

**“For Such a Time as This”**  
**Graduation Address Israelite Academy**  
**Rabbi Sholomo Ben Levy**  
**October 27, 2023**



**Ester 4:14**

*“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews [Yehudeem] will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”*

I begin today by telling these graduates that you were chosen by the Almighty God “For such a time as this?” This is your time. You are living in the right time and space.

The rabbis who stand before you today answered a divine call “who will go for me? Who can I send? In that sense, you were chosen to embark on this mission.

**Challenges you will face**

1. Unprecedented Cynicism. There has never been a generation of people who have less trust in their leaders. This is true of our political leaders of all parties. Polls show that a majority of people no longer trust the Supreme Court of the land to do

what is right. They still admire celebrities for their wealth and talent in the areas of sports and entertainment, but no one is under the illusion that celebrities possess any more virtue, honor, or morality than anyone else. Will Smith and Jada Pinket, and Bill Cosby were once our role models for the ideal Black family—not any more. Religious leaders of all faiths and denominations have suffered a similar fate. I have a Catholic friend who attends church regularly but thinks that any parent who would leave a child alone with a priest would be acting irresponsibly. So, we shouldn't confuse popularity with trust. Millions of people attend places of worship just like they attend concerts and sporting events. **Your mission is to regain trust and confidence at a time when people have become skeptical and suspicious.**

2. Atheists and agnostics who would never describe themselves as being atheists and agnostics. In other words, these are people who may observe some religious traditions: weddings, bar mitzvah, or Passover seder. But, they do so out of a sense of “tradition,” “family expectation,” or because of the fellowship that they enjoy with the people of their congregation. All of these reasons are powerful and compelling. Routines and habits are hard to break. Family expectations and a sense of guilt for not coming provides motivation. Psychologists would tell us that religious attendance may satisfy the ego of worshipers who feel better about themselves or even morally superior to those who don't attend services. My point here is none of these reasons relate to a belief in the existence of the Almighty God.

As I drive around my neighborhood, I am amazed by how much time, money, and energy people put into decorating their lawns for Halloween. It's amazing and a little scary. Yet, I would wager that none of my neighbors actually believe in ghosts or witches, nor have they invested much thought in trying to understand the history and beliefs associated with the holiday. They do it because it's fun, they enjoy it, and it has been their tradition for years and for generations. And, after Thanksgiving, they will decorate their home for Christmas with the same passion and dedication. They just change the decorations. They don't really believe in any of this. Getting religious people to actually believe in God is a challenge. Getting young people to believe that God is NOT something that foolish people believe in is your mission.

3. Transcending religion, nationality, racial identity, and all other forms of "particularism" in order to embrace the humanity of all people is your highest mission. (Repeat) This last mission was also the mission of every generation of rabbis, ministers, and imams who have come before you. **We all failed.** When you look at what is happening in the Middle East today, you would be forced to conclude that we failed miserably. I mean if Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all derived from Abraham, then why have these people been killing each other for centuries while claiming that they practice a religion of love and peace? This causes many rational people to wonder if the world would be a better place without religion or nationality of any kind. What are you new rabbis going to say to people who believe that religion has done more to divide the world than it has to unite it? You are going to have to find answers to these questions.

The fact that you are graduating today means that you have mastered a vast body of knowledge. You have earned your degrees and the title “master or teacher.” But mastering isn’t enough. You must be able to make the words of Torah real in the world. Start by making the words of Torah real in your own life. Don’t practice a form of routine religion and don’t encourage your congregants to be “religious robots.” God chose us to repair the world. Fixing something requires understanding how it is broken and the things and people who broke it.

Your mission may seem daunting. Or, as Tom Cruse may say, it is a “Mission Impossible.” It will require heroic acts on your part. You will not be able to do it alone. Maintain the spiritual brotherhood that you experienced as students. You will become the next leaders of the Israelite Board of Rabbis as I prepare to retire. So, I would like to leave you on a positive or optimistic note.

People change when they need to change. That is why words alone are insufficient. Fortunately for these new rabbis **two** power forces are about to converge that will transform the world in ways that we can hardly imagine. In my opinion, the first is a technological revolution that will make most of the jobs that humans do today completely obsolete. You don’t believe me. That’s okay. When I graduated from the Israelite Academy 40 years ago, my father, Chief Rabbi Levi Ben Levy, predicted that the internet [Information Super Highway] would transform my generation and he was prophetic in the accuracy of his vision. Today I am telling you that these trends will accelerate to the point where most humans are of little value to the economy. With that loss of employment, most people will

suffer a loss of identity. They will be asking: What am I suppose to do now? What is the purpose of my life in this society? Then, rabbis, you will be there to answer them as Micha taught: “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before they God.”

The second force that is sweeping through the earth is called “Global Climate Change.” I know that we have a lot of science skeptics and a few science deniers. Graduates, I am telling you that the Creator of the Universe is about to do something to this planet. His hand turns the earth and breath of His nostrils blows the wind. He causes the rain to fall and makes the sun shine upon the earth. Therefore, if the climate is changing then we know for sure that is the Creator who determines the temperature.

They laughed at Noah when he said “the climate is going to change and the waters are going to rise.” As these changes take place, people will begin to panic. Entire cities will be uprooted and become uninhabitable. Nations will go to war for access to water. At that time, when people are panicking and unscrupulous leaders are exploiting their pain and confusion, then you will rise to say “Thus saith the Lord.”

Preach global cooperation and interdependence. We all need each other. We can only survive by working together. Such cooperation will require that we all sublimate our egos—but also our national identities [borders], our racial identities, our religious identities. [Israel and Egypt] When the water begins to rise, we must row together in order to keep the boat afloat or we will all sink and drown as passengers on a ship of fools.

When all of these things come to pass, the ears of the people will be open and their hearts will be open to your words.

For such a time as this were you chosen. For such a time a this.

*“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” Ecclesiastes 12:13.*

