

Rabbi Andrea London

I'm delighted and honored today to be with Congregation Agudath Israel to celebrate the sacred partnership between Rabbi Sara Blumenthal and this congregation. Thank you to Rabbi Ari Lucas for inviting me to be here and mazal tov to the board, staff, and members of Agudath Israel and to Rabbi Blumenthal, her parents, Sharon and Marc, her brother, Brian, and sister-in-law, Lisa.

*Poteach et yadecha u'masbia l'chol chai ratzon*—open up your hand and give everyone the sustenance they need. This line is from Psalm 145 which is an alphabetic acrostic paean to God. In this psalm from our liturgy, we praise God for the many ways we are cared for by the Holy One of Blessing. When I first met Rabbi Blumenthal, she was about 8 years old and regularly led this psalm—also known as Ashrei—at our Saturday morning minyan. Her chanting of the psalm made such an impact on the community—not just because she was young and her Hebrew was flawless—but because her rendition of it was so soulful. The depths of Rabbi Blumenthal's soul, which you at Agudath Israel have had the opportunity to experience already and, I pray, will continue to grow and learn from as she serves you as your rabbi, was evident early on.

A few years later, I had the pleasure of studying with Rabbi Blumenthal as she prepared her *dvar torah* when she became bat mitzvah. She was grappling with Deuteronomy 15 in Parashat Re'eh in which God says there will be no needy amongst the Israelites once they settle in the Land of Israel. And then, a few verses later, God declares there will never cease to be those who are needy. So which is it? Rabbi Blumenthal, at the ripe old age of 13, quickly realized that there was no contradiction in the text: if we care for others, there will be no one who is in need. If we don't, there will be people who can't sustain themselves. Our hands are God's hands on this earth. When Psalm 145 asks God to supply us with what we need, it's an exhortation for us to open our hands and hearts to make sure no one is in want. Rabbi Blumenthal not only can chant the Ashrei beautifully, she also understands the importance of living by its values.

This is exemplified in the commitments she took on when, during her college years, she was instrumental in leading a group on campus that brought together Muslim and Jewish students. Rabbi Blumenthal is an open and curious person who understands the value of developing relationships with people outside the Jewish community in order to build a strong society in our diverse country. *Patcha et yada*—she opened her hand and heart—in friendship and with a desire to understand and learn from others.

When she spent time in Israel on a fellowship and in rabbinic school, her openness and curiosity extended to the diverse communities that live in Israel. One of her volunteer positions was with the Jerusalem Youth Chorus—a musical group comprised of Jewish and Palestinian youth—who sing together not only to create beautiful music, but also to build a harmonious shared society in Israel in which everyone, regardless of their background, can thrive. *Patcha et yada*—she opened her hand and heart to help Jews and Palestinians in Israel better understand and empathize with each other.

A few years ago, Noah Efron, who facilitates a podcast from Israel called The Promised Podcast, was visiting our congregation in Evanston. Rabbi Blumenthal shared with him some of her experiences from

her time in Israel. He was so moved and impressed by her thoughts and her commitment to Israel's flourishing that he shared them on his podcast the following week.

Rabbi Blumenthal is a person of tremendous depth and character. She is passionate about Jewish study and learning, loves Jewish prayer, and really walks the walk of living an ethical and upright life based on our Jewish values and teachings. Watching her grow and blossom in the 23 years I've known her as been a great privilege and honor. I am sure that over the 9 months that she has been with you and served this community, you have been touched by her intellect, her compassion, and how she is a role model for authentic Jewish living. *Potachat et yada*—she is opening her hand and heart to you, the Agudath Israel community.

Now that we are installing Rabbi Blumenthal as your rabbi in this wonderful community—and she has gushed to me how much she has loved serving as your rabbi with Rabbi Lucas—your task is to reciprocate and open your hand and heart to her. Her role as your rabbi is to offer you comfort and support when you are in need, to celebrate and bring meaning to your simchas, to teach and guide you, and to challenge you to grow. The relationship between a rabbi and their congregation is two-way, a sacred covenant in which both of you commit to listen and support one another even when you disagree or are upset with one another. As you continue to get to know each other, may your mutual respect deepen and your community flourish.

Psalm 145 begins with these words, *Ashrei yoshvei veitecha od y'halelucha sela*—Happy are those who dwell in your house, Eternal source of blessing, they will forever praise you. At this moment of celebration words of praise come easily to our lips. God, we pray that you will continue to open your hand to Rabbi Blumenthal and Congregation Agudath Israel that they may experience an abundance of all that they need to grow and flourish as individuals and as a community in relationship with each other. For Congregation Agudath Israel and Rabbi Blumenthal, I pray that your sacred partnership as rabbi and congregation be filled with compassion and love so that together, filled with gratitude and joy, you will wholeheartedly exclaim the final words of Ashrei—*v'anachnu n'varach ya, m'atah v'ad olam halleluyah*. We will bless you now and forever, Holy one of Blessing--Halleluyah.