



**Hebrew Union College Graduation New York
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Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President, Union for Reform Judaism**

It is no simple task to lead our people in this precarious moment.
הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה (Hodu L'Adonai)– Thank God we have each of you!

In such a world, at such a moment, this great academy of Torah learning we call Hebrew Union College is even more critical in raising up new generations of rabbis, cantors, educators, scholars, nonprofit managers and leaders.

Finding our voices in such a moment can be challenging. The prophet Isaiah tells us: **קוּמְךָ כְּשׁוֹפַר הַרְרָם קוּמְךָ** -- Raise your voice like a ram's horn! Ibn Ezra says that means raise your voice so all can hear. Does that mean we must scream our message to be heard over the din of demonizing voices that too often pollute our communal discourse or is it an invitation to find ways to pierce through the vitriol, to reach the yearning souls of those we are meant to serve.

Our voices can sing out, lift up, soothe, and rousingly proclaim our tradition's moral demands.

Isaiah emphasizes what might seem obvious to us: that ritual without social justice is simply a lie. Saying the prayers, observing the holidays, studying the texts should never be divorced from how we act and how we demand that our societies act.

Did you ever wonder what the biblical prophets were like? Imagine getting to know Isaiah, Amos or Deborah, the ancient leaders who challenged the most powerful people and ideas all the while setting forth a vision for a more just, compassionate and peaceful world. None of us will have that opportunity but I believe that knowing and learning from Rabbi David Saperstein is the next best thing.

Some mistakenly believe that honorary degrees are not earned, but they are. Twenty-five years of serving the Jewish people with all of one's heart and soul deserves more than just our admiration and so we now have new Doctors of Divinity and Religious Education.

Look around. There are so many colorful new hoods being worn throughout this sanctuary. Did you ever wonder why we wear them as we do? Perhaps those hoods signifying newly acquired wisdom rest on each of our graduate's spines for a reason. This moment requires real backbone.

There is also a reason our graduates have earned new titles and degrees. That reason is given on the last page of tractate Berachot in the Babylonian Talmud:

תלמידי חכמים מרבים שלום בעולם



“Torah scholars bring peace into the world.” (Berachot 64a)

Learning is not an end in itself but rather an instrument of redemption. So, to those wearing colorful new academic hoods today please know that our world aches for your teaching. In our world teeming with polarization, hatred and bloodshed may each of our degree recipients be among those who, מרבים שלום בעולם, who, through their leadership and learning bring peace to our world.

On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism, the umbrella institution of Reform Jewish life and partner to the College, I am delighted to confirm the bestowal of these degrees, and to extend congratulations to our degree recipients. Mazel tov.