



Kavanah

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We are living in interesting times. Perhaps a bit too interesting for some of our taste. We are living in a moment existentially challenging for the Jewish people here and in Israel, for all Americans, and for many people the world-over. Living our lives demands that we respond to the world as it is. Even if we cannot with certainty answer the political or theological questions of why things have come to be this way, we must decide what we will do in response.

Dear students, you have answered with your lives. Like our ancestor Abraham, you have been told Lech L'cha, go, without knowing what the service to which you were called would look like. And like Abraham, you responded with a Hineni that launched you on a journey of study, growth, trial, reward, and transformation that brings you, and all of us, to this place at this moment.

Like our ancestors Abraham and Sarah, you are Ivrim, those who cross over. With the ritual we enact today, you cross over to a new identity of obligation to our people and all humanity. Like all of the crossers-over of our past, you take your place in a lineage of leaders who could not foresee the circumstances and challenges ahead, but who forged ahead through turbulent passage with courage, or at least, with faith. None of us knows exactly how you will be called on to lead. But we do know that we could not be in better hands.



And we do not send you across empty-handed. When our ancestor Jacob stood poised to cross the Yavok river toward dangerous uncertainty, he wrestled with God and emerged injured—but with a blessing that would sustain him. And he emerged equipped with a credential we also bestow today on each of you. According to Bereshit Rabba, via Rashi, on this section:

אין לנו שם קבוע, משתנים שמותנו, הכל לפי מצות עבודת השליחות שאנו
משתלחים (בראשית רבה)

We have no fixed names. Our names change depending on the commanded, sacred service to which we are called.

For the wrestling with God and humanity you have engaged in over the recent years and over your whole lives, and in preparation for the sacred service upon which we dispatch you today, we bless you with new names, appended to those you carry already. Those names, by which you shall henceforth be known, are Chazan and Rav b'Yisrael, the visionary and great leaders of those who wrestle with God.

Today you take your place in the chain of transmission, the *shalshet hakabalah*, of those who crossed over before you and led us from antiquity until today: Moses and Joshua, Miriam and Devorah, Hillel and Shamai and Bruria, Rambam, Spinoza, Isaac Mayer Wise and Stephen S. Wise, Sally Priesand and Barbara Ostfeld...

Beautiful students, already our teachers and today our leaders, as you ascend this bima and stand before this holy ark, you take your place in that sacred lineage.



With the ancient act of *smichat yadaim*, the laying on of hands, and with the equally ancient words of *birkat cohanim*, the priestly blessing, you will become cantors and rabbis. And with those titles, you accept the obligation of your particular *shlichut*, your commanded sacred service to God, our people, and all people with integrity and authenticity, reverence and humility.

Beloved students, we now call you to be ordained as rabbis and cantors in Israel.