

KAVANAH

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Shir HaMaalot: A Song of Ascents

As we near the spiritual center of our service, when you, our rabbinical candidates, will receive s'micha, I offer fifteen blessings, one for each of the 15 Psalms of ascents (120-134 in case you're counting). As we prepare to lay upon you the authority of our people, we draw from our multiple pasts: both by recounting Biblical the path toward the Temple Mount that these Psalms symbolize, and by invoking the memory of our beloved colleague Rabbi Andrea Weiss, who brought relevance and erudition to the Psalms in her teaching and writing.

120:1

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת אֶל־יְהוָה בְּצָרָתָהּ לִי קָרָאתִי וַיַּעֲנֵנִי:

A song of ascents. In my distress I called to GOD—who answered me.

Just as you have answered your calling, so may you offer sage advice and spiritual direction to all those who seek counsel—even if they may not know they're seeking it.

121: 4:

הֲגֵה לֹא־יָנוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל:

See, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!

May you retain your good judgment, even in moments of exhaustion, even when life puts you under great stress.

שִׂמְחֹתִי בְּאִמְרֵיהֶם לִי בֵּית יְהוָה נִלְהֶ: 1 122:

I was happy when they said to me: Let us go to the house of Adonai.

May you feel joy as you prepare to cross the threshold into each classroom and sanctuary.

123:3 :

חַנּוּנוֹ יְהוָה חַנּוּנוֹ כִּי־רַב שְׂבַעְנוּ בּוֹזִז׃

Favor us, O ETERNAL One, favor us! We have had more than enough of contempt.

May you respond to stress with grace and patience; and may each tense conversation become an opportunity for learning and mutual understanding.

124:6: בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה שֶׁלֹא נִתְגַּנְנוּ טְרָף לְשִׁנֵּיהֶם׃

Blessed is GOD, who did not let us be ripped apart by their teeth.

May you depose your sacred duties with a sound body, mind and heart. And may you be supported by ethical dental, eye care and health insurance.

125: 3:

כִּי לֹא יָנוּחַ שֵׁבֶט הַרְשָׁע עַל־גּוֹרֵל הַצְּדִיקִים לְמַעַן לֹא־יִשְׁלַחוּ הַצְּדִיקִים בְּעוֹלָתָהּ יְדֵיהֶם׃

The scepter of the wicked shall never shape the fate of the righteous, so that the righteous will not set their hand to wrongdoing.

May you navigate political pressure with fortitude; may you act only after you have come to peace with your own morals and ethics; and may you use your public position as rabbi to pursue nuance, even when others try to pull you toward simplicity.

126:6 הֲלוֹךְ יֵלֵךְ | וּבְכֹה נִשָּׂא מִשָּׁר־הַזֶּרַע בֹּא־יָבֵא בְרִנָּה נִשָּׂא אֶלְמַתְיוֹ׃

One who goes along weeping, carrying the seed-bag, shall come back with songs of joy, carrying the sheaves.

You began your rabbinical formation with everything you needed to lead the Jewish people, you have each navigated significant challenges, but here you are, about to become rabbis. May you see the potential for leadership in each person you encounter.

127:1:

אִם־יְהוָה | לֹא־יִבְנֶה בַּיִת שֹׂא עִמּוֹ בּוֹגֵיו בּוֹ אִם־יְהוָה לֹא־יִשְׁמַר־עִיר שֹׂא | שֶׁקֵּד שׁוֹמֵר׃

Unless GOD builds the house, its builders labor in vain on it; unless GOD watches over the city, the guard keeps vigil in vain.

יְגִיעַ בְּפִיךָ כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁר־יָרָה וְטוֹב לְךָ: 128:2

You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors; you shall be happy and you shall prosper.

May you tend the flame of passion for your sacred work, may it fuel you and never let you burn out.

129:3:

עַל־גְּבִי חֲרָשׁוּ חֲרָשִׁים הֶאֱרִיכוּ (למענותם) [למענותם]:

Plowers plowed across my back; they made long furrows.

May the hard times you experience in the years ahead become the fertile soil from which new growth can emerge.

מִמַּעַמְקִים קָרָאתִיךָ יְהוָה: 130: 1

From out of the depths I call to God.

May you have the strength to ask for help, even if you are not sure you need it, and know that while you may feel alone, you will always be surrounded by colleagues.

131:1:

יְהוָה | לֹא־גִבָּה לִבִּי וְלֹא־רָמָו עֵינַי וְלֹא־הִלְכֵתִי | בְּגִדְלוֹת וּבְנִפְלְאוֹת מִמֶּנִּי:

O ETERNAL One, my heart is not proud nor my look haughty; I do not aspire to great things or to what is beyond me;

May you communicate your own boundaries to others with grace and clarify; and may you recognize that what you CAN do is enough, even as others ask you to be superhuman.

זֹאת־מְנוּחָתִי עַד־יְעַד פֶּה־אֲשׁוּב כִּי אוֹתִיהָ: 132: 14

“This is my resting-place for all time; here I will dwell, for I desire it.

When the world seems chaotic and impermanent, may you let the knowledge of the ages guide you and center you, may you project calm and offer a shelter of peace to all those around you.

133:1:

הִנֵּה מֵה־טוֹב וּמֵה־נְעִים שְׁבֹת אֶחָיִים גַּם־יַחַד:

How good and how pleasant it is that kindred dwell together.

May you find strength and satisfaction in the many communities to which you belong, both now and in the years ahead.

134:2:

שְׂאוּ־יַדְכֶם קֹדֶשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה:

Lift your hands toward the sanctuary and bless GOD.

You are now on the final step. May we rejoice together as you become the next leaders of the Jewish people.

Amen Selah.