

The Rabbinic Life

By Dana Evan Kaplan

By the tenth grade, I knew that I wanted to be a Jewish religious leader and Jewish studies scholar. The two roles seemed completely intertwined in my mind, and I couldn't see how one could be one without the other. This was the model of the rabbi that I saw from my family's involvement in The Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, Congregation Rodef Shalom and the Jewish Center. As I moved toward my Bar Mitzvah, I began reading Judaica books and it seemed logical that one would want to write such works in addition to leading a congregation.

I had read that many rabbis had studied for Ph.D.'s simultaneously with their rabbinical studies, but this didn't seem to be the standard model by the time I was ready for graduate school. Somewhat by chance, I was able to enroll in the HUC-JIR Rabbinic program in Jerusalem and at the same time pursue a doctorate in Jewish History at Tel Aviv University. The HUC-JIR Jerusalem Program required students to pursue an M.A. degree and so the structure was very suited for my academic needs.

When I graduated I was looking for a position where I could combine being an active pulpit rabbi with a university affiliation that would allow me to pursue my research interests in American Jewish History. I was offered such an opportunity in Cape Town South Africa. In August 1994, I began to serve as rabbi of Temple Israel-Green Point and as Research Associate at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town. In 1997, I returned to the United States to serve as Associate Rabbi at Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun.

Over the next six years I tried to lead two large congregations while at the same time produce serious scholarship. It was a difficult combination because research required a tremendous amount of time and this did not diminish the amount of congregational duties waiting. Leadership of a community is not something that can be quantified in a number of hours and as time went on, I began to feel that I had to make a choice between rabbinic leadership and Judaic scholarship. This was a very difficult realization, because I really enjoyed the pulpit rabbinate. Despite the inevitable congregational politics, I enjoyed temple life and was very close with many of the members. There were also some tremendous opportunities that arose directly out of serving in large congregations. For example, in South Africa I was able to invite Archbishop Desmond Tutu to speak at a Friday night service. We arranged for an African church choir to join the temple's choir on that same evening.

This past August, I made the leap by accepting the Oppenstein Brothers Chair in Jewish Studies at the University of Missouri - Kansas City. What made this move particularly attractive was that it also included directing the Danciger Program in Jewish Studies at the university. In the role of director, I am hoping to be able to engage the Jewish community in the context of academic Jewish studies.

Even before my arrival, Joshua Taub, the incoming Senior Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Jehudah in Kansas City, asked me to assist him in leading the High Holy Day Services in that temple. Thus

I was able to continue to play an active rabbinic role, even if it was only for a very short period. This is important to me because I don't want to just work in the "ivory tower." I believed and I still believe that a rabbi can make a difference not only in the lives of individuals but also in playing a leadership role for the Jewish people.

In my new position, I was also able to begin speaking at congregations throughout the country. Particularly moving for me was being the Installation Speaker for Cantor David Bentley in Congregation B'nai Tikveh in Walnut Creek, California. Rabbi Raphael Asher asked if I could also speak on the topic of my upcoming edited volume *Contemporary Debates in American Reform Judaism: Conflicting Visions*. It was a wonderful four days and it helped to reinforce my sense that I had made the right decision.

One of the main motivations for becoming a full time academic was the chance it afforded to publish. I have relished the opportunity to sit in front of the computer and try to formulate serious sustained responses to historical, theological and sociological issues. I had already published my first scholarly article in December 1995 in the journal *American Jewish History*, edited by our colleague, Marc Lee Raphael. The article dealt with an attempt by a man living in a small town in Virginia in 1896 to convert to Judaism and study for the rabbinate at HUC. Marc's enthusiasm for the piece encouraged me to write more.

As can be seen from that first article, there was an organic connection between my life as a Reform rabbi and my scholarly concerns. To sustain the type of effort required over the years of research, the subject has to mean something to you. During my time in South Africa, I began to write on the Jewish community in that country. After I returned to the United States, I began to write on American Reform Judaism.

It was shortly after my return to this country that I began collecting articles for the collection that eventually became *Contemporary Debates in American Reform Judaism*. I solicited, edited them, and put them in order to shape the presentation of the topic. This last task was certain to be the hardest, since it was inevitable that twenty or twenty-one writers would have dramatically different concerns, as well as styles. I was amazed at how some of the authors could take virtually the same data and interpret them in different and frequently contradictory ways. This was a particularly stimulating project.

As a full time academic, I now have the time to complete a number of other scholarly projects that I had already begun. Rutgers University Press has commissioned me to write a book on the dramatic changes that the Reform movement is undergoing. I am also working on full-length studies on the Jewish communities of Cuba and South Africa, and am hoping to rewrite my dissertation on conversion to Judaism in nineteenth century America. It is constantly repeated that being a rabbi means being a teacher and I would suggest that this not only means teaching in person, but teaching through writing and publishing. I have

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Sharing Our Lives

הטוב והמטיב

- ▶ Congratulations to ROBERT and ANNETTE SAMUELS on the birth of their 7th grandchild, Noam Samuels Sroka on August 3, 2000.
- ▶ ARTHUR and LINDA STARR are excited to announce the engagement of their daughters, Ziva to TJ Raney and Adina to Stephen Rosenthal. They both became engaged in the same week in October and will be married six months apart (April and October 2001).
- ▶ We wish LEONARD and SHIRLEY STERN a hearty mazal tov on the occasion of the rebuilding and rededication of their home on July 5, 2000. Their home in New Hyde Park, NY was destroyed by fire on March 15, 1999. They wish to thank colleagues and congregants at Temple Sinai, Massapequa for their good wishes and assistance.
- ▶ Congratulations to KINNERET SHIRYON on receiving the "Career Woman of the Year Award – 2000" from the Modi'in Municipality for her outstanding achievements in the development of Jewish Community Education in Israel and her contribution to the community at large.
- ▶ BRIAN BEAL and NAOMI ADLER joyfully announce the birth of their son, Joshua Adler Beal, on August 15, 2000.
- ▶ DEBORA GORDON joyfully announces her marriage to JUDITH WIEMAN on November 26, 2000.
- ▶ DONALD and MARILYN TAM joyfully announce the marriage of their daughter, Andra Michal to Marc Lefkovits on July 2, 2000.
- ▶ Congratulations to KENNETH M. CHASEN and ALLISON M. LEE on the birth of their son, Benjamin Lee Chasen, on November 2, 2000.
- ▶ Congratulations to SETH D. PHILLIPS on his promotion to Lieutenant Commander, US Navy Chaplain Corps, and being selected to give the benediction at the national memorial service for the USS Cole in the presence of the President of the United States.
- ▶ HOWARD and BETH NEEDLEMAN joyfully announce the birth of their son, Noah Emanuel, on October 25, 2000.
- ▶ MOSHE and ILANA ZEMER proudly announce the birth of their fourth grandchild, Tome Shmuel, son of their daughter Hilla Zemer and Baruch Benditz on November 11, 2000 in Jerusalem.
- ▶ Congratulations to HAROLD B. WAINTRUP, Rabbi Emeritus, Temple Beth Am, who gave a sermon as part of the 50th Abington, PA, Interfaith Thanksgiving Jubilee. Rabbi Waintrup is a founder of this annual event.
- ▶ Congratulations to our colleague, KENNETH SEGEL, who was recently honored by Temple Beth Israel, Scottsdale, AZ with a special evening and gift for his 30 years of rabbinic service.
- ▶ Congratulations to PAUL STEINBERG who will be honored by his colleagues at the NAORRR's annual convention for his service to our movement. Also, at the NAORRR Kallah, there will be an evening of tribute to ERWIN and AGNES HERMAN as they conclude their many years of service as NAORRR's co-executive vice presidents. P. IRVING and PAT BLOOM will succeed them.
- ▶ Congratulations to ANDREW VOGEL and MARTHA HAUSMAN on the birth of their daughter Rosa on December 10, 2000.

ברוך דיין האמת

MOSES CYRUS C. WEILER

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December 4

Messages of Condolence may be sent to:

Mrs. Una Weiler
Nveh Adam
4 Nachshon Street
Abu Tor, Jerusalem
Israel

Condolences and our sincere sympathy to:

- ▶ James and Joshua Bennett on the death of their father Gerald Bennett on Wednesday, November 22, 2000.
- ▶ Todd and Lauren Chizner on the death of Todd's mother Judith on Monday, November 20, 2000. Judith's death fell on the one year yahrzeit for Todd's father, Richard Chizner, who died on November 21, 1999.
- ▶ Harvey Tattelbaum on the death of his mother Pauline on Tuesday, December 2, 2000.

רפואה שלמה

- ▶ Our colleague, JONATHAN BROWN, is recuperating at home from prostate cancer surgery which took place on October 31. He would welcome e-mail greetings, phone calls, or notes.

If any of your personal or professional information changes, please notify **Shelley Limmer**, slimmer@ccarnet.org at the CCAR office, in order for us to keep our database as current as possible.

The Bulletin Board

Central Conference of American Rabbis

Space Still Available for Career Reviews

The next Career Review, led by our colleague Jack Bloom is set for Monday through Thursday, May 7-10, at the Holiday Hills retreat center in Pawling, New York (in the beautiful Hudson Valley). The review will run from 4:00 p.m. Monday through 12:30 p.m. Thursday. The cost of this review is \$525 per person, and includes the review, private rooms and baths, 9 meals, and all materials. Train service is available from Grand Central Station, or driving directions can be provided. Each year, those who attend attest to an utterly extraordinary, sometimes life-changing experience.

To register, send a \$100 deposit payable to CCAR to Elliot Stevens at the CCAR. Space is strictly limited to 12 colleagues (no spouses), and last year's review quickly sold out.

The Maqom Stage Fund

Talmud is the foundation on which all of modern Judaism stands, yet few attempt to approach it as it is portrayed as legalistic and complicated. I am thrilled to announce that after over 3 years of work, the production of "Talmud: The Musical" is nearing completion. It has been my dream for years to develop a first-class musical based on the inspiring story of Rabbi Akiba. To develop this musical, I have hired both a professional playwright, David Schechter and a professional composer, Ned Ginsburg. These two New York-based veteran theater professionals are nearly finished crafting a musical production of the highest standards. The musical is accompanied by a curriculum about Rabbi Akiba that can be used as background or as a piece of curriculum with the musical as its culmination. The musical will be appropriate for use in your congregations, schools,

day schools and our UAHC camps as well as Hillels and JCCs.

At the end of the play, the woman protagonist begins rabbinical school, so many sources of support to which I might turn are not available. Let's claim the Talmud as our own. I ask that you consider supporting the development and production of this musical by cooperating with and/or donating to the "Maqom Stage Fund." In addition, if you have congregants who are interested in the arts, may I ask that you please pass this message along to them? This contribution is tax deductible based on Maqom's status as an educational institution (501c3 status). You and/or your congregation will be acknowledged on a special page on Maqom's website. Donations may be sent to Maqom at P.O. Box 31900-323, Houston, TX 77231. Thank you for your consideration.

Aging and You

The CCAR Committee on Aging is interested in meeting with Conference members who have a special interest and/or background in issues of aging - theological, clinical, liturgical, textual, personal, etc. If you are intrigued by the possibility of helping to strengthen and redefine the mission of this potentially dynamic and vital committee, please either fax: (504-861-3102) or e-mail (rabbipec@aol.com) the chair, Edward Paul Cohn at your earliest opportunity.

Copyright

Seeking copyright available black and white graphics of Judaica (general as well as Holidays) as well as graphics of nature images (ie: trees, flowers, etc.) for use on a newsletter I am creating. I am looking for esthetically inspiring images and tend to gravitate towards older looking images versus "modern" ones. Vicki Hollander, 327 East 18th Ave. Vancouver, BC V5V1E7 Canada. Phone: 604-327-9876 e mail: vicki@axion.net.

"A Treasury of Wisdom and Inspiration From the American Rabbi."

Rabbi Sidney Greenberg is preparing for publication an anthology to be titled "A Treasury of Wisdom and Inspiration From the American Rabbi."

He is inviting rabbis of all groups to submit brief passages (a paragraph or two), for consideration for inclusion. If you would like to submit any of your writings for consideration, you can reach him at: 315 West 86th Street, Suite 14A New York, NY 10024.

If you can send your contribution in hard copy and on a computer disc, it would be helpful.

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been very encouraged by the efforts of Fred Greenspahn to organize the academic members of the CCAR. A number of such individuals have been models of scholarly attainment and so as I embark on this path, there are some very big shoes to fit into. A friend recently asked me how I like my new career. I looked at him with surprise, because in my mind it is not a new profession, but a different approach to achieving the very same goals.

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