



Ordination Invocation

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Los Angeles Ordination 2026, Hebrew Union College**

Friends, teachers, colleagues, and soon-to-be rabbis:

I'm humbled to be present and to offer an invocation for this ordination of rabbis from the Hebrew Union College Jack Skirball campus, here at Stephen Wise Temple.

Before we begin, however, it seems appropriate to consider precisely what it is that you've gotten yourselves into. What does it mean to become a rabbi in the second quarter of the 21st century? What does it mean to serve our people at a moment when discord tears at the fabric that binds us together? What does it mean to embody a three-thousand-year-old tradition in an era when Tik Tok and Joe Rogan possess as much sway as philosophy and theology?

To answer that question, I believe we must turn back, rather than forward, to our tradition's guidance for traveling through the unknown of the wilderness, guidance we recited just yesterday morning.

"The Israelites will camp, each individual upon their flag, according to the banners of their ancestral house. They will camp surrounding, yet facing, the Tent of Meeting."¹

Immediately following Sinai... immediately following the creation of a covenant that transforms Israel into a unified people, the Torah acknowledges the generational differences that separate one Israelite from another. Our tradition does not imagine unity as the erasure of difference. It imagines a camp of many banners surrounding one sacred center.

The Talmudic sages affirm this idea, teaching us that when we witness *uchlusei yisrael*, the various multitudes of Israel, we should recite, *Baruch chacham harazim* –

¹ Numbers 2:2.

“Blessed is the One who recognizes secrets, for there is no mind or face among them that is the same” Ben Zoma then adds, “yet all of whom have been created to serve the Divine.”² Many minds and many faces with conflicting beliefs and divergent ideas may still serve one goal.

As Reform Jews, we seek neither homogeneity nor anarchy. Rather, we seek to embrace diversity structured around a common, yet sacred purpose: the ennoblement of *all* humanity through the embrace of our enduring teachings, an embrace that may only be achieved via a continual, sacred dialogue between tradition and modernity... between rabbis and laity... between Jews and non-Jews... between principle and pragmatism... between distinct ideals and moral clarity.

A simple task, no doubt, but perhaps the most pressing task of this age. And, so, this morning, I pray that your conviction in our enduring teachings and values never falters. But I also pray that your conviction never comes at the expense of your compassion, nor your humility. That you remain open to different realities... different voices... different perspectives... different banners... even as you remain firmly rooted in the enduring values that bring you to this sacred task.

Armed with conviction, but governed by empathy and humility, may you chart the future of our people and its living tradition, fashioning a Judaism confident enough to engage with the modern world without surrendering itself to it; a Judaism broad enough to shelter many banners while remaining oriented toward an enduring, sacred center; a Judaism that leaves all humanity better for having witnessed its teachings brought to life.

Amen.

² BT Berakhot 58A.