

Rabbi Linzer's Remarks YCT Dinner, 2005

Tonight we honor Howard and Debbie Jonas together with the S. Daniel Abraham Semicha Fellows of 2005. The former are already well-established leaders of the Jewish community, and the latter, young men with the knowledge and training, the character and the vision are ideally poised to become the next leaders of *Klal Yisrael*.

In thinking of leadership, one can speak of two distinct types, one that is world-creating and the other that is world-sustaining. Rabbi Soloveitchik zt"l alluded to these two models when he so beautifully expounded on the passage in the Talmud which attributes the Morning Prayer to Abraham and the Afternoon Prayer to Isaac. The Rav explained that the Talmud is not referring to when they prayed, but to how they prayed. Ideally, when we arise in the morning we are filled with great plans for the day, with ambition to achieve and to make a difference in the world. A new day is dawning, filled with opportunity and possibility. To pray the Morning Prayer, then, is to turn to God and ask God to allow us to fulfill our dreams, to realize our ambitions. This was the prayer of Abraham: "And he built an altar there and he called in the name of God" (Gen 12:8), "And Abraham called in the name of God" (Gen. 13:4). Abraham came to change a world, to bring all of humanity to the realization of the one true God. Abraham was a world-creator.

Of course, by the afternoon, we are no longer dreaming new dreams. The day has worn on, and our energy is flagging. Not the time to start new projects, we hope to make some progress is the projects that we have already begun. To pray the Afternoon Prayer is to ask God to give us the strength to endure and to persevere. This was the prayer of Isaac. Isaac, who did not start a new religion, but who led his life following in the footsteps of Abraham, redigging those wells that Abraham dug, the wells that in order to continue to provide water, need to be maintained, and need to be redug. Isaac came to maintain Abraham's world, and without him Abraham's new world would have collapsed. Isaac was a world-sustainer.

While perhaps somewhat less glamorous, being a world-sustainer is critically necessary, and Judaism has only survived because of the countless number of Isaacs that have lead communities and nurtured families. Every rabbi, then, must minimally be an Isaac. He must provide a leadership that is world-sustaining, one that maintains and nurtures the religious world and commitments of his constituency. Ideally, such leadership educates and inspires, strengthens commitment to Torah and mitzvot, addresses halakhic issues with sensitivity and integrity, fashions meaningful prayer, holiday, and lifecycle events, and provides emotional, pastoral and spiritual support to those in need.

To be able to do this with knowledge, skill, and professionalism is no mean feat. And yet, I would ask if such religious leadership suffices for *Klal Yisrael* today? If we believe that all is alright with the world, that Judaism in general and Orthodox Judaism in particular are doing fine and only need to stay the course, then we can satisfy ourselves with rabbis who are Isaacs and no more. But if we look around we will see that the world

is *not* alright, that assimilation is continuing unchecked, that a Judaism of depth and commitment is irrelevant for almost all Jews, and that even for many Orthodox Jews, Orthodoxy is seeming more and more antiquated and exclusionary. What we need today are rabbis who are Abrahams as well, leaders with a vision, leaders who understand the need to transform community, to shape an open and inclusive Orthodoxy, leaders who want to kindle a spark in all Jews, helping them find ways that they can connect to their tradition and to God in ways that are truly meaning for *them*.

Much of our curriculum is dedicated to training our students to be rabbis in the Isaac mold. Our three-year rigorous halakha curriculum is second-to-none, and students emerge as trained halakhic decisors, fully knowledgeable in all areas of practical halakha and with the skill and sensitivity to give the correct halakhic ruling for the person and his or her circumstances. Our students are taught how to teach, educate, and inspire. They learn how to officiate in the synagogue and at lifecycle events with professionalism and in a way that is spiritually inspiring. And our four-year intensive pastoral counseling program is unparalleled in any school of any faith or denomination, producing trained pastoral counselors capable or providing the emotional and spiritual support for which so many congregants yearn.

But beyond all of this, are students are imbibed in a rabbinical school and a culture that teaches them to become leaders in the model of Abraham, that teaches them to reject complacency and to strive לעילא ולעילא, ever yet higher. It is from this culture, shaped by Rabbi Avi Weiss, an Abraham in name and role, and enriched by the passion and individual visions of all of our students and our all of our rabbis, that our students emerge as true leaders for *Klal Yisrael*. Leaders who understand that, in the realities of today, Isaacs do not suffice, and that Abrahams are desperately needed as well.

At tonight's dinner we honor the Jonases, who, with their far-reaching vision, have combined the roles of Abraham and Issac, creating new, critically important institutions for the Jewish community and generously supporting existing ones. And we honor our graduating class, 11 outstanding future leaders, each with his own vision for *Klal Yisrael*, each with the training and knowledge to serve as leaders in the Isaac mold, but with the vision, character, and passion to transform *Klal Yisrael* in the mold of Abraham.

To all of them we say חזקו ואמצו, be strong and courageous, merit to go לעילא ולעילא, higher and higher. *Klal Yisrael* is counting on you.

Rabbi Dov Linzer