

Chag HaSemikhah Remarks, 5777

Today marks the fourth and final opportunity I have to address a Chag HaSemikhah as Yeshiva's president. It has been a sacred privilege.

Today, we celebrate over 130 young men of extraordinary quality and character who I have seen grow in learning and in middos and in professionalism.

And today, I know that you join me in celebrating the extraordinary Roshei Yeshiva and Hanhala of Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan whom I have had the pleasure to partner with.

In today's celebrants, Yeshiva embraces the continuity of our profound mission of advancing Torah values, so as to guide, teach and lead our people and the world to a better place. Almost 40 years ago, President Norman Lamm stood at this podium and shared the following message:

Scholarship and piety are necessary, but they are not sufficient. A spiritual person is one whose ideals and practice transcend his self-interest, whose deportment and, indeed, very presence symbolizes the values of Torah.

Years before that, at an earlier Chag HaSemikhah, his predecessor, Dr. Samuel Belkin zt'l, shared the message that:

There is one thing we must remember always. Just as we have faith in God, and just as we have faith in the Torah of Moses, so let us have faith in the Jewish people, in the continuous miracle of its rebirth. Let us have faith in the miracle of spiritual unity between God, His Torah and His people, which is summed up in the sayings of our Sages, "Israel, the Torah and the Holy One Blessed Be He, are one."



President Richard M. Joel

President and Bravmann Family University
Professor, Yeshiva University

ישראל ואורייתא וקודשא בריך הוא חד הוא.

And almost 85 years ago, our first president, Dr. Bernard Revel zt'l, stood at this podium and said the following:

Out of the portals of this sanctuary of the spirit shall come a Jewish leadership — lay and spiritual — conscious of its unique heritage, striving to develop in this land a Jewish life, culturally creative and spiritually satisfying, based upon the eternal foundations of the Torah, helping our communities to fuller self-expression, and richer contribution to the cultural and spiritual values of our society.

So I stand here today on the shoulders of those who came before me, and I contemplate, what can I possibly add to this discussion? To this continuing conversation?

To me, parashat Ki Tisa offers a precious perspective on how we, klei kodesh, and lay kodesh, are to lead our lives, a message that has been a defining insight for my life and I think for that of my wife and children.

Perek lamed gimmel details an amazing discussion between Moshe and the Ribbono Shel Olam, culminating with Moshe beseeching God to let Moshe see God's face, *Hareini na es kevodecha*. God responds:

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת פָּנַי כִּי לֹא יִרְאֶנִי
הָאָדָם וְיָחִי

And He said, "You will not be able to see My face, for man shall not see Me and live."

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֵתִי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל הַצּוּר

And the Lord said: "Behold, there is a place next to me, and you shall stand on the rock."

Such a dramatic moment — Moshe wants to see God's face. As close as Moshe was to the Ribbono Shel Olam, he was hungry for more. He wanted to see God's face, and God says no. But then God says "stand beside me."

Rav Sampson Raphael Hirsh explains: הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֵתִי — there is a place next to Me. One and only one point of view exists as the highest goal to be attained by the highest human mind, even for Moses, only one legitimate point of view, and that is *not* to try and get a sight of God, but, elevated by God, and godliness, to look at men and the human condition from a height, next to God, near to God, from God's point of view, to understand and appreciate all men and all conditions of human life.

This master insight — the human being is not supposed to see God — it's not our realm. Our goal is to stand beside God. Our role is not to see God, but to see as God sees, and strive to do as God does.

Beloved musmakhim: Hear the message from four presidents of this Yeshiva, and consider that:

Be a caring role model;
Believe in the Jewish People;
Dare to make a difference in the world;
And strive to see as God sees and do

as God does — *vehalachta b'drachav*.
As musmakhim of Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan, you have been trained in leadership, you have been prepared to serve as our ambassadors of nobility, spreading the warmth

of Torah by constantly fanning its flames. Your actions matter — your commitment to Torah inspires people and elevates the world.

Esther and I are entrusting our children and our grandchildren to

you. Partner with them and with all our children to advance the Torah and advance the world.

V'cheyn yehi ratzon.

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