



## **2025 Roger E. Joseph Prize Winner Remarks**

**Stacy Burdett**

**Hebrew Union College, Ordination, May 4, 2025**

**It's an honor to stand here with the incredible family of Roger Joseph and with the HUC community, from President Rehfeld to today's ordinees and their families.**

**A prize about human Rights and Jewish survival is a call on us not to lose sight of the inextricable connection between the two. That's the tightrope Jews have always walked - buffeted by fierce winds: whether war in Israel, politics, or, of course, donor pressure. The best leaders inspire us not to look down in fear, not to look inward, but to look up and ahead in hope and courage.**

**I think about my mentor Abe Foxman, who I'm grateful is here today. Born under Nazism, Abe had every reason to see nothing but the worst in people and to lead with fear, and from a place of trauma and grievance. But he always looks ahead with optimism for a better future for Israel, for Jews and for anyone facing bigotry. I think about all of you being ordained today. Because, throughout my career, whenever and wherever I have found people walking that tightrope with grace, I always have found Reform leaders.**

**I'm so grateful to HUC and the Joseph family for pulling back the curtain to shine a little light on people who work in the shadows, maybe anonymously, under someone else's banner. More than ever, we need to empower advocates and practitioners. Thank you for reminding all of us that values aren't the product of moral philosophy, or the privilege of rank. They're just choices and actions, maybe by no one you've heard of. And behind this curtain, not yet in the C suite of major organizations, is where you'll find more of our community's women leaders.**



**Don't get me wrong, being a Jewish advocate in this country, in this generation has been like being on top of the world. Although, the closest I've come to the Oval Office is the powder room down the hall. It was 12 years ago, antisemitism was surging in Europe. It was important to bring Jewish leaders to bond with an American president and to ask for help.**

**I had such an emotional rush: I mean, what a gevaldik place to be. the granddaughter of a rabbi with a heavy Jerusalem accent who marched to the very same building in 1943 with hundreds of other Orthodox rabbis, trying to bring FDR a message. They never got past the door. and here I am.**

**How could you not feel like Queen Esther, who was told:**

**וְמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם-לְעֵת כְּזֹאת הִגַּעְתָּ לְמַלְכוּת**

**Who knows, maybe you've reached the royal court for just this kind of moment?**

**It touches a very raw and painful nerve now to think about Esther, a Jewish woman intervening to stop dangerous, bigoted royal decrees. I'm not going to talk about anyone outside of this room. We are the protagonists of our American Jewish story; we hold the pen, we're writing this chapter. Not anyone else.**

**It isn't a simple time to step into the role of spiritual leader.**

**We are in the fight of our lives. Protecting the moral and civic health of America and American Jewry is anything but self-executing. It demands of us that we take chances. It demands that we expand our hearts and our thinking about what it means to care for others, what it means to lead and care for Jews—not just some Jews, not just the right kind of Jews, all of us.**

**I don't know how we will prevail or how long it will take.**

**I know one thing for sure. Our Jewish contribution to this moment will be magnificent, just like it has been in so many other places and times. I know we**



**will not let up until Jews and all of us can flourish in the fullness of who we are,  
So don't look down, don't look inward, look up in hope and courage.**

**Mazel tov to you all, thank you so very much for this meaningful honor.**