

REMARKS BY DR. MICHAEL HALZEL UPON RECEIVING THE JEA/BEHRMAN HOUSE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

I would like to convey my most sincere appreciation to my colleagues at the JEA for having selected me for this high honor and to the people of Behrman House who have made the award possible and who have demonstrated their support for the JEA for all of the years that I have been a member.

Lifetime achievement award in Jewish education – that’s quite a mouthful – It not only covers the span of close to 70 years of **my** lifetime, but also encompasses the lifetime of my late father, George Halzel, who attended Beth El Hebrew School in Boston as a youngster, continued his formal studies at Hebrew Teachers College and who continued studying Talmud and sources on his own until his dying day. My father endowed me with a love of learning and an appreciation of the task of the Jewish educator through his volunteer work with the Boston BJE. I was privileged to be able to pass on our family’s commitment to teaching Jewish children to our son Avi, who as a youngster attended Hillel Day School in Swampscott and later continued his graduate studies with his wife Rayna at the University of Judaism. Avi currently serves as the CEO/Headmaster of the Denver Jewish Day School where carrying on the tradition, our four grandchildren, Matan, Ariela, Adina and Gilad are all students. Needless to say, Avi has made us very proud parents and grandparents.

Among my earliest childhood recollections are attending Junior Congregation accompanied by my father and my sisters where the principal of Beth El Hebrew School, Sidney Hillson, decided to recruit and train me to be a *Baal Tefillah* – a skill that I continue to enjoy, and which has stood me in good stead over the years. I went on to the Prozdor at HTC because that’s what everyone did in those days and that was where most of our social contacts were made. Somehow, my rabbi convinced me to attend Yeshiva University for my undergraduate studies. Getting accepted into the junior year abroad program at Chaim Greenberg Teachers Institute and the Hebrew University is what ultimately determined the path that I was to follow for the rest of my life. For it was there that I gained sufficient proficiency in Hebrew language and Judaic studies to consider making a career of Jewish Education and perhaps even more significantly, it was there that I met my

besheret, Celie, my devoted wife and companion for the past 49 years, and a master Hebrew teacher in her own right. And the rest, as they say is history.

For Jews, education is not just what we know, it's who we are. No people ever cared for education more. The world is changing ever faster. As the theme of this conference illustrates, in a single generation nowadays, there is more scientific and technological advance than in all of the previous centuries since human beings first set foot on earth. In uncharted territory, you need a compass. That's what Judaism has been to me. Tradition was right. It guided our ancestors through good times and bad.

It lifted them, often to heights of greatness. Why? Because Judaism is about learning. Education counts for more in the long run than wealth or power or privilege. Those who know, grow. The best things any of us can give our children are values to live by, ideals to which to aspire, an identity so that they know who they are, and a religious and moral heritage to guide them through the wilderness of time.

We can't live our children's lives for them. They are free. They will make their own choices. But we can show them what we love. If you want Jewish grandchildren, love Judaism and live in it with a sense of privilege and joy.

That is what I received from my parents. That is how I tried to live my life. That is what I have tried to pass on to the generations that will follow me. If I succeed, it will truly have been a lifetime of achievement.

In Pirke Avot, Ben Zoma teaches us that a wise person might not know more than anyone else, that someone rich does not have to have a lot of money, that a mighty person might not be physically strong, and that a person we honor might not be an award winner! Rather, Ben Zoma teaches us that these good characteristics really are about the way a person respects other people – and receives respect in return. Kol Hakavod to my fellow honorees and to all of you who devote your lives to the furtherance of Jewish education. May you go from strength to strength!