

Rabbi Field, I would like to wish you happiness and especially good health in your new home in Israel, President Dorsch, members of the board, my fellow faculty members, parents, relatives and guests, and graduates of the class of 2008.

I hope you all excuse me for being a little nervous, but I have never given a speech before, especially in front of such a large group of people. I've spoken in public, but they were lectures or classes on subjects that I could usually do off the top of my head. This is the first time I really had to sit down and write a speech, and not knowing exactly how to do it, I turned to some experts for help, most notably my wife and children and my friend and colleague, Susan Weisgrau. They all agreed that I should begin with a funny story.

I had what I thought was a good one all picked out. It was about a student who surprised his rabbi with a commentary to the Song of Songs that he wrote in honor of the rabbi. My critics didn't like it for three reasons. First, they thought it was too long. Second, they didn't think it was funny, and third, they were very disappointed with the rabbi's answer. The rabbi said the student should have written a commentary to the Book of Job, since Job, who suffered so much in his life, could suffer through the commentary of the student. I was then going to say that so you won't have to suffer like Job either, I'll make my speech short. My family thought the rabbi should have been proud of the effort his student made rather than being derogatory. They wanted the ending to be more reflective of my role as an educator, so I decided not to tell it.

Instead, I decided to start on a more serious note. With the permission of the Class of 2008, I would like to speak with your parents first. I find graduations to be a very unique time and I'll try to explain what I mean by using one of my teaching techniques: word associations. If you don't understand the association of the words, you won't understand what they mean. The two examples I use are: "he leaps tall buildings in a single bound". All the students know it's Superman, because they know the associations of the words. Then I ask what does "Hi Yo Silver away" mean. Very few know. My generation knows that at the end of every episode of the Lone Ranger, the Lone Ranger would get his

horse Silver to stand on his hind legs, and he would say “Hi Yo Silver away” and then ride off into the sunset. Without knowing the Lone Ranger television show, the words are absolutely meaningless and incomprehensible. So much of what we do in class is try to learn the associations of biblical words: what they mean in their context, and what associations they have for us today. Graduations, too, have associations with me, in a midrashic sort of way

One is the first stanza of the **לכה דודי: אחד השמענו אל המיוחד**: “observe and remember in one utterance the unique God caused us to hear.” This is the explanation of **אלקבץ** why the word **זכור**, remember, appears in the version of the Ten Commandments in the Book of Exodus, and **שמור**, keep or observe, in the Book of Deuteronomy. His explanation is that God made some people hear one word and other people another word, all in one utterance. This explanation always reminds me of a line from a Bruce Springsteen song. This quote from Springsteen is for Sam. The line is “she can laugh and cry in a single sound”. A graduation is where this happens, parents are laughing and crying in a single sound. On the one hand, you are so proud of your children, and you have every reason to be. On the other, you know that this is an end; they are leaving and are going to be on their own. This reminds me of the story of the Garden of Eden. On the one hand, God wanted us to be happy, naked children running through the garden with no cares. On the other hand, God knew that we would have to leave, to make a life for ourselves. Now your children are taking that step, which evokes both tears of joy and sadness. It is truly a unique time. It also makes us stop and think how fast time is flying by. It seems like only yesterday that I was tutoring Zoe and Hannah for their Banot Mitzvah, and here they are, beautiful young women graduating from high school. See Zoe, I promised I would bring you into the speech.

Now that we have gotten so personal, I feel like it's a good to time for me to make a confession. I think most of the graduates know this, but it's something I think you parents should know as well. I am a devout Marxist. I try to live my life according to the words and wisdom of my hero—Groucho Marx. To quote him, “I thought my razor was dull until I heard him speak”. I'm sorry, wrong quote.

This is what happens when you let your children do the final editing. The correct quote, to paraphrase him, “I would never send my children to a school that would have me as a teacher”. But you did, and I am eternally grateful to you. You have trusted me with your most valuable possession—the mind and the heart of your children. I tried as hard as I could to repay your trust.

In a class I took with Dr. Saul Wachs on the philosophy and history of Jewish education, I had to write my ten most passionate beliefs about my teaching. They are based on the formula of Rambam’s thirteen articles of Jewish faith, but are called my ten teaching commandments. I hope they will demonstrate to you how I tried to live up to the tremendous responsibility that you have placed upon me:

1. I most passionately believe in religious pluralism. There are no absolutes. Every interpretation supported by the text is valid.
2. It is more important for my students to figure out what they think than to hear what I think.
3. I believe that my students must learn to think with their hearts as well as their minds. That means how they learn as well as what they learn.
4. I believe that my students must have the skills to interpret text. The most important is translation which involves both vocabulary and grammar,
5. My students must know that the Bible has been interpreted for thousands of years, so interpretations, both ancient, rabbinic and modern, must be studied.
6. I believe my students must know the context of the world of the ancient Israelites: their history, geography, and archaeology.
7. I believe my students must be challenged to accept the relevance of the Bible in their lives. Their identity is shaped by this book.
8. I believe my students must understand the chain of tradition of which they are a part. Great minds, such as my own as some seem to believe, have grappled with this text for millennia.
9. I believe that education was and is the most important tool for the preservation of Judaism, which is why I can’t understand why Jewish educators are so underpaid.

10. I believe that smiling is one of the most effective teaching techniques.

We American Jews live with a dilemma. I think it has been around since Hellenistic times. As Jews, we think with our hearts. That is where the Bible says our thinking takes place. Our ancient Israelite ancestors were a passionate, emotional people who felt the world around them. The Greeks made us start to think with our heads. As Americans, educated in the Greek way, we think with our minds. I have struggled with the issue of which is more important. On the one hand, as a teacher in a fine academic institution, I have tried to open the minds of our your children by challenging them to learn, but more importantly, to give them to skills to express and defend their own points of view. On the other hand, as a Jewish institution, the heart is so important. Quoting Daniel Gottlieb, a psychologist who spoke to the junior and senior classes, it is the ability to love and to be loved that marks success. I wish I could quote Benjy directly when he said something like, “to love to live, and to live to love”. I wanted your children not only to learn, but to love to learn. Looking at your children, I think I have succeeded, more because of them than because of me. Dr. Saul Wachs maintains that the key to success in teaching is to awaken the motivation in the students. It is their internal motivation that will determine the success of their education, not what a teacher does. This graduating class has the internal motivation to learn, and clearly the ability to love as well.

There is another reason why I am thankful to you. On the bulletin board in room 15 there was a quote from Confucius—“if you love what you do, you will never have to work another day in your life”. So I want to thank you for allowing me to do what I love, and not to have to go out and work for a living.

Now that we’re on the subject, I have another confession to make. I didn’t live by the words of my hero Groucho either. As Ariel said, all four of my children graduated from here, and I was privileged to teach three of them. It was an experience that I will always cherish, since it gave me the opportunity to see my children in a way that I would not have been able to otherwise. It is really a shame that most parents do not have this opportunity. I was often asked by parents whether it was hard

to treat my children differently and not show them any partiality. My response is substantiated by Rashi. In his commentary to the **ואהבת**, Rashi understands “**ושננתם לבניך**”, “and you shall teach them diligently to your children” to mean, **אלו התלמידים, מצינו בכל מקום שהתלמידים קרוים בניך**, “these are your students, we find in every place that your students are called your children.” I did not have to show partiality to my own children since I have tried to treat all my students as my own children. So I want to thank you for lending your children to me. This makes my own children not being here in school with me anymore much easier to bear.

To the graduates of the class of 2008, I want to thank you so very much for this honor. Putting me in the class of such faculty members as Joe Dougherty, Susan Weisgrau, and Sharon Levin, people I admire and have so much respect for, both as educators and human beings, is a flattering and humbling experience. They are truly a tough act to follow. When I accepted the offer to be the keynote speaker, I told Ariel I was really worried. I couldn't figure out if it was trying to live up to the standard that Joe, Susan, and Sharon had set, or if it was finding something nice to say about this class. On one of the last days of teaching seniors at the end of the third quarter, and those of you who have taught seniors know exactly what I am talking about, Ariel looked at me and said, “How are you going to say something nice about us after this class?” My response to her was, “don't feel bad, you're going to have to find something nice to say about me. I guess we'll find out which one of us is the better liar.”

Fortunately for me though, it is really not that hard to find nice things to say about such a wonderful and talented group of students. Just as graduations are a unique night, you are truly a unique group. To give just one example, it is not unusual for students to want to go off topic. Some classes even make it into a game to see who can get teachers off on a tangent the quickest. It is flattering to me that my students want to know what I think about topics such as politics, religion, philosophy, movies, music, and especially comedy, which many in the class have no understanding or appreciation. Right Jon? This class was different. As much as they wanted to know what I thought, they really wanted to know me. I also promised my Trio, Erica, Ilana, and Lora, that I would mention them in my speech.

They epitomized this group. Their desire to know me as a person and not just as a teacher demonstrated to me that their heart was clearly in the right place, and even if I didn't teach them everything that I wanted to academically, they taught me that they know what it means to care.

Now comes the really hard part, trying to find words of wisdom and guidance that will help you through your college years and beyond. It's hard to believe that there is only one student in this graduating class that I didn't teach, and having taught your two sisters, Elyse, the loss is mine. What can I say to you that I haven't already said over the last four years, even though this may be the only time that Elliot is awake, both Miriam's made it on time and are hopefully not chewing gum, and no one else in talking. My advice is: never be embarrassed about who you are. You are unique, each and every one you. Be proud of that. To quote Pablo Picasso, "Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that will never be again. And what do we teach our children? We teach them that two and two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are? We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you. Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move. You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel? You must work, we must all work, to make the world worthy of its children." Even though Picasso probably never studied Tractate Sanhedrin, he seems to understand it. "If a man strikes many coins from one mould, they all resemble one another, but the supreme king of kings, the holy one, blessed be he, fashioned every man in the stamp of the first man, and yet not one of them resembles his fellow. Therefore every single person is obliged to say: the world was created for me." The world was created for you. You must, as Picasso said, make the world a better place for your children. Or to put it in other words, you are unique, just like everybody else.

As most of you in the class know, I am also a big Bob Dylan fan. My wish for you can be summed up best in a song by Dylan. The song is based on the traditional blessing **יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ**. I

asked my son Ari, who is an outstanding musician, if he would back me up like he did at one of the coffee houses if I decided to sing it. He just laughed at me. After thinking about it, having to listen to me sing would cause even more suffering than just having to listen to me speak, so I'll just recite it.

“Forever Young” by Bob Dylan

May God bless and keep you always, may your wishes all come true,

May you always do for others and let others do for you.

May you build a ladder to the stars and climb on every rung,

And may you stay forever young.

May you grow up to be righteous, may you grow up to be true,

May you always know the truth and see the light surrounding you.

May you always be courageous, stand upright and be strong,

And may you stay forever young.

May your hands always be busy, may your feet always be swift,

May you have a strong foundation when the winds of changes shift.

May your heart always be joyful, may your song always be sung,

And may you stay forever young.

Thank you so much again for the honor of allowing me to address you and I want to wish you and your families my most sincere congratulations.