

Dearest David, Menashe, Josh, Sam, Marc, Jason, Darren, Jack, Yossi, Saul, and Uri – you now stand on the threshold of receiving smikha, as the S. Daniel Abrahams Class of 2005. But in a way, you are also very much the class of September 11, 2001, the tragic events of that day occurring only days after you began your tenure at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. Having lived through those events, you have become poignantly aware of the depths of human suffering, the realities of the human condition, and the shattered world in which we live, a world that cries out for tikkun, for repair. It is this world that you now enter as rabbis and as religious leaders. What have you learned in your four years at YCT that prepares you for this task?

Through rigorous study and training, you have mastered the intricacies of halakhic texts and the details of the laws, and you have become adept in the art of halakhic decision making, learning how to analyze correctly halakhic queries and to weigh and apply the appropriate rulings. It is in recognition of such mastery that we will soon confer upon you the right to render halakhic decisions, יורה יורה באסור והיתר.

But you have also learned that your role goes beyond that of being an expert legalist, that to be a true מורה הוראה is to know not just law, but to know and to care about people. For halakha in its true beauty resides not only in the beit midrash, sharing company with abstract concepts and weighty tomes, but also and truly in the homes, the lives, and the flesh and blood of the Jewish people. In your pastoral counseling training you have learned how, as pastoral counselors, to give succor to those who suffer, להחיות רוח שפלים, ולהחיות לב נדכאים. In your halakhic training, you have learned that your mandate as future poskim, now – as always – is to weigh the fullness of the human reality facing you and to apply the law that is correct for that person in his or her circumstances, לשואל ולשאלה כפי דרישות התורה וחכמינו זכרונום לברכה.

You also understand that beyond halakha, people need wisdom, they need understanding, and perhaps most of all, then need an aggadata – a narrative, a myth, a theology, a way of understanding not what הלכה we follow, what path we are to walk down, but where that

path leads, and *why* we are walking down that path in the first place. In a world that seems to have lost its moorings, in a world in which people are urgently looking for God, for connection, for meaning, you must bring an agadata to your halakha. You go out not only as מורי הוראה, but also as מלמדים and מרביצי תורה, rabbis who will teach and spread Torah, rabbis who will educate and inspire, rabbis who will show people the beauty and light of Torah and the profundity of its teachings. Rabbis who will bring meaning to people's lives.

And there is also another halakha, the halakha of character. For you have also learned – or in many cases have always known - that there are other הליכות, other walks, that the Torah requires of us. You have learned that there is a הליכה of בדרכיו, a going in God's ways, a demand to act ethically, honorably and compassionately, even in the absence of legal requirements. And you have learned that there is a הליכה of הצנע לכת עם אלוהים of refining our character traits and comporting ourselves in a way befitting religious individuals.

Each one of you is a man of sterling character, a rabbi who will show by his own example what it truly means to walk in the way of God. As such, you will be more than just a teacher and a posek, you will become an embodiment of the Torah. You will become a role model who, through your character and actions will be מאהב את שמו של הקב"ה על הבריות, a person who causes God to be loved by all those whom you encounter.

You now have before you a daunting dual task. Upon receiving smikha, you become representatives of the mesorah, charged to faithfully represent, transmit, and apply our Torah and all of our hallowed traditions. But your mandate does not end there. For as future leaders of Jewish communities, as רבנים ומנהיגים בישראל, you must take those treasured teachings of the past and fearlessly face up to the challenges of the present and of the future, leading communities which are in such need of responsible religious leadership, leading such communities to repair a world in such desperate need of tikkun.

“Never doubt,” said Margaret Mead, “Never doubt that a small group of committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has.” You gentlemen, soon to be rabbis, with your training, your character, your natural talents and

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your commitment, are in a position to be just such a group of individuals. יהי ה' עמכם, may God be with you to realize all of your goals and dreams.