

Graduation Address Excerpts 2003

Graduation Address Los Angeles, May 19, 2003

“Probing the Jewish Tradition for Moral Guidance”

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Ph.D.
Rector and Sol & Anne Dorff Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, Co-Chair of Bioethics, University of Judaism



We Jews rightfully treasure our tradition for a whole host of reasons. Among others, it gives us a sense of roots and a sense of what to hope for; it makes life meaningful by marking off the events of life and the seasons of the week and the year; it gives us a wealth of wisdom about how to live life and sets a critically important tone of questioning absolutely everything; it gives us a worldwide community in the past, present, and future; it provides us with a

complete civilization, with literature, philosophy, law, music, art, dance, and a homeland; it gives us a sense of the sacred and multiple ways to interact with God.

One other reason we cherish our tradition, though, is that it often gives us moral direction and motivation. And yet in modern times, we sometimes find that it is hard to apply the

tradition to the issues that confront us. Sometimes that is because modern science and technology have created facts that our ancestors could never have even imagined, let alone treated, and sometimes the chal-

lenge comes from a very different direction – namely, the new social, political, and economic circumstances in which Jews find themselves in America, circumstances with few, if any, parallels in Jewish history.

...My approach *is* halakhic, it *does* pay particular attention to Jewish law in order to discern our moral duties. But what I had in mind is not what philosophers call “legal formalism” at all – that is, an approach in which you obey the law simply because it is the law and you determine its demands solely on the basis of what the texts say. Instead, I would use the living, dynamic Jewish legal system in which you obey the law for a whole variety of reasons and you determine its demands on the basis not only of precedent but also of theological, historical, social, moral, and even economic concerns....

Graduation Address Cincinnati, May 29, 2003

“Hold Fast Our Integrity: A Joban Task in a Joban World”

Dr. C. Hassell Bullock (C '70)
Professor of Old Testament and the Franklin S. Dyrness Professor of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College

Today I want to address a topic that has become part of the soul of our American culture, and so endemic to our self-understanding, that we could say *integrity* is defined and explicated as *the* American value. That is, it is joined inextricably to our American ideas of *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*. To understand American life – and this is one of the many good things about us – we have to recognize how this value guides our national and private lives....

I suggest that we find the classic statement on the shape of *integrity* in the book of Job.... When the Almighty singled Job out, it was because he was a “blameless (Heb., *tam*) and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil” (Job 1:8). And when the

Adversary makes his second frontal assault, God reminds him that Job “still holds fast *his integrity*” (Heb., *tumato*) [Job 2:3]. The point is that Job exhibits a consistent moral conduct,¹ based upon moral principles to which he adheres and to which he bears testimony, both in the prologue and the dialogue. The Adversary thought there had to be a chink in Job’s armor somewhere. The Hebrew word *tumah* (“integrity”) has the meaning of *completeness, wholeness, or consistency*. Therefore, we may speak of *integrity* as *wholeness* or *consistency of character*....

While the book focuses on a single individual and his integrity, the classical nature of the book turns the spotlight on us as religious professionals. Job’s maintenance of his



integrity, so hardnosed and unrelenting, highlights a model for the academic world and the community of faith. Admittedly, it brought Job into conflict with his peers and into tension with the Deity, but it guided him through the labyrinthine ways of his life....

Colleagues, students, and congregants have every right to demand of us a consistency of character. The people whom we serve want to know that our life and actions are governed by principles that connect our private and public personae.

¹ Klaus Koch, “Tamam,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. by Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 3:1426.

Graduation/Ordination/Investiture Address Excerpts 2003

Rabbi Uri Regev (J '86) Executive Director, World Union for Progressive Judaism

Ordination Address Cincinnati, May 31, 2003

It's possible that from the time of creation it was destined that *Bamidbar* would be read on your ordination because, indeed, what we read in the *parasha* is a stage in the transformation and the progress of religious leadership. We read in the *parasha* that initially it was the firstborn in each tribe who would be destined to serve God and lead the religious life of the community. From this fate of birth the religious leadership was handed to a select group, the Levites, and among them the priests – the sons of Aaron.

In this modern era, we are witnessing yet another transformation. Today, we are no longer willing to afford the responsibility for leading religious life to those who are destined by fate of birth but rather to those who have selected themselves, dedicated themselves to their cause, and are accepted as such by our respective communities and the Jewish people. This is one example of the progress in addressing the challenge of leading the Jewish people in our religious undertaking.



ROGER E. JOSEPH PRIZE
ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Investiture and Ordination Ceremonies New York, May 4, 2003

At Congregation Emanu-El
of the City of New York

Awarded to Daniel Pearl,
posthumously, and The
Daniel Pearl Foundation
Accepted by Professor Judea
Pearl, Daniel Pearl's father

The U.S. is now facing the challenge of building bridges of friendship toward the Muslim world, and of restoring America's image as a beacon of values, progress and basic freedoms. The legacy of dialogue makers like Daniel Pearl, who earned the respect of decent people on both sides of the East/West divides, and who symbolize America's humanity and goodwill, will become a powerful catalyst in forging a new and better world in the aftermath of the current conflict....

This gives us the hope that, some day, I will be able to tell my grandson:
"You see, Adam? Your father's legacy helped us win that battle! Humanity has triumphed!"

Graduation Address New York, May 1, 2003

David A. Harris, Executive
Director, American Jewish
Committee



Permit me to applaud you, the graduates, not only for your impressive academic achievements but, every bit as much, for taking a personal stand.

By choosing to pursue graduate studies and a career in pastoral care and counseling, education, sacred music, and, of course, the rabbinate, you say something profound about yourselves.

You say that the work of repairing this broken world is not someone else's task, it is yours. You say that in a world where self-gratification and self-entitlement are increasingly, even obsessively, the watchwords of the day, you choose instead to focus on those in need....

In other words, in a world in which quality-of-life issues dominate, you are preoccupied with quality-of-living issues. You say, in the words of Rabbi Stephen Wise, founder of the Jewish Institute of Religion, a component of this school, that life is "not a matter of extent but of content."

You say that in a world in quest of the material, you are in search of the sacred.

You say that in a world focused on the here and now, you are linked to a timeline that

stretches back millennia and that you are determined will stretch forward no less far....

Henceforth, you will have the chance day in and day out to touch the lives of others in meaningful ways – to awaken consciences, to stir souls, to lift spirits, to open hearts, to expand knowledge, to fortify hope, to build community, to pursue justice, and, in doing so, to mobilize those around you to stand with you....

To have the twin blessings of the sovereign state of Israel and the democratic societies of the West, led by the United States, as our homes is to be given the gift of an unprecedented, previously unimaginable opportunity. Use that gift wisely. Never, never take it for granted. And always bear in mind the remarkable examples of those men and women who bequeathed us that gift. May you find strength and inspiration in their exceptional lives.

Graduation/Ordination/
Investiture Addresses
can be found at:
[www.huc.edu/faculty/
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