

Benediction for American Hebrew Academy Graduation  
May 25, 2008  
Rabbi Eliezer Havivi

In the parasha of the coming week, Parshat Bemidbar, we read about the arrangement of all the tribes of Israel, Reuven over here, Shimon over there, as they march through the desert on their way to the promised land – I'm reminded of that order now, as I look at the graduates in the front, and the parents and families a little further back, and then other AHA students, and friends all around.

And as I look at the graduating seniors, I see so many faces, so many beautiful neshamas that I have gotten to know over the past four years – in class, at basketball and baseball games, in synagogue, in Poland and Israel, friends of Nadav and Tal. I am grateful for those moments that I spent with many of you, and I hope that our connections will grow in the future.

Here's a piece of advice- to Nadav, to his friends, to the graduating seniors, class of 2008:  
Be Jewish! Study Torah, in its widest sense, and do mitzvot. As many as you can.

Because living Jewishly is the most fulfilling way you will find to live your lives.

And at the same time, know that Jewish practice is not an end in itself – The purpose of Jewish practice is for you to become fully human.

That's correct: Judaism will help you be more fully human, will help you engage in a healthy way with the world around you, and will help you fully embrace life.

Shabbat is good, not for its own sake, but because it will help balance you and your families-to-be.

Cultivating honesty and generosity and avoiding *l'shon hara*, will help you build meaningful relationships with friends and associates, and with your own conscience.

Our Jewish practices around birth and coming of age, and marriage, and death, and prayer and holidays and cycles of time, will help you better realize and heighten and appreciate the moments of transcendence which grace us regularly.

You all know the story of Hillel, who, when asked to teach the Torah on one foot, said –  
*"d'sanei alach , l'chavercha al ta'avid* – what's hateful to you, do not to your fellow. That's the whole Torah." That's what it's really about, and to get there, our tradition has us practice rituals and behavior patterns that refine our personalities, so that we can get there. And as you know, that's not all Hillel said. Hillel also said: *"zil g'mor*. All the rest is commentary – Now go out and learn."

Beautiful and wonderful graduates of the American Hebrew Academy – Torah and Mitzvot are all commentary to being human. Go out and learn them. Go out and live them.

Graduates – We, your teachers, your parents, your community, have given you roots and wings, Take them, with our love, and use them well.