

On the Occasion of the Installation of Rabbi Leah Doberne-Schor
Temple Emanu-El, Westfield, NJ
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Rabbi Ellen Lippmann

Thank you's: Rabbi Sagal, who now 15 or 16 years ago took on a role in my multi-voiced senior sermon at HUC-JIR; he became Joseph, that quintessential dreamer and organizer. To former rabbis Chuck Kroloff and Deborah Joselow, from whom I learned long ago that this synagogue was a special place. And to my friend and colleague, Rabbi Leah Doberne-Schor, whom it is my honor to honor on this special Shabbat.

Rashi taught that when a tzadik leaves a place, it creates an impression, because while the tzadik is in a city, the city is glorious and praising and shining; in leaving, the city left behind is no longer any of those things. So I can tell you that the lights in Brooklyn shine a little dimmer these days, there is less praise and much less glory there, as it was in Beer Sheva when Jacob left.

Though he didn't know it at the time, Jacob went to pursue his dreams and to become the person he was meant to be. All our hope is that in coming here, Leah intends to do the same.

Our Torah portion for this week is Ki Tavo – when you come, when you enter – the perfect words for someone who is just entering this new “land.” Listen to its words:

When you enter the land that the Eternal your God is giving you as a heritage...you shall take some of the every first fruit of the soil...put it in a basket and go to the place where the Eternal your God will choose to establish His name. You shall go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, 'I acknowledge this day before the Eternal your god that I have entered the land that the Eternal swore to our fathers to assign us.' The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of the Eternal your god. You shall then recite as follows before the Eternal your God: 'My father was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us...We cried out to the Eternal, the God of our fathers, and the Eternal heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery and our oppression. The Eternal freed us from Egypt my a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. God brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore I know bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O God, have given me.' [Deuteronomy 26:1-10]

It is the beginning of ritual: take a basket, put these crops in it, bring it to the priest, declare that you have done what you are supposed to do, and then tell the condensed version of your history, a version so powerful that it reappears in Passover seders year after year.

We can imagine a parallel text for our situation: *When you enter the congregation that its board, HUC and the CCAR placement office found for you as a starting place, you shall take some of every first experience that the members, rabbis, staff and board are giving you, put it in a basket and come to this sanctuary to speak to your God. You shall go to the rabbi in charge at that time and say to him, "I acknowledge before the Eternal my God that I have entered this congregation*

that was found for me during placement.” The rabbi in charge will take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the ark, before the Eternal your God. You shall then recite your history before the Eternal your God, your history, that of your family, of this congregation and of the Jewish people. And only then are you ready to proceed.

It's not a bad idea – You have made it through five challenging years of rabbinic school, a senior sermon, a thesis, several job experiences, and suddenly you are ordained and are expected to be a rabbi and see yourself as one, a student no longer. It isn't bad to have a ritual of arrival, to give you a sense of transition, time to adjust, a chance to remember where you came from and express hope for where you are going. This is probably exactly what our ancestors had in mind for the transition to the land, and what this congregation imagines as it holds this service of installation.

But while our ancestors put first fruits in their baskets, Leah, I imagine you putting the first experiences I mentioned: a first baby-naming, a first bar or bat mitzvah, a first confirmation, a first social justice achievement, a first wedding, a first Torah study, a first funeral. What a big basket you'd need.

And yet, to truly grow to being the rabbi I know you will be, you need to gather the things that can never be put in a basket, the intangible rewards and hardships of being a rabbi, a real rabbi, *rav u-morah*. What are those things? The baby's smile as you announce a name; the child's glowing eyes at being able to read Torah; the straightened shoulders of the confirmand; the gratitude of those your efforts have helped; the love that passes from one beloved to another at their wedding; the excitement of recognition during study; the tears falling at a funeral.

When I was ordained, I went to work for MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. I loved that work, which moved forward what I had begun with the HUC soup kitchen, and for a time it was rewarding, challenging work. Yet soon, I began to realize that I missed being rabbi in a community, missed seeing those smiles; and glowing eyes; and straight shoulders; and gratitude; and love; and excitement; and tears. I was doing occasional weddings and funerals and even baby-namings while at MAZON, but they were too often ritual only, without the heart. The heart grows as a community grows, as you not only share those smiles and tears, but begin to know the people with whom you build this community, know their lives, their homes, their fears, their joys, their yearning souls and fruitful minds.

I started Kolot Chayeinu – Voices of Our Lives, the congregation that – God willing – will turn 13 years old this year, when I realized that for me there could be nothing like the deep connections of building community together, symbolized for me by the sharing not of first fruits, but of meals and endless numbers of cups of coffee. *How do you measure, measure a year?* asked the author of the modern opera, Rent. We rabbis measure a year in holidays celebrated and loved ones wed, study accomplished and gravestones unveiled, small acts of justice and even smaller ones of kindness. Smiles and tears, laughter and anger, joy and sorrow will never stay in any basket, but they will enter your heart and expand it, stay in your mind and make it wise, fill your hands and let you achieve greatness.

Filling the hands is the biblical metaphor for ordination, and I know, Leah, that you already have your hands full. But tonight, I try to pass these lessons from my hands to yours, from my heart to

yours, from my mind to yours. I have watched you teach and preach and lead prayer and enliven meetings already. All that experience fills your hands and your basket, and flows through the history you will tell – and will be asked again and again to tell – of how you became a rabbi and why you became a rabbi and ‘I didn’t know there were women rabbis.’ But what is yet to come is the true wisdom we all pursue, the desire to become the tzadik who leaves behind a space once filled by light.

You don’t need to become the greatest scholar, though you are already a fine one. And you don’t need to become the greatest preacher, though at that too you excel. What you do need is to develop a heart of wisdom, as the psalmist says, a heart full of your own tears and those of others, your own joys and those of others, your own pain that helps you understand that of others, and your own anger that keeps you working on behalf of others. As you keep walking into this new congregation, take your basket and remember to tell your history. Just never forget to bring your heart, filled to the brim with all of what can never fill a basket. Open eyes, an open heart, open hands, and an open mind will serve you better than any amount of acquired skill. As we are taught, words that come from the heart, go to the heart.

I offer you these words with full heart on this special night, and now I offer you this blessing from our Torah portion which offers the chance for blessing or curse. There will be cursed times and maybe even cursing as you move forward, but there will be blessings aplenty as you already bring blessing to this community that is becoming your own:

jrz lhkg vuvh sucf -- The Presence of the Eternal has shone upon you! [Isaiah 60:1 – haftarah for Ki Tavo]

Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the country...

Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

Blessed shall you be in your comings and blessed shall you be in your goings.

lh,tmc ,t vfurcu lhtcc ,t vfurc