

Today's speakers were asked to confine their remarks to three to five minutes each. However, since I rose before dawn this morning after a sleepless night and drove four straight hours to be here for this event, I believe that I am entitled to at least fifteen times whatever was allotted to the other presenters.

I traveled here today, first and foremost, to pay tribute to the accomplishments and intellectual attainments of a remarkable woman, Sara Hurwitz, and to celebrate her receipt of a new title that will be announced shortly. This worthy cause, in and of itself, would have been a sufficient justification for the trip.

Nevertheless, there was a second reason why I felt compelled to be present at this conferral ceremony, and this was, in my opinion, even more significant than honoring Sara Hurwitz as an individual – namely, honoring what Sara Hurwitz represents. Because I believe that this auspicious occasion is not only a historic moment for the Jewish people, it is also a kiddush Hashem – a sanctification of God's name - and I wanted the opportunity to participate in a kiddush Hashem.

A Kiddush Hashem is achieved whenever we demonstrate that the intellectual, spiritual and divine transcend the petty, the political and the material. And today, we are making a clear statement of the principle that knowledge of Torah and fear of God are the only criteria that matter when it comes to the question of who should serve as a leader in Israel.

Today's success represents a tremendous step forward to a new stage in a mighty struggle. And Sara Hurwitz's emergence as a spiritual leader of profound wisdom and impeccable character marks the dawn of a new era in negotiating the challenges and obstacles that face us in that struggle.

I say that we are engaged in a struggle, and that this is only a step, because we all know that the principle Sara represents is far from being well established in today's Orthodox communities. Indeed, there are many among us – not in this room, but within Orthodoxy as a movement – who still cling to outmoded ideas and dogmatic notions about who is or is not qualified for Torah leadership.

They are concerned with chromosomes rather than character and value anatomy over ability. They are skeptical of or opposed to what we are proclaiming here, and believe that gender identity is a more fundamental qualification for leadership than either Torah knowledge or observance. And the momentous events of today will do little, at least in the short run, to change their attitudes. So it is obvious that Sara Hurwitz's accomplishment, the Kiddush Hashem she has orchestrated and which we all applaud, is still incomplete, and that the struggle to establish the principle of justice must go on.

In fact, I firmly believe that our struggle cannot be deemed truly successful until the little girl attending a Gan in New York, and the young woman studying in a seminary in Yerushalayim, *and the housewife living in Bene Brak*, all know that the potential for Torah leadership is within their grasp.

But even that is not enough. No, we still won't be finished, our task will not be completed and our mission will not be accomplished, until the little *boy* in Cheder in Bene Brak, *and every rabbinical student in New York*, and *every man learning in kollel in Yerushalayim* recognizes that his gender does not grant him a monopoly on our God's Torah.

Unfortunately, concern with the present state of affairs is not shared by enough of the leaders of the Orthodox community. Many of them will travel across the country or across the world to fight alleged injustice, but they remain indifferent to the injustices being perpetrated daily against fifty percent of the Jewish population, who are systematically denied equal access to the Torah, our most precious commodity.

Our message today is loud and clear: There is a place for women in the world of Torah leadership, and our absolute commitment to Halakha leaves no place for power politics in the House of God.

Maybe it is because I am a crazy right winger – I hail from the right wing of Orthodoxy – but I believe that Torah and halakha should be the only basis for our communal policies, to the exclusion of all other factors. And it has already been demonstrated, in the responsa handed out this morning, that empowering women in this manner is fully legitimate from the standpoint of Jewish Law.

Maybe it is because I am a fundamentalist, but I believe that when the Torah states that man and woman are *both* created in the image of God - with an equal capacity to serve Him and to study and teach His ways to humanity - it means exactly what it says.

Maybe I am a religious fanatic, but I can see it – I can already envision the scene on Har Tzion – men and women, sitting, learning, teaching and leading together, as they guide us all toward our Final Redemption.

May Hashem bless Sara Hurwitz with the fortitude and wisdom – combined with the outstanding character she already possesses – that will enable her to lead and to inspire Jewish communities world over.

And may Hashem bless all of us with the merit to witness the fulfillment of the words of the Prophet Yoel (3:1) “And I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons **and your daughters** will prophesy.” And so may it be His will, and let us say, Amen.