

# President's Remarks at 84th Annual Installation Dinner

*By Jonathan D. Lubin*

Thank you Judge Evans, and to the honorees, Madame Attorney General, dear guests, thank you all for being here. A special thank you to my wife, Chana Raizel Lubin for coming to this dinner, and for supporting all that I do and have done for this organization. A special thank you to my mother, Dona Spain, who is in town from Coral Gables, Florida – my old stomping ground. And to everyone else who has come here, who has purchased ads, or sponsored this dinner, thank you, thank you for supporting our work.

This week, we read from the Torah Portion called Parashas Balak, from Numbers, which tells the story of the evil prophet Bilaam, and his failed attempts to curse the Jewish people. Our sages, in Ethics of our Fathers, learn certain lessons from Bilaam. They say that there are three traits that are common to students of Abraham our Father: A kind eye, a lowly spirit, and muted passions. By contrast, the evil Bilaam's students are characterized by having an evil eye, a haughty spirit, and expansive desires. The Chassidic Master, the Sefas Emes asks the obvious question: what have I learned from this? Any fool could figure it out. And he answers that many people think that dedication, in and of itself, is praiseworthy. Come our sages and say that one must have a kind eye – he needs to see the good in others, and seek out their benefit. She needs to have a humble spirit – the willingness to subjugate even her own goals for the sake of her fellow. Finally, such a person must be extrinsically motivated.

Dedication alone may not be sufficient. Ours is merely to be tools in the hands of the Most High. Our sages continue that students of Abraham eat in this world, but they inherit the world to come. The Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement, says that 'inherit' here doesn't refer to some eschatological future, but rather it refers to the here and now. When your motivations are to serve the Master of the Universe, you draw the world to come into this world, and make it holy. This is true leadership.

This dinner is a celebration of leaders, people who I and many others hold up as heroes. People like our honorees, and our keynote speaker, here tonight. People like Rabbi Ahron Wolf, who makes sure that no Jew in Chicagoland is ever alone to fend for himself or herself, particularly in hospitals and retirement homes. Rabbi Baruch Hertz is, for me and for many others in Chicago, a leader and hero of the highest caliber. Rabbi Hertz would give the shirt off of his back, and with him that isn't a figure of speech. Aviva Patt, our Executive Director. She's the real leader of the Decalogue Society.

With a rise in anti-Semitic incidents and other forms of nativist bigotry, leaders are a precious commodity today. And any Economics student knows that what makes a commodity precious is its scarcity. The Decalogue society was one of the many organizations that filed an Amicus Brief before the United States Supreme Court earlier this term, pointing out the striking similarities between what has been called the Muslim ban and nativist bans against Jewish immigration that we faced in the flight from Hitler's Europe. I was proud to be one of its co-authors. And I'd like to recognize Gail Eisenberg, one of the other co-authors, for her leadership on that score.

While I personally was disappointed in the decision that was handed down yesterday in that matter, I'm proud of the work of so many attorneys who stood up for what is right, and at the very least caused the president to amend the travel ban so that it would comport, however slightly, with the Constitution.

We organized an immediate response to the events in Charlottesville earlier this year that brought together leaders from many of the affinity bar associations. I can see many of you here today, and I'm happy that we're all on the same team. We're a good team. And we'll do great things.

Bigotry is more and more an equal opportunity employer. As Jews, we've learned through the wisdom that comes from unfortunate experience that in order to confront hate, it is simply not enough to look across the political aisle and point out the iniquities of those on the other side. Indeed, our influence is usually the strongest among those who are closest to us.

But with every challenge comes an opportunity. The Lubavitcher Rebbe was wont to say that the light shines brightest in the darkness. The Decalogue Society has always been a light. And if current events have cast a cold shadow over our great nation, know that our light will shine brighter and brighter, with all of your help.

As I wrote in the Tablets last Spring, alternative media – internet chat boards, and social media – have not only created new forums for bigotry, but they’ve given us new tools to fight it. We aren’t going to stop people from speaking – nor should we try. As Justice Brandeis articulated it, “those who won our independence believed that the final end of the State was to make men free to develop their faculties.” We aren’t going to be able to scare bigots into their basements. In many cases, they’re already there. We know, as Brandeis continues “that it is hazardous to discourage thought, hope and imagination; that fear breeds repression; that repression breeds hate; that hate menaces stable government; ... and that the fitting remedy for evil counsels is good ones.” At the investiture of Justice P. Scott Neville Jr. that I attended on behalf of this Society recently, more than one of the speakers referred to the words inscribed on the wall of our Illinois Supreme Court: Audi Alteram Partem, hear the other side. That dedication to equanimity in the face of competing narratives may be the secret to American liberty. Free speech doesn’t give hatred the freedom to grow. It gives hatred the freedom to die, and die it should.

And nobody has dedicated himself to that vision, or has fought hatred with greater ferocity, and with more poise than Mitchell Goldberg; you’ve left big shoes to fill. I feel wholly inadequate to the challenge. But thankfully, working alongside you these few years, you’ve also given me important lessons in what it means to be a leader, and a statesman. There is so much I’d like to say to you about how grateful I am to have been given the time we’ve spent together, working for this organization. But, as words wouldn’t do justice, I can only say thanks. With your model as a guide, and with G-d’s help, this Society will grow, resting on the strong foundations that have been laid for it, but with the conviction that FOR US the sky truly is the only limit. Thank you, and G-d bless you.