

THE Chronicle



HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION



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SPECIAL INAUGURATION ISSUE

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear friends,

Paraphrasing Charles Dickens is one way to sum up this moment in the Jewish world: it is the best of times and the worst of times. It is a festive time of joyous Jewish holy days, and yet we remain ever mindful of the recent Israel-Gaza War and the significant resurgence of antisemitism facing our people around the world.

While the battles raged this summer, I was so proud of HUC-JIR's extraordinary role in Israel. Our Israeli students and alumni did incredibly meaningful work during the weeks of the conflict. As you will read in these pages, they provided significant support, comfort, and pastoral care to communities struggling with fear and isolation during the incessant waves of siren warnings and rocket attacks. Our Year-In-Israel students, beginning their first year of studies in Jerusalem, and our Cantorial Certification students, fulfilling their Israel Studies experience this summer, expressed their profound solidarity with the people of Israel during these trying times.

The commitment of our Israeli and stateside students is a testament to their deep understanding of our core Jewish value: "*Kol Yisrael arevim zeh la-zeh*," "All Israel are obligated to one another." During this holy day period of personal reflection, renewal, and rededication, we affirm our devotion to Israel and pray for the blessings of security and peace for all those around the world who are suffering the ravages of war.

What we do and how we act ought to be shaped not solely by our own wants and desires, but by having a constant and unrelenting focus on our role in God's world.

The Sukkah is a powerful metaphor for our thoughts at this time. A temporary dwelling, precarious and open to the elements, it reminds us of our Jewish journey throughout the ages and our transcendence over persecution and exile. In the Babylonian Talmud (Sukkot 27a), a discussion appears of just how many meals one is obligated to eat during the seven days in which one must dwell in the Sukkah. It comprises a quote from the Mishnah and a halakhic inquiry and answer:

*"A person is obliged to eat fourteen meals in the Sukkah, one each day and one each night."
The Administrator of King Agrippas asked Rabbi Eliezer: "May a person like me, who eats only one meal a day, only eat one meal in the Sukkah and still fulfill my obligation?" He answered him: "Every day you draw out the meal with all sorts of delicacies for your own honor, and now you cannot add one delicacy for the honor of your Creator?"*

This short, pithy text goes straight to the point of an important facet of the Rabbis' worldview, one that should influence and mold our behavior especially today: what we do and how we act ought to be shaped not solely by our own wants and desires, but by having a constant and unrelenting focus on our role in God's world. The occasional elaborate celebration, delicacies and all, is acceptable, of course, but it must be in the service of God, our obligations to the Jewish people, and the betterment of the world.

This spring and summer, HUC-JIR's leadership has been intensively engaged in a number of highly productive planning and initial implementation endeavors to fulfill this vital mission. Together with the Board of Governors, we have now established a core set of five goals that will guide our institution's evolution in the years to come. These goals include a focus on Thought Leadership by building HUC-JIR's position as an intellectual resource for the Reform Movement and the entire global Jewish community through educational offerings, academic conferences, enhanced web resources, and alumni

education. The proceedings of the Academic Symposium, recorded in these pages, reflect the beginning of this initiative.

We will continue to reimagine and expand our efforts in Recruitment and Admissions, partnering with other organizations, congregants, and alumni, to attract and retain the best and brightest students. We will work to ensure a financially sustainable future for the College-Institute through vigorous fundraising, Board development, conservative fiscal management, and strategic advance planning. We have begun reviewing curricula across our programs, keeping our training aligned with the evolving roles and communities in which our students will serve, and helping them grow ever deeper in their text skills, Hebrew, and knowledge of Jewish tradition. Finally, we will build on our unique presence in Israel, through continuing our excellent programs that train Israelis for leadership in a pluralistic religious world, even as we create opportunities for visiting North Americans and bolster the relationship between the Diaspora and Israel.

We welcomed a new team member in the senior administration, Elizabeth Squadron, our new Vice President for Program and Business Development, who previously served as the Director of the Mayor's Office of Operations under Mayor Michael Bloomberg. She is coordinating our five goals and their implementation over the next three years, in cooperation with our senior team. A website, with goals, objectives, benchmarks, and responsibilities clearly delineated, is underway, and will be available to keep you apprised of our progress.

Thanks to you – our alumni, friends, and supporters – fundraising continues to be a bright area at the College-Institute. So far this year, we have been blessed with several very significant gifts in the \$1-\$5 million range for a total of \$13 million in principle gifts completed, with more currently under discussion. We are grateful for your devotion as you contribute to creating a vibrant Reform Movement and Jewish community through your support of scholarships and endowed faculty chairs, specific schools and programs, and our Annual Fund. Bequests and other planned gifts, as well, do so much to help our institution thrive. Please know how much we appreciate all of your encouragement and assistance and how seriously we take our role as stewards of your gifts.

What has become abundantly clear to me over these past eight months as President is that we are part of a thriving community – one that values learning, creates opportunities for growth and leadership, and sets our students on a sacred path that is meaningful, crucial, and inspiring. Wherever my travels take me, I encounter individuals whose lives have been changed for the better because of HUC-JIR. I am proud, as an alumnus, a faculty member, and now, as President, to be a part of this outstanding institution of learning.

Of this I am certain: the festival of Sukkot is communal. No one can build a Sukkah alone. (I tried it once – it is, shall we say, ill-advised!) Within each of our booths we only feel complete with the presence of others. It is uniquely rewarding to be there, even though it is only for seven days each year. How much the more so when we build more long-term, permanent institutions like the College-Institute, with far greater impact and more enduring results.

Thank you for your commitment to being among our builders. I look forward to building with you for many years to come.

In friendship and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aaron D. Panken". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rabbi Aaron D. Panken, Ph.D.
Tishrei 5775 October 2014

HUC-JIR's ADVOCATE

ANDREW R. BERGER
CHAIR OF HUC-JIR
BOARD OF GOVERNORS



Andrew Berger
and Rabbi Panken
reading Torah.

“I truly believe that HUC-JIR is the most important Jewish institution in North America today,” says Andrew R. Berger,

the new Chair of HUC-JIR’s Board of Governors. “It is HUC-JIR that prepares innovative and caring Jewish leaders to inspire new generations to lead Jewish lives. Nothing is more important than supporting HUC-JIR’s mission.” Berger’s life’s journey exemplifies his point, saying “it was two red-headed rabbis, alumni of HUC-JIR, who changed my life.”

Born in Norfolk, Virginia, to parents who were lawyers, he grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska, where his father was a law professor at the University of Nebraska. “My Jewish identity was formed mostly by osmosis, based on my parents’ strong identification, rather than synagogue or community-centered,” he recalls.

Focused on becoming a lawyer early on, he graduated from the University of Nebraska in two years with a B.A. in economics and went directly to Cornell Law School, where he enjoyed the Socratic method of teaching that “taught me how to think as a lawyer.” He was recruited to a large law firm in Cincinnati and after two years joined Katz Teller in 1980, where he became a partner in 1984. His practice is concentrated in mergers and acquisitions, commercial financing transactions, business organization and succession planning, and executive employment agreements. He serves as a member of the firm’s Board of Directors and is listed in Woodward/White’s *The Best Lawyers in America* and recognized as an Ohio Super Lawyer by Law & Politics Media.

Never having affiliated with a synagogue or been involved in the organized Jewish community, Berger’s turn toward Jewish engagement in his 40s was sparked by an unexpected invitation from a friend and law partner, Tedd Friedman, a lifelong member of Isaac M. Wise Temple, to attend Yom Kippur services at its landmark Plum Street Temple. Arriving early, he picked up the *mahzor*, the High Holy Days prayer book, “whose beautiful meditations posed soul-searching questions for me: have you done everything to help strengthen the Jewish people, to make yourself a better person?” The theme of the sermon –The Eleventh Commandment: Thou Shalt Hope – inspired him to think about how “the Jewish people have survived as a civilization because we never gave up hope for ourselves and the larger world.” Deeply affected by the service’s theme of ‘return,’ Berger told his wife Linda, whom he had married in 1991, about this “life changing experience, almost an epiphany” and that he wanted to explore a stronger connection to the Jewish community and membership in a synagogue.

Another law partner, Jerry Teller, a longtime member of the HUC-JIR Board of Governors, leader of the Cincinnati Jewish community, and member of Wise Temple, directed Berger to his rabbi, Rabbi Lewis Kamrass. Rabbi Kamrass welcomed the Bergers but suggested they do some learning first and sent them to the Rabbi Gary P. Zola, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives at HUC-JIR/Cincinnati.

Dr. Zola’s *Introduction to Judaism* class and their new relationship with Rabbi Kamrass “had a tremendous impact on our lives. We were concerned about how an interfaith couple would be received in the Jewish world and were in the process of deciding how to bring up our children. Because of that class, the feeling that our family could be welcomed into the community, and the support of those two red-headed rabbis – Dr. Zola and Rabbi Kamrass – Linda made the decision to bring up our children as Jews. That’s why I am passionate about HUC-JIR. I want us to turn out more Jewish leaders like them who can change people’s lives.”

The Bergers joined Wise Temple and discovered a welcoming community with “many people like us raising children in an interfaith environment, where Judaism is a choice. We found good friends with whom we could have serious conversations about God, values, and what it means to be in a synagogue community.”

Starting in 1996, Berger soon took on significant leadership roles as a member of the Wise Temple Board, Chair of the Outreach and Strategic Planning Committees, and as President (2005-2007). Having experienced what a single invitation can do, he was motivated to build on the temple's mission to "foster a culture of invitation." His love for music helped lead to the creation of the all-volunteer *Shir Chadash* band, inspired by a workshop he attended at a URJ Biennial convention. Guitarist/singer Berger and his nine-member group perform traditional liturgy set to contemporary music at a monthly Friday night service and at community-wide events at the JCC and the Cedar Village retirement community. [Listen to *Shir Chadash* at huc.edu/shirchadash]

Invited to join the Cincinnati Federation Board in 2007, Berger chaired the Jewish-community wide Cincinnati 2020 Strategic Planning Team that involved key professionals, lay leaders, and thought leaders from Cincinnati's thirty Jewish organizations and congregations, including HUC-JIR, whose faculty participated in working groups. Berger served as Federation President (2012-2014) and takes pride in Cincinnati being "the most connected Jewish community of its size in North America."

Jerry Teller approached Berger in 2008 to join the HUC-JIR Board of Governors at a time of severe economic crisis. Berger became a member of the Board's New Way Forward Task Force, which he later chaired, to provide oversight to the administration's five-year plan for financial sustainability that was successfully completed by 2013.

A member of the Executive and Governance Committees, he also chaired the Strategic Planning Committee, which coincided with the work of the Presidential Search Committee, on which he also served. "With our beloved Rabbi David

Ellenson stepping aside after twelve accomplished years, we are fortunate to have a new President who is breathing new life into everything we do. Rabbi Aaron Panken has embraced the strategic plan, along with his own goals, which include increasing recruitment and admissions, reviewing curriculum for the needs of the 21st century, deploying resources efficiently, and expanding HUC-JIR's reach beyond the walls of its four campuses. "

Inducted as Chair in June 2014, Berger seeks to ensure that "each Governor has a meaningful role in our institution and that our partnerships with the other branches of the Reform Movement are ever stronger." He is committed to seeing HUC-JIR continue to grow by preparing more students for leadership, expanding its role in advancing religious pluralism in Israel, and promoting HUC-JIR's thought leaders as "the intellectual firepower on the leading edge of Jewish life."

Berger's commitments are shared by his wife Linda, who is the Board President of the Interfaith Hospitality Network, a nonprofit agency that partners with congregations of all faiths to provide emergency shelter for homeless families. The Bergers are blessed with five children: school psychologist Laura, twin sons architect Daniel and lawyer Timothy, Culinary Institute of America student Julia, and Hannah, who entered Kalamazoo College this fall.

This summer, Andy, Linda, and Hannah participated in a memorable trip to Berlin and Prague, organized by HUC-JIR's American Jewish Archives and the Jewish Women's Archive, to commemorate the legacy of Regina Jonas, the first-ever woman rabbi, who was ordained in Germany in 1935, served the Jewish community of Berlin during the Nazi era, and was murdered after having been imprisoned at the Theresienstadt (Terezin) concentration camp. The Bergers accompanied the first women rabbis ordained by the Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Orthodox seminaries in North America and Europe, an experience that powerfully reinforced their family's cherished values of inclusion and equality. [See Berger's article at huc.edu/jonas]

Berger points to the recent Pew Study of Jewish Americans as a clarion call to action. "With the largest growing segment of Jews characterized as 'Jews of No Religion,' it is up to HUC-JIR to prepare leaders with the knowledge and skills to create the Jewish experiences, spiritual growth, and opportunities for learning that will engage the unaffiliated and enable them to find a home in a community informed by Jewish history, tradition, and culture. HUC-JIR is an absolutely amazing institution. We have to remain strong and continue to grow. It is worthy of all of our support. I urge everyone to join with me."



Andy Berger (at right) and Linda Berger (second from left) with their children (from left) Julie, Tim, Laura, Hannah, and Dan.



LEARNING TO LEAD IN A TIME OF WAR

During the recent Israel-Gaza war, our Israeli rabbinical students and alumni offered significant spiritual support and reassurance to communities subjected to rocket attack, while our stateside students studying at our Jerusalem campus for the Year-In-Israel Program and Cantorial Certification Program demonstrated their solidarity with Israel.

Third-year rabbinical student Yael Karrie served her community at Nachal Oz, located adjacent to the Gaza Strip, where she led Shabbat services in bomb shelters because residents had fifteen seconds, at most, to find safety when the sirens went off. She created musical activities for children to distract them during missile volleys and provided meaningful pastoral care for those struggling to live a normal life. When

400 soldiers showed up at her kibbutz after a week of non-stop military service inside Gaza, many of these exhausted and tense young soldiers were drawn to the beautiful guitar and vocal music they heard emanating from the center of the kibbutz and came to Kabbalat Shabbat services. And when a group of Orthodox soldiers hovered hesitantly by the edge of the circle because of the prohibition against playing musical instruments on Shabbat, Karrie and her musicians laid down their instruments, and, *a cappella*, shared in making harmonies together.

Perhaps the most ingenious and memorable thing Yael did was to create a campaign called *Adom V'sameah*, "Redeeming Red." The color of the "code red" alerts that indicated incoming missiles was associated

with its destructive implications. So Yael re-imagined it, collecting photos from friends of red things that were positive instead. From pictures of infants in red outfits to crimson flowers and ruby shoes, Yael's Facebook page quickly filled with evocative images of what red could be instead of what it was. Campers and counselors at Union for Reform Judaism camps dressed in red clothing and sent their photos to Yael. This effort was a resounding testament to the value of our Reform Jewish community and the links we share as a global Jewish people.

Rabbinical student Galit Cohen Kedem served her community in Holon, a suburb of Tel Aviv, by sustaining their spirit despite the anxiety caused by the attacks. At Havdallah services coupled with pizza dinners for her families, people shared the names of soldiers, friends, and loved ones for whom they were concerned. Outings and activities for the children were arranged.



Year-In-Israel and Cantorial Certification students demonstrating solidarity with Israel (top). Campers offer a "red hug" of support for Israel from URJ Camp Coleman in Cleveland, Georgia (bottom).



Israeli rabbinical alumni with President Shimon Peres: (from right) Rabbi Myra Hovav, Rabbi Gabi Dagan, and Rabbi Haim Shalom.

Concerned about the elderly and those struggling with disabilities who could not reach the shelters with each alarm, as well as those who, paralyzed by fear, would not leave their homes for weeks, Kedem organized programs in which congregants would visit one another.

Rabbi Myra Hovav's Kehillat Yuval in Gedera, a very young community with many babies, toddlers, and children, faced numerous challenges: schools and preschools intermittently closed; day care facilities no longer tenable because those situated in private homes lacked sufficiently quick access to a shelter for groups of very young children; and parents called to military service or obliged to work who suffered anxiety about young families left at home. Nonetheless, her community gathered for Shabbat in people's

homes, children baked challah together, and studies for *b'nei mitzvah* students continued. A psychologist volunteered for story time and craft activities to help the children deal with stress, and Myra's Yuval Stork initiative for new mothers gave crucial support to those with newborn infants. Hoping to give a respite to her community, she took eighty adults and children on a day trip to Haifa for a visit to the zoo, relaxation at the Leo Baeck Center, and a warm welcome by Rabbis Gabby Dagan and Naama Dafni-Keln and members of Ohel Avraham congregation.

At the same time, HUC-JIR's 36 first-year rabbinical, cantorial, and education students and 11 Cantorial Certification students began their Orientation in Jerusalem just as the Gaza rocket offensive was launched.

Their blogs, reflecting on their experiences and commitment to Israel, expressed their emulation of the mindset of the Israeli people: life must go on. [See huc.edu/news/context and huc.edu/news/reflections]

Rabbinical student Robert Friedman summed up their perspective, writing, "While the rockets can indeed do physical damage, it is the potential mental and psychological damage that they can do which can be most effective. Israelis know this, and in the face of all this danger, to spite the terrorists they continue with their daily lives. They do not let fear take over and they will not let it stop them from doing that which is necessary in life. This is the resilience of Israel and this is why, over centuries of adversity, Jews have always survived and persevered."

Facing Mt. Zion, Year-In-Israel and Cantorial Certification students participate in a moving opening ceremony as part of their Orientation program at the outset of the Israel-Gaza conflict.



IN CELEBRATION

THE INAUGURATION OF RABBI AARON D. PANKEN, PH.D.

RABBI RICK JACOBS

PRESIDENT, UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM



Almost two thousand years ago, a new president or *nasi* was sought to lead the academy of sages known as the Sanhedrin. Tractate Berachot of the Babylonian Talmud narrates the ancient search. They too considered a number of worthy candidates but one stood out. Before accepting the position, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah smartly checked with his wife. She warned that his predecessors didn't all have long tenures and furthermore she commented that he just looked too young for this weighty position, but miraculously his hair instantly turned white.

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Panken, before you agreed to become the *nasi*, you wisely checked with Lisa, and like Rabbi Elazar, you've quickly acquired more than a few grey hairs. Most significantly, Elazar ben Azariah had big ideas for the academy: he wanted more students to dive deeply into the sea of Jewish learning on their way to lives of inspired leadership. Aaron, you share that vision with your Talmudic forebear, and like him you also know that leading change requires courage, vision, and creativity, traits you have in abundance.

Rabbi Panken is a strategic thinker, a wizard with technology, and at home in rarefied academic debates as well as in the complex practical realities of synagogues and life in the 21st century. I have no doubt that Dr. Panken will figure out how to get us where we need to go. As a captain and pilot, he knows how to navigate currents and winds to arrive safely in distant harbors. So may he guide all of us on this journey.

Isaac Mayer Wise set the bar quite high when it came to creating synergy between the Presidents of the Union and the College; after all, he held both positions simultaneously in the nascent Reform Movement.

Rabbi Panken, I am confident that during your tenure, the College-Institute and the Union will align even more closely in shaping a bright future for our Movement and our many partners. Lifting our gaze to the future, I pledge to partner and collaborate with you and this great academy that you lead – to strengthen, deepen, and grow our Movement.

The Torah teaches that “Aaron shall carry the names of the children of Israel on the breastpiece of decision over his heart...” (Exodus 28:29) Midrash Tanchuma elaborates: “When Aaron had to make a decision regarding a fellow Israelite, he was to consult not only the rule book but his heart as well...” (Tanchuma Sh'mot 27)

Aaron Panken is cut from the same cloth; the depth of his heart matches, if not exceeds, the breadth of his brilliant mind. In the past few weeks, Rabbi Panken has not only ordained and graduated a new generation of Jewish leaders, but, more significantly, he has modeled for each of them how to live a Jewish life of depth and integrity, embodying instead of merely espousing our Torah's timeless teachings. Greatness and goodness flow forth from this remarkable man.

Today as we shower blessings on Rabbi Aaron Panken, may we also add prayers for his large and loving family:

יאמרו-נא בית אהרן

“Say to the House of Aaron,” (Psalm 118) as you share in this demanding and ennobling adventure in leadership:

כי לעולם חסדו

“May God's loving kindness abide among you, always.”

And finally, to our beloved *nasi*, Rabbi Dr. Aaron Panken: May you always be guided by our sages in whose company we hold you:

והעמידו תלמידים הרבה

“May you raise up many disciples” and may they all Be disciples of Aaron” (Pirkei Avot 1:1)

הוי מתלמידיו של אהרן. אוהב שלום ורודף שלום. אוהב את הבריות ומקרבן לתורה.

“loving peace and pursuing peace, loving your fellow creatures and bringing them close to the Torah.”

(Pirkei Avot 1:12)

RABBI RICHARD A. BLOCK PRESIDENT, CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS



On behalf of more than 2000 members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the rabbinical leadership organization of Reform Judaism, most of us HUC-JIR alumni, I am delighted to congratulate Aaron Panken, dear friend, cherished colleague, and longtime CCAR member, upon his Inauguration. Aaron's maturity, humility, keen intelligence, personal charisma, profound Jewish and Reform Jewish commitment, valuable experience as a faculty member and administrator, and, not least important, his warm sense of humor, make him ideally suited to lead the College-Institute. David Ellenson, Aaron's distinguished predecessor, whom I also love and admire, gives me partial credit for convincing him to seek its presidency, and I was honored to serve on the search committee that chose Aaron. If I had done those things and nothing else of note in my rabbinical career: *Dayenu*. It would have been enough.

This is an extraordinary institution in every way. I cannot conceive of a plausible explanation for the flourishing of Judaism in North America over the past century and a half, nor could I envision a future for Reform Judaism, or for North American Jewry itself, without a thriving, robust, and adequately resourced College-Institute, and the rabbis, cantors, educators, nonprofit leaders, and scholars it produces. All who enable this school to fulfill its essential mission deserve our utmost esteem and gratitude.

The unique and precious institution that Aaron now leads has the privilege and responsibility of creating

klei kodesh, sacred vessels, Jewish leaders who are "Holy to the Eternal One." However and wherever we serve, the College-Institute's ordainees and graduates are called to be exemplars, thought leaders, agents of both continuity and change. Our lives are devoted to a cause far greater, nobler, and more enduring than our mortal, transitory, sometimes lost and bewildered selves. We are guardians of the Jewish past, guides to the Jewish present, generators of the Jewish future. Just as inspired rabbis, cantors, educators, communal leaders, and scholars have been key to the survival of Judaism and the Jewish People, Jewish destiny depends upon their sharing priceless gifts of mind, heart, and spirit, now and for countless generations to come.

That future also depends on collaborative leadership among clergy and professionals, and with lay leaders, members, donors, and volunteers. Those who devote careers to Judaism cannot secure the Jewish future by themselves. Nor can Jewish clergy and professionals alone foster the experiences of intrinsic community, meaning, and transcendence that sustain Jewish life and Jewish lives. We need partners.

The partnership imperative also pertains to our Movement institutions, beginning with, but not limited to, its legacy organizations: the URJ, HUC-JIR, and CCAR. Given the challenges of the contemporary period, it is critical that our institutions and leaders transcend the parochialism and competitiveness that have too often hampered our progress as a Movement. Even as we articulate and pursue the particular goals and purposes for which our individual entities exist, we need to think more expansively and creatively, finding new ways to work together in service of our common, sacred cause.

So, to you Aaron, and to the College-Institute, the leaders and members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis pledge our hearts and hands. In you, we invest our hopes, faith, and trust. Let us go forward then, together, as partners, colleagues, and friends, confident we can rise to the summons of our calling, because we must, and because we have each other. Aaron and Lisa, may God bless you and those you love on your journey.

MARTIN COHEN

CHAIRMAN, PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH COMMITTEE, HUC-JIR



The passage of the Torah that we have just read has been transmitted to us throughout the millenia. Just as Moses called upon Joshua in biblical antiquity, we are called today to take our place in the sacred task of serving God, the Jewish people, and humanity.

The call to service and leadership lies at the core of our institution's mission. Our founders, Isaac Mayer Wise and Stephen S. Wise, articulated a farsighted vision that would nurture an authentic Judaism congruent with modern life. Generations of teachers, scholars, students, alumni, and lay leaders have carried that vision forward.

We are the beneficiaries of that vision, as today we mark a milestone in Jewish history. All of us here are fulfilling a larger, providential obligation. We are here also to affirm our personal responsibility. And it is you, Rabbi Aaron Panken, to whom we turn. We call upon you to guide our College-Institute, the Reform Movement, and *klal yisrael*.

We are here to support and advise you during challenging times:

- A time when increasing assimilation brings forth more and more North American Jews who do not identify or affiliate themselves with the core institutions and causes of Jewish life.
- An era when our beloved State of Israel is beset by the hostile threats of a destabilized region, a nuclear Iran, a stalemate in the Israel-Palestinian peace process, and the growing Israel boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement.
- A period when the world's population is characterized by a growing anti-Semitic prejudice.
- And a moment when Jews around the globe still face an uncertain future and episodes of violence.

And yet, we are also by your side to express our hopes for a better future. We are here to help you realize our shared dreams for:

- A renewed golden age of Jewish life in our time.
- A secure Israel blessed with peace.
- And a world of justice, where human rights are protected and the sanctity of life is upheld.

May God grant you the wisdom and strength to achieve your aspirations. May you, together with your dear family, find infinite fulfillment as you inspire and shape the next chapter of our people's destiny.

IRWIN ENGELMAN CHAIRMAN (2010-2014), BOARD OF GOVERNORS, HUC-JIR



Rabbi Aaron Panken, it is my privilege to formally inaugurate you as the 12th President of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. It is a joy to charge you with the challenge and responsibility of leading our beloved institution.

I am aware of the great gifts that you bring to your Presidency:

- Your passion for Talmud study and scholarship
- Your inspiring teaching and mentorship of a generation of students
- Your love for the people and land of Israel
- Your commitment to the Reform Movement
- Your devotion to pluralism and *klal yisrael*
- And your personal warmth, compassion, and integrity, which are imbued in all your endeavors.

You are inheriting a legacy of great intellectual, spiritual, and professional leadership that is the hallmark of this institution.

We are confident that your clarity of vision will foster the academic excellence of the College-Institute's faculty, students, and programs, and broaden its impact on the larger Jewish world.

As our President, you will have the opportunity to apply your love of tradition as well as your spirit to advance innovation, growth, opportunity, and transformation.

And, as leader of this seminary and internationally recognized institution of higher Jewish learning, we know that you will take your rightful place in supporting and defending the Jewish people worldwide.

By the authority vested in me as Chairman of the Board of Governors of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, I officially charge you on this day of your Inauguration:

- To sustain *shalshelet ha-kabbalah* – the chain of Jewish learning and teaching, from generation to generation;
- To preserve Judaism's sacred texts, values, history, and memory to ensure Jewish survival;
- To promote the living interpretation of Judaism through a dynamic engagement with contemporary life and liberal thought;
- And to inspire us all to build a better world where ignorance and indifference are eradicated, and justice and understanding prevail.

May God bless you, Lisa, Eli, and Samantha, and your entire family, as you embark on this new chapter in your lives.

May God bless your leadership of the College-Institute, so that Jewish learning and leadership will flourish as a source of light among the nations for the generations to come. We pray from the deepest recesses of our heart that you will know the love and confidence we place upon you this day as you lead our cherished College-Institute into the future.

Aaron, this is a great day for you, your family, and for the College-Institute.

INAUGURATION ADDRESS

RABBI AARON D. PANKEN, PH.D., PRESIDENT HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION



Dear faculty; staff colleagues; cherished students; devoted Board members and friends; our dedicated partners from the Union for Reform Judaism, represented by Rabbi Rick Jacobs whom I thank for his beautiful words, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, represented by Rabbi Rick Block, whom I thank for his lovely words, and the many other organizations which constitute our Reform Movement; and members of our extended Jewish and scholarly communities; and our wonderful friends in the Cincinnati community who have been so welcoming and hospitable in the true manner of *hakhnasat*

our daily worship, contains perhaps the most beautiful statement of thanks, when it says:

*“nodeh lecha, u’nesaper tehilatecha,
al hayyenu hamesurim beyadecha,
v’al nishmoteinu hepekudot lach,
v’al nisecha sh’b’chol yom imanu,
v’al niflotecha v’tovotecha sh’bechol eit,
erev vavoker vetsoborayim”*

“We thank you, God, and we recount Your praise, for our lives which are in Your hand, for our souls which are ever in Your keeping, for Your miracles which are with us daily, and for Your wondrous gifts at all times, morning, noon, and night.”

I am thankful to God, for God’s miracles at all times, of course, but all the more so, at this precious moment. I am grateful beyond words for the blessing of standing here as your new President, and look with hope and joy toward a bright future, for our College-Institute, for our Reform Movement, and for *Am Yisrael* – the Jewish people.

For the remarkably inspiring words we have shared in today’s liturgy, I thank my teacher and my rabbinical thesis advisor, Professor Larry Hoffman, who, with sensitivity, inspiration, and insight leads our Movement in the paths of worship to ever greater heights. To those whose magical voices and thrilling music have helped our prayers ascend to heaven this afternoon, led so ably by Cantors Benjie Ellen Schiller, Angela Warnick Buchdahl, Yvon Shore, and Alane Katzew; Joyce Rosenzweig, Merri Arian, the members of our Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music choir, and many others, I sing your praises, now, for all that you have done to inspire us in this moment and to fill it with song and meaning.

“I am grateful beyond words for the blessing of standing here as your new President, and look with hope and joy toward a bright future, for our College-Institute, for our Reform Movement, and for Am Yisrael – the Jewish people.”

orhim that our tradition values over this entire weekend; and my beloved family and friends who have gathered with us on this moving afternoon: I begin with words of gratitude from the depths of my heart. Our *amidah*, the standing prayer in

Rabbi Panken and his wife Lisa Messinger (center), their children Eli and Samantha (at left), and his parents Beverly and Peter Panken (at right).



For all those who have put their hearts and souls into making this occasion so memorable and meaningful: Mona Kerstine, Chair of the Inauguration, who has brought unending talent, grace, and optimism to every element of this celebration; our entire talented, imaginative, and hardworking Inauguration Team, with special thanks to Jonathan Cohen, Ken Kanter, Jane Karlin, Elliott Kleinman, Sylvia Posner, and Jean Rosensaft and all their outstanding helpers who have worked tirelessly; the good people of Wise Temple led by our Governor and dear friend, Rabbi Lewis Kamrass, I thank you for all the many blessings you have offered our College-Institute and my family. To my dear friends and respected teachers who spoke at our Symposium, and those leading parts of this afternoon's service, please know how much you inspire our community and me, and the lasting impact you have had and continue to have on all of our lives.

ultimately encouraging thousands of students to join him, thus fostering the next generation of rabbinic scholarship. But the Talmud notes that more so even than Rabbi Akiva, it was his wife who gave up everything to make it possible for him to attend and then serve in the house of study. When he finally returns home after twenty-four years to reunite with his family, some disciples attempt to push his wife aside, not recognizing that she had been his prime support each and every day. Rabbi Akiva responds "*shivkooha, sheli v'shelachem shalah hoo*" – "let her be, for all that is mine and all that is yours is hers." In all my years of study and teaching, I, too, have been blessed, in Lisa, with an unparalleled supporter, a profoundly astute partner in every way. She shares my conviction that it is entirely worthwhile dedicating one's life to the exquisite honor of committed Jewish leadership, for as long as God will graciously allow us to do so.

Members of the HUC-JIR Board of Governors assembled for the processional. Rabbi David Posner, HUC-JIR Governor and Senior Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York (top, second from left), sounded the shofar to begin the Inauguration.

And to my illustrious predecessors who are with us today, Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman and Rabbi Norman Cohen, you have illuminated the way for us, and we have joyously followed in your footsteps. To my dear friend and teacher in so many ways, our Chancellor, Rabbi David Ellenson, who served with such distinction these past twelve years – David, please know the enormous sense of gratitude I feel for your loving support and your constant dedication to our College-Institute. Your exceptional ways of leadership continue to be both a blessing and model to me.

In our Talmudic tradition, Rabbi Akiva is said to have left his family for years to attend the yeshivah, studying there, eventually teaching there, and



My children, Eli and Samantha, both committed Jewish individuals in their own right, have been wonderfully encouraging throughout, ever since we first discussed this new possibility over lunch many months ago. My parents, in whose home I first came to learn moral precepts and how to live a Jewish life, have continued their kind, loving, and responsible guidance, and I am deeply grateful that they are here to share in today's celebration. My sister, a respected colleague in the Reform rabbinate, along with her family, has offered love and insight at every turn. My father-in-law, and the many, many rabbis and Jewish leaders in our family, and, indeed, all the members of our extended Panken-Messinger clan, have been there every step of the way, as have all of our friends. I feel, at this moment, greatly blessed.

The beautiful words you heard from the Chairman of our Board, Irwin Engelman, and from the Chair of our Presidential Search Committee, Martin Cohen, convey the essence of our work together for the years ahead. Already, I know what an unprecedented blessing it is to serve the Jewish people with individuals like Irwin, Marty, and our incoming Chair, Andy Berger, by my side. Daily, I give thanks for their wisdom, their insight, and the long view they bring to what we do at the College-Institute.

When I stop to count my blessings, I am so grateful for my constant companions on our talented senior leadership team, for our amazing students who impress me regularly, for our renowned faculty mem-

“One can feel the spirit of the extraordinary professors and preachers, rabbis and cantors, educators and scholars, whose mighty acts of creating community and transmitting knowledge shaped a vital American Judaism that has stood the test of time.”

bers – my teachers and colleagues – from whom I have learned so much over the years, and for our nearly 4,000 dedicated alumni around the world. With our Governors and Overseers, supporters and friends, they are truly an extraordinary gift to a new President committed to building a bright future. Your confidence in me means the world to me, and it is only exceeded by my confidence in you. I will do my level best, 24/6/365, to work with you as we do today: in an inspiring and collaborative partnership that seeks to better every facet of our institution and the Jewish world.

We stand today at a moment of great potential – one replete with enormous and exciting opportunities and yet also a few challenges. Working carefully and effectively, the College-Institute and our Movement have the ability to chart an inspiring course



Joyce Rosenzweig,
Artist-in-Residence,
conducting the
Debbie Friedman School
of Sacred Music Choir.



together for our community in the decades ahead. But to speak of the future, the past, and the present situation of our people, we must form an essential backdrop. First, we must begin by considering *nabalateinu* – our inheritance. Then, *mesimateinu* – our mission. And finally, *atideinu* – our future.

Rabbi Panken with
HUC-JIR's former
Presidents: (from left)
Rabbi David Ellenson,
Ph.D., (2001-13),
Rabbi Norman J. Cohen,
Ph.D., (2000-01),
and Rabbi Sheldon
Zimmerman (1996-2000).

***Nabalateinu* – Our Inheritance**

This gorgeous sanctuary is filled with memories of those exemplary Presidents who came before – Isaac Mayer Wise and Moses Mielziner, Gotthard Deutsch and Kaufmann Kohler, Julian Morgenstern and Stephen S. Wise, Nelson Glueck and Alfred Gottschalk. One can almost hear their powerful voices echoing still among the pillars and the pews of Plum Street Temple. We can imagine

the classes that took place in this building's basement, for it was, for a few years, an early home of the Hebrew Union College, where high school students studied in an eight-year preparatory course for the rabbinate. One can feel the spirit of the extraordinary professors and preachers, rabbis and cantors, educators and scholars, whose mighty acts of creating community and transmitting knowledge shaped a vital North American Judaism that has stood the test of time.

If we are to look carefully at our *nahalab* – our inheritance – since our founding in 1875, we can see three phases within it, which for today I will term: immigration, integration, and individualization. During the 1800s and early 1900s, in a departure of Abrahamic proportions, most of our forbears left their homes in Europe. They set off for America to join the small number of Jews who had come here earlier, seeking the “promised land” perceived by some to be “the new Zion.” Economic need, the quest for religious freedom and safety from persecution, and the compelling lure of new opportunities combined to lead young and old to set off to make their fortunes. From Ellis Island and Galveston, Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, millions of these Jewish immigrants fanned out across the country, driving their humble pushcarts into unknown territory and establishing Jewish communities in places where they had never before existed.



It was in these heady days of immigration that so many of our key Jewish organizations, congregations, and institutions of education, this one included, came into existence. Immigration led to an ambitious age of creation – new synagogues abounded, as did Jewish organizations that worked for the education, welfare, and protection of both new arrivals and longtime citizens. Over the years, peddlers’ pushcarts turned into corner groceries, then to department stores, and with diligence and hard work our progenitors began to thrive in America. Even with such success, powerful forces kept American Jews close together. Universities, neighborhoods, occupations, business and civic organizations, and country clubs often constructed their admission procedures to ensure that Jews were excluded. In the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, these restrictions ensured that Jews remained quite close together, and Jewish neighborhoods thrived. Such proximity allowed for Jewish community to develop and it offered much in the way of centripetal force to retain Jews inside their communal orbit.

“We are the most distracted generation in history, and studies prove that a preponderance of choices leads both to more confusion and to more superficial engagement.”

in the recent alarming rise in European anti-Semitic violence. On the other hand, the founding of the State of Israel and our expanded access to American society offered a new sense of strength and renewed hope. Reform Judaism focused its efforts squarely on our tradition’s universalist tendencies. Our all-encompassing commitments to righteousness led us to march in Selma, to stand in solidarity with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., to help create the Civil Rights Act, and to invest our time and talent in many other worthy acts of social justice.



The Inaugural blessing was bestowed upon Rabbi Panken by (from left) his sister Rabbi Melinda Panken, his sister-in-law Rabbi Sarah Messinger, and his brother-in-law Rabbi Jeffrey Eisenstat.

Over time, department stores gave way, in many cases, to law offices and medical practices, Wall Street and Hollywood, university positions and corner offices. With the waves of suburbanization that overtook America in the 1950s and 60s, as new institutions were built, we began to see, for the first time, a broader sense of acceptance into surrounding society. With these shifts came our second phase, that of integration into the broader American context.

It was a time of mixed feelings, as universalist optimism and deep uncertainty coexisted. On the one hand, the unspeakable tragedy of the Holocaust produced a decided mistrust of Western society, one which we hear echoed

Just as we worked for justice for others, so too did we toil to ensure that Jews had full access to the same rights as other Americans.

As this integration continued, those centripetal forces that had kept us together began to weaken, and centrifugal forces came into play. American Jews were now free to branch out, living wherever they chose, taking up any profession, joining different political parties, participating in almost any club, rising to positions of prominence in a broad array of cultural, educational, government, and business organizations, and making choices in marriage and religious practice as they pleased. With this shift, the pull toward the center of the Jewish community changed

“Our message of a thoughtful, ethical, innovative, and dynamic Judaism that actively learns and observes, that cares for those in need and works for those in need of justice, is perfectly suited for the world around us.”

radically. With less influence from those forces that once held our community together, we live in a world of ultimate choice, and this constitutes the third phase of North American Jewish life, which I will call “individualization.” In it, all is ultimately left up to the choices each individual makes within a vast range of possibilities.

We are now denizens of a world brimming over with choice. Consider two simple examples: once, when one went to buy milk in a grocery store, there

were three choices: regular milk, 2%, and skim. Now, step into any supermarket and you will be, as I am, baffled to see the variety that is available: organic and non-organic, Lactaid vs. regular, Parmalat that promises the shelf-life of Methusaleh, soy milk and almond milk and rice milk in all their varieties, non-GMO milk, and on and on and on. An enormous number of choices now go into even the simple act of buying milk. Once, there was one giant phone company called AT&T, but now we consider dozens of choices when we seek phone service: landline or wireless; smart phone or not; VOIP or FIOS; Verizon, Sprint, AT&T, or other smaller brands; cable or fiber optic; limited or unlimited minutes; international long distance or not; bundled with television and internet with hot spots, or perhaps not; and so on. And how do we decide? We peruse the shrill and biased reviews that all disagree with one another, and try to make sense of all of our many, many options. This trend applies everywhere – from books and entertainment, to the news we watch and read, to what one does with one’s body and spouse and gender and family and friends.

In this third phase, Judaism, too, is saturated with choices. Along with such possibilities comes the overwhelming distraction inherent in too much choice – it takes time to take in all this content and then make all these decisions, time we once spent reading and thinking and studying and learning. We are the most distracted generation in history, and studies prove that a preponderance of choices leads both to more confusion and to more superficial engagement. Add to this the broad proliferation of Jewish organizations, synagogues, and seminaries aimed at serving ever smaller and more tightly defined segments of our community, and a resultant shift in the role of centralized communal organizations. While it has required Jewish organi-

Celebrating with Rabbi Panken:

(1) Rabbi Michael Marmur, Ph.D., Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Provost.

(2) HUC-JIR’s Deans: (from left) Dr. Joshua Holo, Los Angeles; Rabbi Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D., Cincinnati; Rabbi Naamah Kelman, Jerusalem; Rabbi Shirley Idelson, Ph.D., New York.

(3) Father Michael Graham, President, Xavier University.

(4) Faculty representatives who marched in the Torah processional with students and alumni: (from left) Rabbi Richard S. Sarason, Ph.D., Cincinnati; Dr. Alyssa Gray, New York; Rabbi Rachel Adler, Ph.D., Los Angeles.

(5) Dr. Arnold Eisen, Chancellor, The Jewish Theological Seminary.

(6) Rabbi Michael L. Chernick, Deutsch Family Chair Emeritus in Jewish Jurisprudence and Social Justice and Professor Emeritus of Rabbinic Literature.

(7) Andi Milens, President, HUC-JIR Council of Alumni Associations, who represented HUC-JIR’s alumni in the Torah processional.

(8) Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D. President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (not pictured), and Rabbi Asher Lopatin, President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School.



zations once set in their ways to become more nimble and to re-envision themselves in ever new and more dynamic ways, it has also reduced the ability of our entire community to act in a concerted way, together as one.

Here's the exceptionally good news: Reform Judaism has often referred to itself with a kind of quick and imperfect shorthand as the Movement of "choice through knowledge." This means that to make thoughtful, authentic decisions, one must certainly have knowledge, but that the application of this knowledge to the contemporary situation is, ultimately, mediated by each individual's relationship with his or her community. The goal is to incorporate Jewish knowledge, provided by our tradition as it has developed over the centuries, into the daily process of deciding how to live one's life. This implies that when a Reform Jew confronts an ethical decision or a social injustice; when she is deciding how to observe Shabbat or *hagim*, or give *tzedakah*, or what to eat or not to eat; when he has to consider how to get married or divorced or raise his children, that Jewish tradition has a serious and significant voice in that choice.

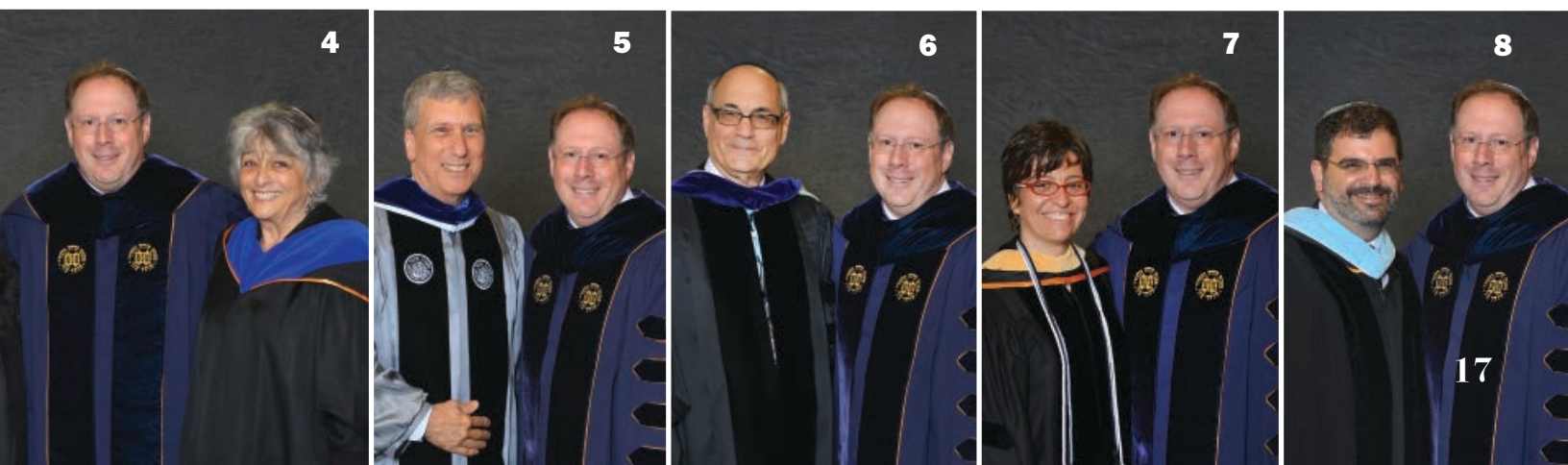
Now, the truth is, we have the "choice" part covered – we are very, very good at that, which makes perfect sense given both our history and our contemporary context. But on the knowledge part of the equation, we can certainly do better. This, truly, is our *nachalah* – our inheritance. We are a Movement that values and respects individual choice, that puts Jewish ethics into action in laudable and moving ways, and often speaks lovingly of Jewish tradition, but we could also use some help in ensuring that our people understand and enact their ancestors' faith in a deeper way. And that is where we now come to *mesimateinu* – our mission.

***Mesimateinu* – Our Mission**

In the contemporary Jewish context, our mission at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion continues to be to serve as a shining, innovative, and attractive beacon of broad Jewish learning, first to our students, then to our alumni, and then to the rest of the Reform and collective Jewish and scholarly worlds. Our message of a thoughtful, ethical, innovative, and dynamic Judaism that actively learns and observes, that cares for those in need and works for those in need of justice, is perfectly suited for the world around us. In fact, many, many innovations we see in other streams of Judaism are actually the direct result of our Movement's past actions.

“HUC-JIR, with its partners in the Reform Movement and across the Jewish polity, must become the center of a new focus on helping Jews not just engage with but learn about our tradition.”

Consider the massive innovations we see now in prayer across all denominations. Our Movement's proud tradition of innovation in worship extends back to Germany in the 1800s, long before any other Jewish group had even considered substantial revision of a *siddur* whose main rubrics had remained largely unchanged since the tenth century. We were the first to incorporate sermons, readings, and poetry in the vernacular; the first to employ inspiring music and musical instruments on Shabbat and Festivals; and the first to ensure equality and dignity for all in worship. When I think of the incredible innovations taking place every day in how we pray all over the Jewish world, I know the impact we have had and we can have.



Rabbi David Ellenson, past President, transmitting HUC-JIR's "Weinberg Torah," rescued during the Holocaust, to his successor, Rabbi Panken.



such distinction, or of the nearly 2000 Orthodox Jewish Feminists who gather each year to consider how Orthodox Judaism might better incorporate feminist concerns into their Movement, I know the impact we have had and we can have.

Consider the many Jewish social justice organizations, whether local or national; think of the camps, youth groups, and Israel programs on the national Jewish youth scene; and the innovative educational initiatives that abound in Jewish life today. The truth is, our Movement has led this invigorating proliferation of possibilities, and inspired the Jewish world to be more creative, more dynamic, and more open to innovation than ever before. When I think of what happens in each of these arenas around the world every minute of every day, I know the impact we have had and we can have.

“Our Movement has led the invigorating proliferation of possibilities and inspired the Jewish world to be more creative, more dynamic, and more open to innovation than ever before.”

Consider the acceptance of feminist critiques of religion and the opportunity for gifted women to serve as Jewish religious leaders. HUC-JIR was the first Jewish seminary in history to celebrate the regular ordination of female rabbis, beginning in 1972 with Rabbi Sally Priesand, a dear friend and one of my rabbis growing up. We were the first to integrate feminist readings of text and traditions into our intellectual framework. Now, all Movements do it, or are, at least, beginning to consider doing it. When I think of our many alumnae who serve with

All this must also continue to be our mission. And there remains much to do. First and foremost, HUC-JIR, with its partners in the Reform Movement and across the Jewish polity, must become the center of a new focus on helping Jews not just engage with but learn about our tradition. Reform Jewish learning must move from pleasant and, at times, superficial, to real awareness of the extraordinary gifts that lie at the heart of our tradition. In every congregation and school, we have a core of committed learners who drink deeply from the wellsprings of our faith, guided by our students and alumni. But there are far too many Jews who no longer engage regularly enough to reach the sort of learning that can help them understand that commitment to Jewish study and Jewish life is a choice of integrity, value, and meaning.

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman blessing Rabbi Panken and his family.



Our cherished Jewish tradition can inform both life's high points and its lows, it can call us to be better citizens of our world, it can respond to our need for spirituality and comfort, for intellectual stimulation and community. It can offer guidance for so many of the ethical and practical decisions that we face every day. But it can't offer any of this if we are too distracted to learn and no one really knows much about it. I liken this situation to one in which the most beautiful gift sits unopened on a shelf – everyone can see that the wrapping is absolutely gorgeous, the ribbon sparkles and shines against the paper, we know that something lovely



Students who marched with faculty and alumni in the Torah processional.

and valuable lies within, and the gift has token value because of that assumption. The problem is, however, that no one has opened it and benefited from it in anything more than the most passive way, leaving its true value unassessed and unknown. Too few are the members of our community who have opened the packages of Jewish life their parents and grandparents bequeathed them, and I fear the number is not yet increasing.

On this day, let us commit ourselves to leaving no part of the awesome gift of Jewish tradition unopened anymore. Our faculty, our students, and our graduates lead the way in helping others open up the Jewish tradition that is the sparkling gift of their ancestors – they have all the tools and skills necessary to make it accessible and meaningful in fresh and lasting ways. We must bring all our resources to ensuring that upcoming generations have positive and inspiring Jewish learning experiences that will engage them, teach them, and build them into shapers of the Jewish future with knowledge, commitment, and strength. This is, after all, what the great academies of Jewish learning have always done – from Yavneh and Usha to Sura and Pumbedita, in North Africa and Spain, across Europe, and, finally, in North America and Israel – such institutions have always exerted themselves *lebagdil Torah u'leha'adirah*, to magnify Torah and to exalt it. They did this by training and engaging the most exceptional faculty, by seeking out and generously supporting the best and brightest students, by ensuring a curriculum that was both rooted in inherited tradition and immediately relevant, and by holding themselves to high standards that led to high achievement. And we will do no less, faithfully extending the awesome trajectory of our predecessors. Our mission, then, is to build on our splendid past, and create a brighter, better educated, and more inspired future.

Atideinu – Our Future

Our institution's extraordinary future will hinge on the following nontrivial goal: we must find and support the absolute best and brightest of students, and educate them with the absolute best faculty, curriculum, alumni, library, archival, and other resources they will need. In this endeavor, we need everyone here this afternoon to participate. Help us find the best students, help us encourage a brave new generation of leaders, so that our children and grandchildren will know the joy we know of living a Jewish life of the highest integrity and the deepest meaning.

“We must improve the understanding and linkage of Reform Jews worldwide with our Jewish State and with all our global partners, and we must fervently support and advocate for the long-term security of the State of Israel.”

In a world of expansive choice and competition, consistent quality and relevance are our core necessities. As North America's first institution of higher Jewish learning, we are the largest, best resourced Jewish seminary in the Progressive world, yet we must commit ourselves to constant review and improvement of all that we do. We must build on the strength and geographic diversity of our campuses in Cincinnati, Jerusalem, Los Angeles, and New York, every day. We must root ourselves more firmly into the Jewish community in these cities and around the globe, and build our presence, a project that is already off to a great start. We must also send the message, loud and clear, to all our constituencies, that there is nothing more exciting, more important, or more fulfilling than working in today's Jewish community. Beyond the inherently fascinating learning derived from thousands



(From right) Cantor Yvon F. Shore, Cantor Alane Katzew, Rabbi Cantor Angela Warnick Buchdahl, Cantor Benjie Schiller, and Merri Lovinger Arian.

of years of Jewish tradition, beyond the excellent vocational opportunities, such work offers a life that is meaningful and leaves the world a better place.

We will continue to build our focus on and our presence in Jerusalem. As the only North American seminary with a full campus and program in Israel, we are proud to be uniquely positioned to influence both Israeli and North American society, and to ensure that the relationship between these two great centers of Jewish life continues and thrives. With our 84 ordained Israeli Reform rabbis and many more studying in our program in Jerusalem right now, in addition to the scores we have trained in pluralistic Jewish education and chaplaincy, we have already seen the indelible impact we can have on Israeli religion, government, and society. We must further ensure that visiting groups, family and congregational trips, and *b'nai mitzvah* find a welcoming home on our Jerusalem campus as well. With dedication and hard work, we must improve the understanding and linkage of Reform Jews worldwide with our Jewish State and with all our global partners, and we must fervently support and advocate for the long-term security of the State of Israel.

“We must send the message, loud and clear, that there is nothing more exciting, more important or more fulfilling than working in today’s Jewish community. Such work offers a life that is meaningful and leaves the world a better place.”

I would humbly suggest another project: we need to consider precisely what it means to be Reform Jews in an increasingly post-denominational world. For me, Reform Judaism has always symbolized what I consider to be the best of Judaism – firmly rooted in our tradition, yet egalitarian, inclusive of patrilineal Jews and intermarried families, welcoming to the LGBT community, politically active, and comfortably in dialogue with other faiths and ideologies. But when we look around the community, these qualities alone may no longer actually distinguish us from many other developing streams of Jewish life.

I dream of a Reform Judaism that is distinctive, where the great ideas we stand for are a lasting source of pride. To make this so, we must begin to address anew the many challenges extant in the world around us: from defeating poverty to improving healthcare and upgrading public education; from finding some rational way to decrease the frightening gun violence in our midst to tending to the environment; from considering aspects of foreign policy in an ever more complicated global scene to ensuring that voices are heard all across the political spectrum. HUC-JIR must continue to be a place where critical conversations like this take place on the most vital issues, not in overly partisan and polarizing ways, but in a deeper, more informed fashion. The Jewish world will be better for it, and we are perfectly positioned to make it happen.

Finally, we plan for the College-Institute to expand its global thought leadership in the years to come, allowing members of our community and our affiliates to benefit from the creativity and expertise of our faculty and students through new online offerings, new kinds of conferences and gather-

ings on contemporary Jewish topics, and content that will educate interested scholars, alumni, and students of all ages, races, faiths, languages, and denominations. We will build upon our successes in the area of hybrid and executive programs, expanding our student base and broadening our impact in the broader Jewish community. The Jewish world is waiting for us to develop in this manner, and we will not fail to deliver on our role as the intellectual center of our Movement, and, indeed, of greater Judaism, in the years ahead.

We are in many ways, once again, immigrants who have arrived on the shores of a new world, one quite different from the one our great-grandparents first inhabited. Like any immigrants, we bring with us our cherished traditions and the inspiring wisdom of our ancestors, but it will take all our creativity, all our commitment, and all our attention to ensure that we flourish as we make new forays onto novel shores. Just as they were up to the challenge, just as Abraham faced his fears and went off into the unknown, just as our people wandered

in the desert led by Moses, Aaron and Miriam, to find their sacred place, just as the generations moved from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia to North Africa to Europe to America and Israel, yet always remained part of our people, we, too, will find our way, with God's blessing. May the Holy One who has blessed our journey thus far continue to bless each of us, our Movement, and, most of all, our beloved College-Institute, henceforth and forever.

“We plan for the College-Institute to expand its global thought leadership in the years to come...and we will not fail to deliver on our role as the intellectual center of our Movement and, indeed, of greater Judaism, in the years ahead.”

“Hallelujah,” composed by the 19th-century German-Jewish composer Lewandowski and sung by the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music Choir, filled the sanctuary of Plum Street Temple during the recessional at the conclusion of the Inauguration.



BENEDICTION



RABBI NORMAN J. COHEN, PH.D.
ACTING PRESIDENT (2000-2001);
PROVOST EMERITUS;
PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF MIDRASH, HUC-JIR

God of ages past; our God: *Eloheinu V'Elohei Avoteinu V'Imahoteinu*

We ask that You bestow your blessings upon Aaron Panken. Like the Biblical Aaron at the moment of his consecration as High Priest, he brings special gifts of self: extensive service to our people and to our College-Institute, deep knowledge of our tradition and his devotion to others.

Amidst the offerings and gifts brought to the Tent of Meeting during the Seven Days of Aaron's Consecration, Moses curiously was instructed to place symbolically a bit of blood on Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. Each element of this strange ritual, according to the Midrash, represents that which was expected of the High Priest in his service to God and to the People: listening, acting, and setting a course for the Israelites.

Like Aaron, the High Priest, you, Aaron Panken, are reminded to ever listen to the voices of those whom you serve – to know and understand their needs and concerns, but at the same time to be attentive to the voice in you which impels you to fulfill the highest and best that lies within you. You also are compelled to translate what you understand into action that will enhance our future. And finally, may the direction upon which you will lead us ensure the continuity of our People and chart a path for future generations. May your entire being, every part of you, be devoted to both the people whom you are now blessed to serve and lead, and the highest call in the universe.

At the conclusion of the Days of Priestly Consecration, God's Presence was evident in the Tent of Meeting and God pledged to abide amongst the People. So may our place be sanctified through your leadership and each of us and the entire House of Israel find ever greater meaning and purpose. May we all continue to experience blessings in our *mikdash me'at*, our holy place, every day as today.

INAUGURATION TOAST



MONA B. KERSTINE CHAIR, INAUGURATION

Aaron, you have received many beautiful and meaningful blessings this afternoon. I believe I now know the significance of the term “abundant blessings.” We come together now for a time of celebration and a time to toast your future as our leader.

We know that you are ready to be our President and we want you to know that we are ready to have you as our President. We are here as partners as you have accepted the challenges and opportunities that this unique position affords. We’re here with you today, not only for today, but for the many tomorrows.

We know that you are a person of great integrity and of great generosity – intellectually, spiritually, thoughtfully, and materially. We count on you to be our friend, teacher, motivator, nurturer, and challenger as together we sustain and advance the mission of the College-Institute.

We also know, Aaron, that you hold a great value in the concept of Space - not only Sacred Space, but in the sanctuary of your Home, as an engineer, as a pilot in the air, and as a sailor on the water. But your ability to soar is coupled with your ability to anchor yourself and direct your vision to its goal.

I have long had a favorite quotation from the playwright Ibsen: “Tie yourself to a star and sail with it.”

Aaron, you have attached your soul and your energies to the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and we anticipate that you will navigate the best course for us, and we will soar to even greater heights in the future.

And now I ask that all of your friends, family, colleagues, and supporters gathered here today prepare to raise their glasses. My cup is a very special and meaningful one. It is a gift from Aaron and Lisa that exquisitely represents the Passover story and depicts Moses and his brother Aaron pleading before Pharaoh for the freedom of the Jewish people. It has been engraved with today’s date.

To Rabbi Aaron Panken, may you be blessed with many long, successful, and rewarding years as the President of HUC-JIR. May you be known for your greatness in leadership and may the College continue to prosper and thrive. *Mazel Tov!*

ACADEMIC SYMPOSIUM: IMAGINING THE JEWISH FUTURE

In celebration of Rabbi Panken's Inauguration, distinguished HUC-JIR faculty, leading guest scholars, and alumni thought leaders offered interactive TED-style talks in which they addressed the reimagining of Jewish life and envisioned a vibrant, innovative, and achievable Reform Jewish future.

These video presentations are posted on the HUC-JIR website and are being shared with congregations to support learning across the entire Reform Movement.

BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND JERUSALEM: THE EVOLUTION OF U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONS, FROM TRUMAN TO OBAMA

Warren Bass, Ph.D., Senior Editor, The Wall Street Journal



One of the most interesting relationships in world politics today is the unusual alliance between the United States and the State of Israel – the superpower and the regional pariah, the vast nation that often thinks of itself as a shining city on a hill and a small nation that has endured siege and strife. While there have always been bonds of friendship between the U.S. and Israel, going back to President Truman's recognition of Israel just minutes after it declared its independence, those bonds have been tested and tried in a relationship enmeshed in webs of overlapping conflicts – including not just the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also disputes between Israel and neighboring states as well as the surrounding global political environment, from the Cold War to today's post-9/11 security environment. The special relationship between Washington and Jerusalem came not from immaculate conception but from a complex mix of calculations mixing both ideals and interests – evolving from the indecision of Truman to the outright hostility of the unsympathetic Eisenhower to the pivotal president of Kennedy (whose administration created the alliance as we know it) to the full-blown 21st-century alliance.

LEADERSHIP

Shaul Kelner, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Sociology and Jewish Studies, Vanderbilt University

WATCH THE VIDEO: [HUC.EDU/INAUGURATION/KELNER](https://www.huc.edu/inauguration/kelner)

A religious movement looks to its seminary for ideas: for ideas to inform, for ideas to inspire, for thought-leadership to help guide action in the trenches, on the ground. And this symposium is a realization of that ideal in practice. We're going to be looking today at the relationship between ideas and actions, between beliefs and behaviors, between meanings and actions.

I want you to consider two different models. One is a very contemporary model that I'm certain you will be familiar with and that is very much present in popular Jewish conversation. The other is a more traditional model that is not as well-known but that actually has a lot of grounding in contemporary sociological thinking.

You will see that my position on this inclines to the traditional and sociological more than the popular. But what I want to do is raise the question of how do ideas and meanings relate to each other, and what does that relationship mean for the ways that leaders think about dealing with the challenge of Jewish engagement?

Model one, with which I assume you are familiar:

You have heard it said that "We're all Jews by choice," and that because we are all Jews by choice, in a moment when everyone is free to choose or not to choose Jewishly, we need to answer the question, 'Why be Jewish?' We need to answer that question for ourselves and we need to answer that question so that we can engage other people. If we don't know why this matters to us, how are we going to be



able to present to others compelling reasons for why they should be engaged Jewishly?"

This notion that to deal with the challenge of Jewish engagement we need to answer the question of 'Why be Jewish' is something that comes up periodically, usually after we have a demographic survey and people tear their hair out about the prospects for American Jewry.

This notion certainly was alive and well a few years after the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, when President Panken and I were in a hotel conference center on Cape Cod as part of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship, a leadership development program. We were both new graduate students sitting in the circle with other rabbinical students, Ph.D. students, cantorial students, and students of Jewish education and Jewish communal service.

Leading the discussion were Jonathan Woocher, a sociologist and educator, and Jonathan Sarna, the scholar of American Jewry, who today we wish a *refuah shelemah*, complete recovery. We were debating the question: Do we need to answer this question of 'Why be Jewish' in order to actually go out and do the work as Jewish leaders that we want to do and need to do? How important is this?

The room was diverse denominationally and politically, and there were a lot of different perspectives on this. But even after the 1990 Population Survey, many shared this notion that we have an assimilating community and in order to engage the unengaged, Jewish leaders must understand 'Why be Jewish?' They have to crack that nut. They have to answer that question.

Around the same time, David Harris, head of the American Jewish Committee, wrote about an apocryphal story of a

French philosophy professor who gave his 500 students a final exam. It was a one word final exam. And the question was “*Pourquoi?*” “Why?” 498 students gave very long answers and all failed. The two who got it right gave two word answers in French: *Pourquoi pas?* Why not? And the other: *Parce que.* Because.

Harris said that maybe in his parents’ generation if you asked the question ‘Why be Jewish’ you could get away with an answer like, “Because.” Go take that to someone now, someone who’s not engaged, someone who’s not showing up at the congregation or in the day school. “Why should I do this? Why would I be Jewish?” “Because.” It won’t work. Maybe it worked then. I’m not even sure if it did, he said. It won’t work now.

“We are all Jews by choice. There is nothing that is forcing any of us to choose Jewish. And in this context we need to be able to provide a well-articulated rationale of why people should make this choice.” This is the argument.

The Pew Study comes along in 2013 in October. In November, *The Forward* has an article with the headline: “Answer This Question: Why Be Jewish? Figuring Out What To Do About Pew Means Going To the Source of Identity.”

This question comes up again and again and again. When I think of demographic surveys, on the one hand you could say that this is social science, and there is supposed to be a cumulative march of progress where we’re building on the shoulders of giants and our knowledge is advancing. And that is true.

But at the same time we read these demographic studies as Jewish texts. This is a ritual reading. Every ten years we get a Rosh Hashanah for statistics, where we essentially reenact the story

of the spies. They go into Canaan and they come back and they report, mostly with trepidation. Some say optimistically, “We can handle this.” But there’s an enduring tension.

With these surveys we deal with the same questions because we’re looking to the future with hope, we’re looking to the future with fear. Our new Jewish texts, these demographic surveys, give us the opportunity to deal with these questions again and again. So we get the new demographic survey and again we must answer the question why be Jewish to address the problem of engagement.

We are all Jews by choice. There is nothing that is forcing any of us to choose Jewish. And in this context we need to be able to provide a well-articulated rationale of why people should make this choice.

There is a model that relates behavior to action in this. It is a model that says that ideas will lead to action.

From this perspective, the argument goes, first, we need to be able to understand what underlies why we do what we do in order to protect ourselves, because we all change, we’re on journeys. If we are not clear to ourselves as to why we are doing what we are doing, even we may stop doing it.

Second, the notion that ideas are of primary importance is very appealing. Think about why. The Pew Study provides some numbers: we are a highly educated population where six out of ten American Jews graduate college with an undergraduate degree, twice as many as the population at large. Almost three out of ten Jews

have an advanced degree, three times as many as the population at large. Therefore, the notion that we can approach this rationally – that we can understand why we should be Jewish, and make a compelling case that will be logically convincing is very appealing to these well-trained scientific minds.

So, “ideas leading to action” is one model and a popular one.

There is another model, for which I want to turn to a text in the book of Exodus: “And Moses came and told the people all the words of Adonai and the ordinances. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘*Kol hadevarim asher diber adonay na`aseh.* All the words which Adonai has spoken we will do.’” Moses then writes the words down. The Israelites offer sacrifices and then the text goes on, “And he, Moses, took the book of the covenant and read in the hearing of the people and they said, ‘*Kol asher diber adonay na`aseh v’nishma.*’ All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will hear” or “we will obey and we will understand,” variously translated.

Traditional interpretations of the text proceed from the notion that this is the divine word of God and because it is divine, there’s no word out of place, there’s no letter out of place. And every word can be used to teach something. So it’s a strange thing. You might think here that when there is a law that is being presented, the response might be, “Okay, well, let’s hear what it is and then we’ll do it.” But instead, it is, “Okay, we’ll do it and then we’ll hear what it is.” It seems to be reversed. And the rabbis were attuned to this. Because this is counterintuitive. There’s a midrash that they tell:

Before God gave the Torah to the Israelites, God went to the other nations of the world to offer the Torah.

God goes to the Edomites, the children of Esau, and says, “Here’s the Torah. Do you want it?” They say, “Let’s hear what’s in it.”

And God says, “Well, it says thou shalt not murder.”

“You know, we’re Edomites. That’s what we do. No thank you, we don’t want it.”

So God goes to the Ammonites and the Moabites, descendants of Lot’s incestuous relationship with his daughters. “Well, what does it say?” “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” “No thank you, not for us.”

So God takes the Torah to the Israelites, who accept it and say, “We’ll take it, we’ll do it, and we will understand.” Understanding comes, hearing comes. But it comes *after* action, it comes *through* action.

Now, this is a different model that relates action and behavior together, rather than the “why be Jewish” model, which says first you have to understand why you do what you do so that you explain it and thereby encourage other people to do it too. This is different. This one says do it first and the meaning is going to emerge from the process of doing it. There are other rabbinic approaches that say the same thing. “*Mitoch shelo lishma ba lishma.*” If you begin doing an act not for the right reasons, the reasons you *should* be doing it, you can eventually come to doing it for the right reasons.

I teach at a university where we have a lot of college students who are enrolling in classes because they have to fulfill their distribution requirements. They’re not necessarily in the Shakespeare class because they love Shakespeare, but they take the class and guess what? They discover that in fact they love it.

So we have two different models: a “Why Be Jewish” model and a “*Na`aseh V’Nishma*” model. Let’s step back and look at these two models and think about the deeper social theory that they’re suggesting here and what we can learn about Jewish leadership from this.

In the “Why Be Jewish” model, meaning motivates action. In the “*Na`aseh V’Nishma*” model, action generates meaning.

Meaning motivates action. It makes sense, it’s logical. But if you think about it in terms of 20th-century social theory, there is a tiny problem with that.

If everyone connected with this institution stopped doing what they were doing, the institution would not exist. It is created and recreated, produced and reproduced from moment to moment by the actions that we collectively do to recreate it.

That tiny problem is named Sigmund Freud. You think you know why you do what you do? Have you spent ten years in therapy yet? Freud introduced us to the notion of the subconscious, to the notion that our motives are not immediately accessible to us. So we can try to explain why we do what we do, why be Jewish. We can come up with reasons: “in this hyper-individualistic world this provides community;” or “with all this rapid change where even kids are not on Facebook anymore because that’s for old people already (old being 25 and older), Judaism gives stability and some anchor in tradition;” or “in this globalized world where we’re always moving all over the place, wherever you go you can find

community.” These are good reasons and good rationales and they work.

But is this why we do what we do?

The reasons that we ourselves engage in this are so deep and so complex and so fraught. And to think that we can reduce this to a set of rational arguments to make a case to others to act as we do, is highly problematic.

What about the theoretical grounding of the “action generates meaning” approach? There are all these hard-to-quote French social theorists from the 1970s, Foucault and Bourdieu and DeCerteau, who talk about practice and *habitus*, and take up this idea that meaning is something that we construct through the actions that we do. (There is a traditional echo to this, which I’ll talk about in a minute.)

As a sociologist, I’m in the social constructionist camp. That means that I believe that we as people create the reality in which we are living. There is an anthropologist named Clifford Geertz who explained it this way: human beings are like spiders who weave meaning; we weave these webs of meaning and then we live on the webs of meaning that we ourselves have created.

A social constructionist approach means that right now we are engaged in the act of creating Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. If everyone connected with this institution stopped doing what they were doing, the institution would not exist. It is created and recreated, produced and reproduced from moment to moment by the actions that we collectively do to recreate it.

All the things that have been created before are the webs that we’re climbing on: they’re real. But we’re carrying it forward. We produce it. The traditional echo comes in the morning prayers:

“Hamechadesh bituvo bchol yom tamid maaseh breishit. God who renews in God’s goodness every day continually the act of creation.”

This is a vision of God as creator, where creation is not a one-time act. Not created once and then done, no. But rather, God at every moment renewing the act of creation. And if God stopped that work, it’s all gone. At every instant the world is being created. So with this traditional conception we have an analogue in this contemporary sociological conception that we create the worlds that we live in. Our actions create our worlds and the actions that we engage in create the worlds in particular ways. So when we change the way that we act, the meanings that we generate, the *nishma*, becomes different. Change the *na’aseh*, the “we will do” and the *nishma*, the “we will understand” becomes a different understanding.

What’s the difference between a Passover Haggadah and a Passover seder? Is a Haggadah a seder? There is a difference between a script and a performance. The meaning that gets generated at a seder is not just the official meanings that are encoded in the Haggadah. The meanings come from each unique performance because every time you get together it’s a new moment. This is Heraclitus: you don’t step in the same river twice.

So even if, for your seder, you go back to the same place with the same people, you are a year older, the context in which you are doing it is different. Think about the difference in the meanings that emerge from a seder when it’s the first seder that you’re going to where the older generation that had always run the seder is no longer doing it and the torch has been passed. Or it’s the first seder that you’re attending where your kid is old enough to know the four questions and is the one to ask it. The meanings are different.

I think about different seders I’ve experienced. The year that we were spending in Israel away from the family and we were with a friend whose family came from Iraq, it was a Passover seder, but it meant something different to me. I think of the year that my cousin brought his banjo to the seder and we sang everything accompanied by that instrument. Was it different? It was a different way of doing things and it meant something different.

So you have a script and the script can be fixed, but every time you enact it, you’re enacting it in a unique way, and unique meanings get generated. That’s on a small level. But this matters on the big level, too.

Whatever is meaningful, create ways of doing and invite people to join. Not everyone is going to join. Not everyone is going to join in every action. But in the course of doing, meanings will emerge. The meaning will come.

It’s 1974 and imagine that you are engaging the Jewish people, you’re imaging yourself connected to other Jews. The way that you’re imagining this is because you are actually doing something that creates in your mind a sense of what that Jewish collective is. You’re out on Solidarity Sunday and you are marching on behalf of Soviet Jews. You are out there and you’re saying, “‘We are one’ and ‘I am my brother’s keeper.’” You’re imagining a Jewish people that’s united. And the main act you are doing that imagines the Jewish people in this unified way is a public political act.

But now come back with me to Cape Cod. The first time that Aaron and I met, we were also imagining a Jewish people, but we were doing it very differently. In this context we were not in public, we were sitting privately. We were not proclaiming “We are one.” We were talking across denominations, we were encountering a lot of diversity, and we were trying to work through that diversity in these conversations. The image of the Jewish people that emerged was a very different image.

Both of these actions, marching in public and sitting in private cross-denominational conversations, imagine a Jewish collective – but they imagine it differently. The first imagines a unified Jewish people by engaging people in public political action. The second imagines a diverse Jewish people by engaging people in private conversations to engage Jewish diversity.

Some have asked, what ever happened to Jewish peoplehood? Well, what happened to Jewish peoplehood is that the way that we enact Jewish peoplehood has changed. As we’ve stopped doing one typical set of actions and started doing another type of actions, the way in which we think about what it means to be a people has changed. So what does this mean as we think about Jewish engagement and leading for Jewish engagement?

We don’t need to be in our heads and we don’t need to rationally figure out ‘Why be Jewish’ and then make a case logically. A *na’aseh v’nishma* approach would say: create ways of doing Jewish, whatever’s meaningful to you – you don’t even have to know why it’s meaningful to you. Whatever is meaningful, create ways of doing and invite people to join. Not everyone is going to join. Not everyone is going to join in every action. But in the course of doing, meanings will emerge. The meaning will come.

WORSHIP

*Rabbi Cantor Angela Warnick Buchdahl '99, '01
Senior Rabbi, Central Synagogue, New York, NY*

WATCH THE VIDEO: [HUC.EDU/INAUGURATION/BUCHDAHL](https://www.huc.edu/inauguration/buchdahl)



Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, Ph.D., Barbara and Stephen Friedman Professor of Liturgy, Worship and Ritual at HUC-JIR, shared a story with me almost twenty years ago. He was at a conference of liturgists of all different faiths, and they decided that in place of a traditional service they would all take five minutes of silence. The Buddhists sat in peaceful meditation, the Christians were deep in prayer, but for Rabbi Hoffman and the other Jews.... One Orthodox colleague said to Larry, “I’ve never been that quiet for that long in my entire life!”

When we Jews pray, we like to have a script. We are the People of the Book. And when we think of worship transformation, what we usually mean is “let’s write a new prayerbook!” We have witnessed a wonderful transformation in Reform worship through our texts over the decades: *Union Hymnal*, *Gates of Prayer*, *Mishkan T’filah*. Just the names alone tell you how much things have changed in the Reform Movement!

But text is only a means to an end. Transformative ritual and worship does not happen in your head, but in your heart. Jews are very attached to our words. But too often we focus on the words at the expense of everything else.

In that vein, as I was anxiously editing and re-editing this talk, I remembered what a speech coach taught me last year – only 7% of my effectiveness will be about the text. Yes, you heard that right. 93% of the effect of this talk has nothing to do with my notes. Remember that when you are slaving over your next High Holy Days sermon – 7%!

So what is the rest?

38% is what I *sound* like. What are my inflections, my pacing, the animation in my voice, *my gravitas*.

What about the last 55%? Can you guess? 55% of it is visual! Instead of worrying about my notes, apparently I should have spent more time thinking about my shoes.

I found this all pretty unbelievable.

But once I learned this principle, I could see it everywhere. I was in Chicago officiating at a wedding and while I hope I said the right words to the couple, the moment everyone cried, the truly transformative event, was the processional. The visual experience of a young couple leaving their parents to create a new family said it all.

That same weekend I visited Trinity United, a large, traditionally African-American church led by my friend, the Reverend Otis Moss. I brought my family with me. My children were mesmerized. They were singing along. These folks knew how to do worship!

And it wasn’t the text, which by itself wasn’t all that inspiring. It was the Trinity United choir singing “Are you Ready? Are you Ready? For the Coming of the Lord?” that was definitely at least 38% of the experience. What was so moving about the overall experience was not just this choir in colorful traditional African dress, or seeing 150 volunteers right at the front of the room, but watching the authentic, joyous prayer experience in their smiles and in their dancing.

I don’t want to diminish the importance of the text. Text is important, especially when it can help you get inside a prayer or ritual. But we need to start asking questions that help us get to the emotive and visceral experience of prayer, such as:

What is the emotional arc and energy of the service?

What is the choreography of transitions between prayers or songs that create flow?

Who is in the room? Where are they coming from?

How do we create moments for connection, between clergy and between congregants?

These are some of the questions we have been asking at Central Synagogue as we work as a clergy team on worship projects each year. I want to share two different services we've worked on and how asking some of these questions shaped our worship conversation.

The first was the Kol Nidrei Service. It is fair to say that the text alone is not the reason people are so attached to this prayer:

"All vows we are likely to make, all oaths and pledges we are likely to take between this Yom Kippur and the next Yom Kippur, we publicly renounce. Let them all be relinquished and abandoned, null and void, neither firm nor established..."

I'm pretty sure those were the terms and conditions for my last online purchase. Did you know those were the words your Cantor was singing?

We asked ourselves "Why are People Here on Kol Nidrei Night?" It's not about the words of the prayer. Why do they all show up on time, no less, for this service? We realized that three central themes drew them in: Memory. Baring Our Souls; Return. This is what our members truly associated with the Kol Nidrei Prayer.

Our second question was to identify the flow of energy in the service. The challenge here was that the peak moment, the recitation of the Kol Nidrei, traditionally happened in the first five minutes, and the risk was that the emotional arc of the service would be all downhill from there. So we tried

something radical – we wouldn't do the Kol Nidrei at the beginning. Not in its entirety. We took the traditional concept of three recitations, and spread them out over the service, not chanting the prayer in full until the third time much later in the service. And we introduced each reprise of Kol Nidrei with a theme of Memory; Baring Our Souls; Return.

We asked Rabbi Larry Hoffman to write introductions to each section that would help people enter into the emotional tenor of the moment, not just the text. So if you would, close your eyes and imagine yourself in your synagogue, on Kol Nidrei night, seated with your family or perhaps on the bima as you prepare for the prayer:

Like no other prayer, Kol Nidrei compels our presence, And not just us alone, But the memorized outline, too, of younger years

The gentle feel of those who tucked us in, who blessed our days, consoled our nights; And came as we do, on this eve, with memories of their own

We, tonight, are memories in the making, Warming seats for others who will remember us

In some Kol Nidrei they shall hear when we are gone

Now the truth is, Larry Hoffman can deliver more than your average 7%. But starting there, we worked on the emotional arc of the service, and then we looked for choreography that would reinforce our themes. Before the "return" section, the rabbis walked off the bima to the back of the congregation, retrieved two Torah scrolls, and walked them back home to the Ark as the cantor sang "Or Zarua."

The first time we tried this service it was the most powerful Kol Nidrei we had experienced. We were able to build the energy to the full Kol Nidrei. And

the procession of our Torah communicated the power of the day to return, to make *teshuva*, to our best selves.

The second worship project we have been addressing over the last several years is our Shabbat morning service. We recognized that it was a different community each week, usually guests of the *b'nei mitzvah*. As clergy, this is generally a fact we lament and complain about.

But this is actually an amazing opportunity. A captive audience for an hour-and-a-half, including many who might not be Jewish, with whom we could share what was most beautiful and important and relevant about our tradition.

To that end, we thought of framing parts of the service that could have a universal meaning, even within our particular Jewish language. The blessings surrounding the Shema (Creation, Revelation, and Redemption) are prayers that are master narratives in our tradition. But these are not just historical events – they are powerful because these master narratives are still happening in our own lives. How could we communicate that to the community?

We commissioned Dara Horn, a Jewish author, to write new text that would invite people to get inside this theme, to understand that it is ongoing in their own lives. Can you find yourself hearing Creation differently?

Here is the story of Creation:

You once walked through a garden, past a tree you saw each day, and fell hushed by a surprise: a perfect round egg enfolded in a nest, trembling from the possibility within it.

You once stood on the ocean's edge as water rushed towards invisible gates, and heard the silent voice that told the waves, "This far, and no farther."

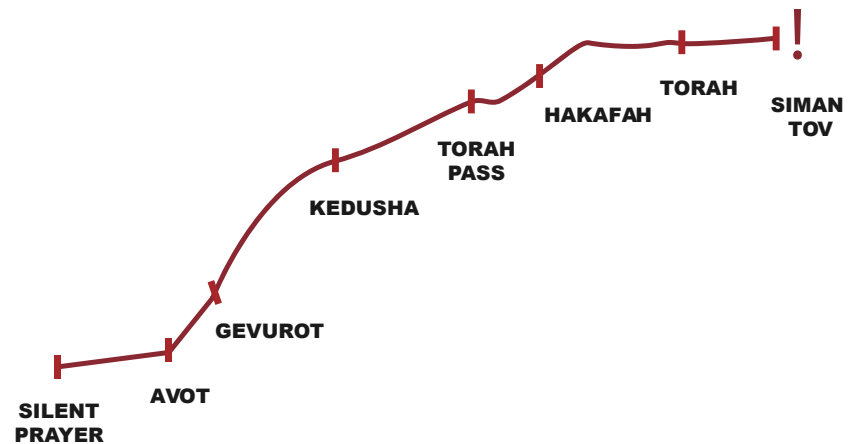
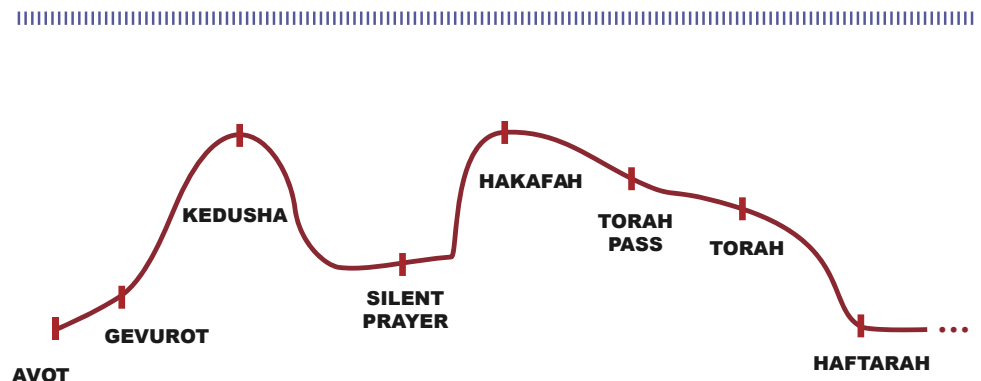
Or you clutched your parent's shrunken fingers as they waited for the end, and knew that just as they bore you into this world, it was your task to bear them to the next.

Once again, I think we did better than 7%. But while the text is beautiful, it is still a means to an end. We also thought about questions of choreography, and the overall listening and visual experience. The cantor and rabbi alternated reading so there were different voices. And we added a picture of a bird nest to our *siddur*.

We also asked, "what are we communicating non-verbally?" Actually, the literal question was, "If an alien dropped into our service, what would it think was important to Jews?" We didn't want the alien to leave thinking that we deified 13-year-old children in alarmingly short skirts.

We then attempted to re-order the service so that the Torah service came at the emotional peak. This changed the feel of the entire service. Now it was clear that the Torah moment was a mountaintop experience and our children took their place at Sinai and our parents cried and even our non-Jewish guests felt part of the sacred drama.

My simple mantra is "Connection Before Content." I draw my proof-text from a teaching in the Talmud: "What benediction do the Priests say before offering God's blessing? Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rav Hisda: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, Sovereign of the universe, who sanctified us with the holiness of Aaron and commanded us to bless God's people *with love*." (Sota 39a)



Before Aaron and the Priests could bless the people, they made a *bracha*, they asked God to help them bless others with love. Empathy, responsibility, compassion, and love for each other is a prerequisite for any blessing or prayer to be accepted, absorbed, or effective.

How remarkable that our own Rabbi Aaron Panken, our leader and teacher, embodies this teaching so fully. Like his biblical namesake, Rabbi Panken is a true *ohav yisrael*, a Lover of Israel. We all feel it from him in the way he listens, speaks to us, inquires after our families. He is a truly brilliant scholar, but he too begins with connection, with love, and this is why it is such a blessing to be his student, his colleague, and friend. And as we prepare for this mountaintop moment, the ritual of Inauguration, I hope he feels our connection to him beyond words.



What were we communicating to all the congregants, the guests, Jews and non-Jews – to ourselves?

We knew that the most important moment was the Torah service. But we didn't think that the emotional arc of the service reflected that. So we created a graph of the emotional energy of the service as it was.

Because what is the ultimate purpose behind the text, the choreography, the energy and flow? All of this ultimately aspires to create *connection*, which is what makes worship truly transformative. Connection among clergy, connection with the congregation, and ultimately connection between all of us and God.

COLLABORATION: ARE WE BUILT FOR IT?

Rabbi B. Elka Abrahamson '85, President, The Wexner Foundation

WATCH THE VIDEO: [HUC.EDU/INAUGURATION/ABRAHAMSON](https://www.huc.edu/inauguration/abrahamson)



Collaboration is so much harder than we think it is. And most of us think we are doing it, and we are not.

The first question I want to ask you is: Are we built on sand or are we built on concrete? I'll begin with a story that I first read in a book that Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote.

He talks about watching two kids on a beach as they build a really intricate sand castle. It has towers and moats and it's quite beautiful and quite elaborate. But as soon as they finish it and they stand up to admire it, a huge wave comes by and washes the sand castle off the beach. And Rabbi Kushner's reaction was "Oh, that's devastating." However, the kids got excited because they got to build the sand castle again. They jumped up and down and found a new spot on the beach and began digging with the same

enthusiasm. Rabbi Kushner was taken by these two children's response. What he realized is that while institutions are going to come and go, the relationships between those kids was enduring. They may not even remember the sand castle on the beach, but they would always remember each other and the joy they took in building together.

So I'll ask the question again: What about Jewish life is built on sand? And what is built on concrete? I will say for sure that Judaism is built on concrete. Let's just start there. Are our institutions, the buildings themselves built on sand or on concrete?

I'd like to make the case for change. Since I teach leadership pretty much every day of my life, one of the questions that people always ask me is to define leadership. I will give you two definitions. The first is that leadership is inevitably about change.

I've lived with the Pew Study, for which I served on the advisory committee, for about two years and have carefully studied the findings. There is a lot of good news. While I am not going to say there is bad news, there is news that makes me anxious.

I really am an optimist. And yet no one can deny that looking at these results the glass can be viewed as half empty. So, I'd like to look quickly at these numbers again.

Good news: 94% of Jews surveyed are proud to be Jewish. Not sure what that means, but it is good news. 35% of U.S. Jews identify with our Reform Movement. A third of all Jews in this country say they're Reform without really knowing what that means.

That is remarkable. That is opportunity.

Interesting news: 22% of U.S. Jews are what we are now calling JNRs. They have their own name: Jews of No Religion.

These are not Jews of another generation who were Bundists or Yiddishists. These are Jews of No Religion. It's not like Jews in Israel. These are Jews who say they are Jews but have no religion. For example, at a wedding that took place last Shabbat, two adults who met when they were children at day school married each other. Jew married Jew on a Saturday afternoon with no rabbi.

They are Jews. It just doesn't matter to them that they are marrying on a

Saturday. It doesn't matter to them if they have a rabbi. They just happen to be two Jews who got married and the religious aspect of their life is just not important. And I'm not sure what to do with that. I'm not sure how to integrate that into my Judaism, but we have to keep that in mind.

The truth is that 58% of Jews are marrying non-Jews. If you break that down into the liberal movements, it's 72%. A new cross tab that I can't verify says that 82% of Reform Jews are marrying non-Jews.

That is not a "good news, bad news" statistic. That is just reality. We are mixing more. We are marrying non-Jews. And on every single identity marker, the behavior of those intermarried couples is changing. Again, I am not giving it a good or bad weight.

They are changing and I'm not sure we have changed enough to meet the needs of that population. And if you go down every marker, it's just different news. 9% of intermarried Jews attend synagogue once a month. And the truth is that less than one-third of American Jews across the board say they belong to a synagogue at all. But when I ask any group of Jews what is their primary means of identifying with Judaism, they would say, "Belonging to a synagogue."

So right there we have to really rethink how we behave. Collaboration itself has to have serious goals or it's not worth it. What does that mean? The goal of collaboration is not collaboration. That is not sufficient. We have to look for greater results as a result of doing our work together. Applying what we can learn from the business world, not the Jewish world, we have to create an environment where innovation will thrive more than it does in a single siloed institution.

We have to make Judaism more attractive in ways we have not yet thought of on our own. We have to create a more accessible Jewish community.

The value of collaborating has to be greater than the cost that will necessarily be incurred when you collaborate. And believe me, there will be cost.

We live in a North American ecosystem of congregations that reflects the society from which they emerged. We built a membership model that requires dues, sometimes fairly expensive dues, and a model that is difficult to sustain by itself.

I travel all over the country and speak with congregational leaders. Very few congregational presidents say to me, "Our financial model is successful. And we have no worries."

I know on Friday nights when there's a new person in town, especially in towns in the Midwest where the population is growing but growing slowly, someone would come through the door and there would be a love bomb around that person to get them to join the congregation. Now, part of that is we want people to affiliate. But it also represents a dues rise if we get new members. And we need those people to support the budgets that we're building. That's how we're built. But I don't know that this model is going to work into the future, especially when only one-third of Jews are walking through those doors. You have two-thirds outside the doors. So what do we do with this data?

People love their rabbis. They love their synagogues. They love their programs. They love their buildings. And those are good things. But I don't think it's enough.

We have individual siloed membership models that I think promote barriers to collaboration. There are five barriers to collaboration that in many ways we are perpetuating through this system.

The first two barriers are about how we think: attitudes and motivations. The first one is hoarding, which can be found both in business and in the congregational model. We hoard our greatness. Hoarding is part of human nature and a huge barrier to collaboration. Hoarding comes from an ecosystem that was largely built in a different Jewish era.

For example, my mother, who turned 85 last week, is the President of Hadassah in St. Paul, Minnesota. That's sweet, but there is something wrong with it.

In the Pew Study, 7% in her generation identify as Jews of No Religion. But in my generation, the generation of her children, 17% of us define ourselves that way. And when it comes to my children's generation, it is at 32%. Look at how quickly that's changing. What will the statistic be among my future grandchildren? We have to change the model of hoarding, the first barrier.

The second barrier is a mindset, which I call holy arrogance: How could things be any better? We are so good at what we do. So you have to go back to the values proposition. Is there something that we can do better by virtue of doing it together?

For example, I have been working really hard in my community to get us to do one Purim carnival. Why do we rent six cotton candy machines? We'll make the cotton candy kosher and the Orthodox shuls can join us. Why do we have to rent forty-seven bouncy toys? The only person who stands to lose is the rental place! We can do it in

a neutral location and invite the whole world. But what if you can't even get past the Purim carnival conversation with other community leaders?

Leadership is about delivering loss at a rate a community can absorb. Loss of any kind, of anything, is complicated. And it's hard.

My teachers, Marty Linsky and Ron Heifetz of Cambridge Leadership Associates and Harvard, talk about how we are all different kinds of vegetables. Let's say that I'm a zucchini. My colleague is a mushroom. I like my zucchini-ness, right? He likes his mushroom-ness. We want to retain our unique qualities. So when you invite me to collaborate, we're creating what we will call a stew. The problem is that you have to cook it just right so that the zucchini-ness is still in there and you can still taste it, but not so mushy that the zucchini has no identity. So how do you retain your own identity, your own sense of who you are as a zucchini or a mushroom, and yet have a flavorful stew. We're all afraid of getting lost in the stew. If we collaborate, what happens to me and my stuff? Keep this in mind as we go on to the second set of barriers in collaboration.

The next barriers relate more to ability and skill, not to what is in your head. Let's say you get past the hoarding and the arrogance, and you have a clear goal: you really believe that you can attract more Jews by being in a collaborative situation. You get to the table and the behavior barrier number one is defensiveness.

We all sit down at the table and we're going to have that joint Purim carnival, which is not collaboration. It's partnership or co-sponsorship. But these tables can very quickly dissolve into avoidance techniques, defensiveness, where nobody can make a decision. We just keep coming up with the next idea, but nobody really wants to run it. That is "over" collaboration.

We just keep going on the treadmill. "We clearly can't come to anything,



let's meet again next year and see if we change our minds." It is not, "Let's meet for a while and conclude that we've all done our fair share and go home. And maybe we'll have a joint Tisha B'Av." That would be "under" collaboration.

First you try to "over" collaborate, and end up with nothing. So then you "under" collaborate. Not agreeing on anything is not a reason to leave the table. But often it is, because we are so well defended and really come to be good citizens. But at the end of the day, we're a little bit stuck in our hoarding and our arrogance. Now, I do think that all those joint programs help us dip our toes in the waters of trust and

transparency. Trust and transparency are so often missing from these tables. Competition is at these tables.

So what has to be left at the door? What armors have to be taken off? We need to discard not only the mindset of arrogance, but the next two behavioral aspects: politics and the power of imagination.

Can we really imagine what our Jewish community would look like if it were different? Let's call this the

"collaboratory." This is the long stage of conversation. This is the stage of patience and openness. You have to have the right people there. And then you have to be playful.

You have to acknowledge (and mean it) that we share a common fate. You know, if you go back into most synagogues and look at their building histories, you will find a wall with the pictures of the different buildings.

We've moved. We've proven that we're built on sand. I often wish I could interview the people who made those decisions.

Now, maybe it was easy because the Jewish neighborhood moved. But today, we have a whole new set of realities. We don't know where the Jews are. We don't even know how they're going to behave.

But we can't ignore those Pew Study numbers. So I'm going to give you some imaginings as possible conversation starters that might happen at this table.

Remember, when you're collaborating, presenting an idea is not a commitment. We feel that if we talk about a big idea, someone will turn to us and say, "You're the chair." "You're paying for it." "And you're the committee."

Sometimes you just have to put ideas out there and let them marinate. So, imagine Reform congregations in a small geographic area decide to have one collective membership fee. If you join one, you join them all – each with their own buildings.

Then imagine if those congregations develop specialties. One congregation specializes in K through 3, and you have the best K through 3 education imaginable, because you are going to have one unbelievable educator who knows elementary education. And then, you have another synagogue that specializes in 4 through 7, with amazing programs. And then, you have a high school that is second to none, that brings all those high school kids into one place so they meet more Jews and make more connections. And then, there are no longer individual temple youth groups. There are regional youth groups with professional youth group advisors.

Imagine if you sold the building of one of those synagogues and you raise \$7 million that you can then use to generate 5,000 staff people, including engagers in your community to go out and go find those Jews.

I think we have enough buildings. I would like to put a camera up in every Reform synagogue in my community and watch the traffic for a week.

How many people come and go in a week? What are we paying to heat those buildings? What are we paying on mortgages? Let's do real estate assessments. And what would be the cost of leveling it?

Let's redesign a Jewish community built for 30,000 Jews. Let's just design it from the ground up. How many think it would look just like it looks today? How many are pretty sure it would look different? So, the question is: what keeps us from getting to different?

As for the College-Institute, if we are developing congregations that specialize in certain areas, why not have campuses at HUC-JIR that become real "collaboratories" for very specific topics of Jewish life? Anywhere you go, you will hear everyone talking about how to attract the 20s and 30s, the Millennials. Why not, at least in a temporary fashion, create a "collaborator" on one of the HUC-JIR campuses that is focused on studying that population, does focus groups on that population, conducts academic research on the sort of developmental reality of that population. What does it mean to be a Jew with No Religion? And then disseminate the information to the Reform Movement. I know that a small number of communities are trying to have these conversations. But talking is not doing.

In conclusion, let's look at the last behavior problems. Once you get these imaginative ideas out there, however, we think of barriers to everything. Here's why we shouldn't do it.

For example, if we sold off one building, used all those assets, and co-located with the congregation 90 seconds away, what will happen to our Sefer Torah, our memorial wall? How are we going to pay two rabbis? And the conversation stopper of all conversation stoppers: what about High Holy Days? Where are we going to fit the 1,200 Jews if not in our building?

That cannot be the conversation stopper. We can solve the big problems if we stay with them longer. Now, I don't want to minimize congregational identity and the attachment people

have to their synagogues. That's a huge barrier. But I also don't want to minimize the fact that the numbers are telling us that we're not attracting people the way we ought to into the existing structure.

By the way, when 185 business managers were surveyed recently to see if they were collaborative, an unimpressive 16% scored as highly collaborative. Those of us who have achieved some measure of success in our congregations have done so because we're driven to succeed within a competitive system, so we really have to push against the status quo to build a collaborative culture.

As the great leadership thinker John Gardner said, "A pluralistic society invites each organization, institution, or special group to develop and enhance its own potentialities. But the price of that treasured autonomy and self-preoccupation is that each group concern itself also with the common good. That is not idealism, it is self-preservation. If the larger system fails, the subsystems fail. That should not be such a difficult concept for the contending groups to grasp, but it is."

How do we lead in this world and not react in this world? The future announces itself from afar, but most people are not listening. The noisy clatter of the present drowns out the tentative sounds of things to come. The sound of the new does not fit old perceptual patterns and goes unnoticed by most people.

So I'm trying to sound the bell a little bit that we may need to rethink our patterns.

What would it be like if we realized that we can't get to the next level unless we had to unlock the future together? What if we open up our synagogue? What if those locks didn't work unless we shared the keys?

JEWISH LIFE IS IN THE BALANCE

Rabbi Jan D. Katzew '83, Ph.D.

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Before we approach the text, let us acknowledge the joyful context for our learning together today: the Inauguration of my *havruta*, my study partner, and my dear friend for fifteen years, Rabbi Aaron Panken, as the 12th President of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. The texts we will consider honor the form and content of our years of Talmud study together. They are dialogical, dialectical, at times prayerful, and often playful. They represent ancient, medieval, and contemporary Jewish and general sources. Above all, they raise questions more than they provide answers, for Jewish learning is a delightfully, maddeningly never-ending search for truth.

This session is entitled “Jewish Life Is in the Balance.” Jewish learning is not only a Jewish occupation; it is a Jewish preoccupation. We need to realize what is at stake when we uncover the significance of Jewish learning – nothing more and nothing less than the future of the Jewish people.

Learning is the reason there is a Jewish people.

Our mission is to keep learning and our vision is a world in which people will live the teaching, that is, the Torah.

The Talmud models Jewish learning.

The Talmud is written in blocks of text, and there are ongoing dialogues that take place within the text, between the text, and between those people who are studying it. Indeed, in some ways, the Talmud anticipates and functions, in some respect, as the original “home page” of the Jewish people, because the conversation is taking place between people who never met each other, people who lived in different times, and who cared deeply about the same ideas, which they found to be both timely and timeless.

I hope that we are going to continue that conversation. I have prepared texts that I hope you find to be “agitational,” that will challenge the status quo with respect to Jewish learning generally and

in the Reform Movement in particular. I hope that they will create a bit of dissonance, a bit of dis-equilibrium, and a measure of discomfort. Jewish learning, to paraphrase Abraham Joshua Heschel, is responsible for comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. And in the United States, Jews are comfortable, too comfortable.

Jewish learning and its translation into Jewish living require a delicate and perpetual balancing act.

We live in a culture that is increasingly binary, resulting in a division between haves and have-nots. Such a polarization exists with respect to Jewish learning. This asymmetry threatens the quantity and the quality of the Jewish future.

Although the appellation ‘people of the Book’ was a Muslim gift to the Jews, we have accepted it with a sense of honor. We may not all be Jewishly learned, but all of us can and should be Jewishly learning. With the freedom we enjoy and the proliferation of accessible translations and commentaries on ancient, medieval, and modern Jewish texts, we have an unprecedented opportunity to be Jewish learners. In order to achieve this worthy goal, we need to embrace our counter-cultural status. “Jews are ‘both/ands’ in an ‘either/or’ world.”

Jewish learning is both particular and universal.

We have the responsibility to draw from the deep reservoir of Jewish learning throughout time and from the wellspring of contemporary educa-

tional thought. In the words of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, “We need to renew the old and sanctify the new.”

If you could remember just one Hebrew letter, it should be the letter ‘vav.’ The letter ‘vav’ means ‘and’. The word ‘vav’ means ‘hook’. Vav is the hook on which Jewish learning hangs. We learn when we build connections, when we discover associations, and when we create combinations. The thesis of a new book, *Powers of Two* by Joshua Wolf Shenk, is that the greatest innovations have resulted from partnerships – from *havrutot*, from Lennon and McCartney, for example, rather than from individual geniuses.

One of the things that I learned from, with, and about each one of my *havruta* study partners over the past thirty years is related to the text that is before you with the heading: **חברות ומשמעות** (*haveirut u'mashmaut*) – **Relationships and Meaning**. We live in a time in which there is a great focus on relational Judaism. Relational Judaism is necessary but it is not sufficient. Relational Judaism has a very different magnification when it is amplified through “mashmaut,” through meaning, through shared dialogue. What are the components of that relationship?

The first text is: “Find yourself an authoritative teacher.” That is a necessary precondition for learning, but not sufficient by itself. “And acquire a study partner.” In David Ellenson’s New York office, these two phrases were inscribed on a plaque given to him by his classmates. They are frequently cited when an outstanding teacher of Torah is honored. However, the rabbinic aphorism continues and grounds the first two statements in an ethical context. “And judge the whole person tending to the side of merit (giving the benefit of the doubt).”

Jewish learning is an ethical exercise in appreciative inquiry, looking for what is good in every text, in every context, in every student, and in every teacher.

Jewish learning not only involves subject matter; it also involves subject matter. How we learn intimately connects to what we learn, and Jewish learning, in contrast to the dominant culture that venerates ‘critical thinking,’ is essentially kind and generous – looking for what is good and worthy rather than for what is weak or wrong.

Jewish learning is multi-dimensional. It’s not only an intellectual exercise, it’s not only an emotional bridge built between people. It’s a social activity. And it is profoundly ethical. Think of

how different your learning relationships would be if, instead of looking for what’s wrong, what mistakes people brought, you would start with what is appreciative inquiry.

How can you learn from every person with whom you interact: every student, every colleague, every one of our children, sometimes one of our parents, our spouses or partners, certainly the people we love most in life?

My mother lives in an extended care facility outside Boston, MA, where she had served on the medical staff for nearly forty years. (She died two days after the Symposium.) She is my teacher when she tells me, “Jan, most of the people here treat me like a patient; thank God there are a few who relate to me as a person.”

In education, there are too many teachers who treat their learners as students and fail to relate to them as people.

I was terribly moved when I came across the text before you from Kalonymus Kalman Shapira. He wrote a text titled **חובת התלמיד – A Student’s Obligation**, which was buried under the Warsaw Ghetto, where he was a rabbi during the Holocaust. The following very brief statement is from the introduction to this work, which was recently published in an English translation. We need to picture the tragic circumstances under which he was teaching. He actually anticipated this by saying in his preface that this is not about the craft of teaching. “We are interested in the whole student. We wish to connect to the *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama* (three words used to describe the soul) of Jewish children to the God of Israel.” From my perspective, Rabbi Shapira captured the goal and the soul of Jewish learning, to connect Jewish learners to each other, across time and space, and to God.

חברות ומשמעות RELATIONSHIPS AND MEANING

Find yourself an authoritative teacher; And acquire a study partner; And judge the whole person tending to the scale of merit.

(Mishna Avot 1:6)

We are interested in the whole student. We wish to connect the נפש (*nefesh*), רוח (*ruach*) and נשמה (*neshama*) of Jewish children to the God of Israel. (Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, A Student’s Obligation: Advice from the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto)

Jewish learning is multi-dimensional: intellectual, emotional, social, ethical, and spiritual. Jewish learning, like learning in general, has become increasingly personal, direct, democratic, decentralized, and global.

What are the conditions, the terms of engagement, that enable you to be an active Jewish learner?

גר ותושב

A STRANGER AND A RESIDENT

I am a stranger and a resident among you. (Genesis 23:4)

Jewish learning is first to differentiate and then to integrate.

How is it possible to be both a stranger and a resident, to be not at home and at home, to be counter-cultural and cultural, in the same place at the same time?

Intentionally, I have brought more texts than we can possibly address in a single encounter. I am a glutton when it comes to Jewish learning. I cannot get enough and I hope that you will find these texts worthy of deeper study in your home congregations and communities. The texts are accompanied by guiding questions for your consideration. It's not enough for us to read the text. The texts have to read us. We have to be willing to engage in a meaningful relationship with them and with our learning partners and open ourselves up to the possibility that these texts have something to teach us about us about our *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshamah*.

Consider the text: "When Abraham introduced himself to the Hittites, as he was prepared to bury his wife Sarah, "גר ותושב אנוכי עמכם" – "I am a stranger and a resident among you." Not a stranger *or* a resident, but rather a stranger *and* a resident.

Here in North America generally, and in the United States in particular, we have an imbalance between being at home and being strangers.

We are too much at home and not enough strangers. To what extent are

we willing to be different? To what extent are we willing to assert our being apart from as well as a part of the society in which we live? In many respects, Jewish learning and Jewish living are a commentary on a single phrase – "We are strangers and we are at home here." Jews have struggled with this conundrum, with this cultural calculus wherever we have lived. We have understood that an integral part of our sacred mission as a people involves being learners who consciously choose when to be countercultural: when to push against the grain of the mainstream even though we know we are swimming upstream. We have been willing to pay the price because we believe the prize is worthy, if not holy.

The Hebrew language is a case in point. It is a particularist expression of Jewish learning. It contains the sacred cultural code of the Jewish people. At the risk of dating myself, I recall a commercial that claimed a telephone call was the second best thing to being there. I never bought that line. Similarly, I am unconvinced that the proliferation of translations and commentaries available in English have obviated the need for a Hebrew-literate core of Jews, and not only rabbis and cantors and educators, and not only adherents of Orthodox Judaism, but also Reform and Conservative and Reconstructionist Jews who are not professional leaders of the Jewish community.

Hebrew is more than a means of communication; it is a language that conveys memory and destiny. Hebrew is also an aspect of identity. To be called to the Torah by one's Hebrew name is an invitation to accept that identity. Speaking personally, there are people who know me as "Jan" and others who know me as "יונה" – they

are not the same person. When I am thinking, reading, writing, and speaking in Hebrew, I am not the same person as when I am conducting those activities in English.

For the sake of Jewish learning, we must develop a cadre of people in our Movement who are seriously Hebraically competent. In addition to Hebrew, there are other ways in which we can express our distinctiveness as Jewish learners. One of them is to learn to live in Jewish time.

We have dear friends for whom it was inconvenient to observe the Passover *sedarim* on Monday and Tuesday evenings (the first two nights of Pesach) this past year. "Why not move a Seder to Saturday night? Everybody can make it, and we can all get together." The gain was a community of family and friends in celebration; the loss was the privatization and the customization of that historical, memorable, and global celebration. Jewish life is often

תיקון מידות הנפש
ותיקון העולם
REPAIR THE WORLDS
INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

Jewish wisdom can improve our lives and help make for a better world, and consequently, Jewish learning is relevant and serious, timely and timeless.

(Jonathan Woocher/Jan Katzew)

Jewish learning is for the sake of repairing the world inside us and the world around us.

What are we doing as a Jewish community that helps us improve our inner life of the soul and our outer life that others witness?

inconvenient, even unnatural. It is frequently out of step with the rhythm of Western culture.

Learning to lead a Jewish life requires becoming comfortable living in Jewish time, which contradictory to folk wisdom is not late. If anything, Jewish time is early as we are taught to express our joy and excitement to perform a *mitzvah* as soon as it is possible.

I remember an Israel experience with rising 11th-grade students that I had the privilege to lead. We visited a kindergarten, where a teacher gave us a tour. He asked all of the NFTY students, probably 35 or so, “What is today’s Hebrew date?” No one knew. “What’s this week’s *parashah* (Torah reading)?” No one knew. But when he asked the same of his five-year-old children, none of whom was Haredi (fervently Orthodox), they knew.

That interaction left a lasting impact on me. Especially at a time of democratized, privatized, and computerized learning, we need to recognize that vast numbers of our people need to know what it means to live in Jewish time. Just as there is no vicarious atonement in Jewish life, so there is no vicarious fulfillment in Jewish life. I cannot “Jew” for you. I cannot learn for you. And neither can you or anyone else “Jew” or learn for me.

The next text I would like us to uncover is a contemporary one by a leading educational philosopher whose name is Nel Noddings. She writes, “The primary aim of every educational institution and every educational effort must be the maintenance and the enhancement of caring.”

I do not presume to know about your educational experience, but Nel

Noddings is not describing mine. Caring was and I believe is exceptional in learning environments. In our educational culture there is a focus on assessing, on metrics, on benchmarks, and on judging. Caring is relegated to a minor role, a bit part in a lifelong educational movie. Noddings argues that we need to challenge the status quo. Later on, in the book aptly titled *Caring*, she uses the following phrase: “Everybody at every age and stage needs to have somebody who is just crazy about you.” Everybody.

צדק ורחמים JUSTICE AND CARING

The primary aim of every educational institution and every educational effort must be the maintenance and the enhancement of caring. (Nel Noddings: *Caring*)

Jewish learning aims at creating a caring, empathic, and compassionate community.

How does your own expression of Jewish learning explicitly embrace kindness as a lived value?

We need to have teachers who care. I’m a really fortunate learner. I’ve had people crazy about me as a student for most of my life. And I consider that to be one of the greatest blessings, a gift from God in the form of a human being, I personally have received.

I can remember Dr. Ezra Spicehandler, of blessed memory, a teacher who cared about me. I walked into his office as a first-year rabbinical student at HUC-JIR in Jerusalem, where he served as the Dean. In my halting Hebrew I asked him if he would be willing to have a Hebrew relationship with me.

I was standing in front of a world-class scholar in Hebrew literature and I had the temerity to ask him to be my teacher outside of a classroom setting. He didn’t just blow me off. He didn’t laugh at me. He didn’t think I was a jerk. He didn’t think I was trying to get an A. He agreed and I am sure I would not be here now if he had demurred. Fast-forward thirty-five years.

I visited Dr. Spicehandler at Cedar Village, the Jewish retirement community in Cincinnati, not long before he died a few months ago. When I arrived there was someone else there, someone who did not speak Hebrew. Ezra could not really follow the conversation. When the other visitor left. I spoke to Ezra in Hebrew. He seemed to recognize me and he responded in kind since he apparently had access to his Hebrew mind. The very last words we shared were in Hebrew, thereby completing the circle. Ezra said “yes” when it didn’t make any sense to say yes. He just cared – about Hebrew and about me. Jewish learning requires teachers who care about the subjects they are teaching, but we need to care even more about the students we are teaching.

Jewish learning is not exclusively Jewish.

I recommend two books that were not originally written with a focus on education. But I believe in terms of imagining the future, they have profound implications for Jewish learning. One of them is Daniel Kahneman’s *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. His primary argument is that we have two systems of thought. Once again, not an either/or dichotomy, but a both/and dialectic.

System one is fast, intuitive, and emotional. System two is slower, more deliberative, and more logical. In our world of instantaneous gratification, we have a predilection for the fast, intuitive,

now, improvise, get it done, immediately. And that skill is very important. It's necessary. But it's not sufficient on its own. In every learning milieu – home, day school, early childhood center, youth group, camp, congregation, senior adult community – we need to have some people who slow things down. They are thinking at a different speed, refusing to be sucked into the vortex of instant gratification, insisting on reflection and the weighing of consequences.

What Kahneman claims (and he was the Nobel Prize winner in Economics 2002), is that he and his *havruta* partner, Amos Twerski, brought out the best in each other. They knew they needed each other. They knew they needed to fail many times before they made seminal discoveries in the social sciences, in particular in the field of decision-making, which bridged the disciplines of economics and psychology.

It is important to recognize that each one of us apparently has access to two interdependent systems of thought. We determine how they interact. At times, we use that automatic, intuitive, emotional, visceral responsiveness, and at other times, we consciously are deliberate, logical, algorithmic, and cogitative. Jewish learning is in the balance, and currently we are off-balance. Sometimes, thinking slow is as courageous as it is rare.

Limerance is a term David Brooks uses to describe a passion, an inspiring attraction, and a love for learning that transcends logic.

In Brooks' own words, "Limerance: This isn't a talent as much as a motivation. The conscious mind hungers for money and success. But the unconscious mind hungers for those mo-

ments of transcendence when the skull line falls away and we are lost in love for another, the challenge of a task, or the love of God."

Limerance can take place in an early childhood center just as much as at HUC-JIR. People have access to transcendence, and Jewish learning cries out for the holy, addressing the soul as well as the heart, the mind, and the hands.

זהו, שלמות, וקהילה IDENTITY, INTEGRITY, AND COMMUNITY

Good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. (Parker Palmer: *The Courage to Teach*)

Jewish learning involves excellence in Judaism and in learning, excellence that begins with the most important learner in every learning environment, the teacher.

Who are the best teachers in your learning community and how are you supporting them?

What can, people like Daniel Kahneman and David Brooks teach us? They remind us that Judaism at its best is eclectic: ready to learn from Torah, the unique story of the Jewish people as well as from *hochma*, the universal narrative that speaks from global wisdom. It is not a coincidence that this event was called a Symposium, because Plato's *Symposium* was about love and so is this one. Jewish learning is rooted in love – of Judaism, of Jews, of Israel, of people, and of God.

Jewish learning, like Jewish living, is a lesson in humility, wholly and sometimes holy unpredictable.

The essayist, scholar, and statistician Nassim Nicholas Taleb wrote *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, which presents a fascinating, compelling argument. We must always be ready to admit that we could be wrong. The unimaginable can and does happen. There are events, catastrophic and wondrous, that change the world forever, events that were unprecedented and unpredicted, events that keep happening. We did not foresee the Holocaust. We did not foresee the Six-Day War in 1967. We did not foresee 09/11/2001. Perhaps the Jewish people are living proof of the Black Swan.

This coming week in the Torah we will learn about the twelve scouts that Moses dispatched to bring back a report about the land of Israel. Ten of the twelve saw insurmountable obstacles. Only two acknowledged the obstacles and yet expressed the belief that they could be overcome. In the last four millennia, I am not sure the proportions have changed materially. There are obstacles in the paths of Jewish learning: ignorance and indifference among them. I choose to align myself with the Joshuas and Calebs of our time and claim that we are capable of overcoming them.

As a people, we have defied logic practically since our inception and the main reason why we are still here inheres in Jewish learning. We may not all be learned Jews, but we have a legacy of being learning Jews. May Jewish learning also be our destiny, since Jewish life is in the balance.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Alyssa Gray, Ph.D., Emily S. and Rabbi Bernard H. Mehlman Chair in Rabbinics and Associate Professor of Codes and Responsa Literature, HUC-JIR/New York

WATCH THE VIDEO: [HUC.EDU/INAUGURATION/GRAY](https://www.huc.edu/inauguration/gray)

Like you, I still have memories from high school. And like at least some of you, not all of these memories are embarrassing. I remember one teacher in particular, a Talmud teacher. We were studying a passage of Tosafot, the 12th- to 13th-century scholars from northern France and Germany whose analyses are now printed on the outside border of the standard Talmud page.

I don't remember what question he was asked, but I do remember his answer: Tosafot could not have imagined that Jews like us would exist. And that line has always stuck with me. It's pithy, it's funny, and it conveys a certain truth because, in fact, Tosafot could not have imagined that Jews like us would exist. Tosafot could not have imagined that Jews like us would live in a free society. For that matter, they couldn't have imagined such a thing as a free society.

Tosafot could not have imagined that Jews would live in a society in which Judaism was "cool." (Tosafot could not have imagined "cool.") Tosafot could not have imagined that Jews would live in a society in which Christians would respect and value Judaism and Jewish rituals.

They could never have imagined, for example, that there would be churches that would want to celebrate Passover seders. And more to the point of our talk this morning, Tosafot could never have imagined that the modest Talmudic phrase "*tikkun olam*" would undergo a profound transformation



in the 20th century to become the shorthand for a relatively newly discovered Jewish religious obligation to fix and repair our broken world.

Tosafot could not have imagined that. They certainly could not have imagined that a man like the Christian philosopher and activist Cornell West would embrace the phrase "*tikkun olam*" and even proclaim on more than one occasion: "*Tikkun olam* all the way." Tosafot certainly could not have imagined these things.

They could not have imagined what we think of as a "cause," whether the cause be climate change or other environmental issues, or creating equality of opportunity, or equality of education for children across the globe. They couldn't have thought in those terms.

To Tosafot and to the other Jewish legal scholars of the Middle Ages, the

cluster of concerns that we group under the heading "social responsibility" were actually grouped under a number of smaller headings. There was "*tzedakah*" (charity) and the laws of *tzedakah*. There was "*gemilut hasadim*," a Hebrew phrase that literally means "reciprocation of kindness," which we use to refer to acts of kindness.

There were laws governing how to relate to tenants, how to relate to workers, how to engage ethically in business with one another, how to engage ethically with others on other occasions and in other contexts as well. Tosafot and their fellow Jewish legal scholars of the Middle Ages would have grouped under these various different headings the numerous concerns that today we group under the broad heading "social responsibility."

So we have, broadly speaking, two models. We have what we might think of as a medieval model of social responsibility, which is essentially the responsibility that one Jew had to another, a responsibility that was carried out and discharged largely, although not entirely, on a localized basis within discrete Jewish communities. And then we have the model of contemporary social responsibility, a model which is appropriate to our world – our world being a global village that Tosafot also could not have imagined. And this last is a model of social responsibility that I'll call the social responsibility of the global village. We have these two models, then, each historically appropriate to its own time, each a product of its own time.

I'm not going to engage in a fruitless line of inquiry as to which is better. But what I do want to point out is that there are some unintended consequences of the social responsibility of the global village – some unintended, perhaps unforeseen consequences. And we'll want to look to Jewish tradition to find ways to deal with those unintended consequences.

I'd like to illustrate those unintended consequences by talking about portraits of two types of Jews. The first type of Jew is one that I met a few years back. I was speaking to a woman who described her husband as the best Jew that she knows – a very happy, warm sentiment. And then she went on, "And he's a Catholic. He's the best Jew I know, and he's a Catholic."

Well, at this point, of course, I was very intrigued. What is her definition of what a Jew is? For that matter, what is her definition of "the best Jew" that she knows? And she went on to explain that her husband is very deeply and passionately engaged in human rights

work, in social justice work. And this, in her view, made her husband the best Jew that she knows.

Now, there's some good news in that. The good news is that among right-thinking people, we Jews have a good reputation. We stand for the right things. On the other hand, there's some disquieting news in that. That's a rather thin definition of what it means to be a Jew and of what Judaism is.

I was recently thinking, again, about my conversation with that woman as I was reading a book that was just published by the Catholic religious writer Joseph Bottum. The book is called *An Anxious Age*. Toward the beginning of the book, Bottum writes about a phenomenon that he calls "thinning up" – how the rich, robust Protestant Christian culture of an earlier generation became "thinned up" in a subsequent generation. The later generation retained some of the cultural patterns of the earlier generation, some of the same values, some of the same concerns. But over time, the robust, Protestant Christian frame in which all that was held fell away. The Protestant culture of the earlier age was "thinned up" into something else.

I was thinking that what this lady represents is really a "thinning up" of Judaism – a "thinning up" of Judaism into social responsibility, without more. Now, social responsibility is key. It is a *mitzvah*, a divine imperative. But it's disquieting to think of the rich, robust, Jewish religious culture being "thinned up" this way into social responsibility and pretty much nothing but social responsibility.

Well, then, how do we deal with this? What do we say? How do we thicken up these "thinned up" Jews? One thing we could do is take them all for dinner at my mother's house. That would be very effective in the short run. I don't

think it would be very effective in the long run, but it would help in the short run. But there are more substantive things we can do. One of them is to stress the priority and primacy of Jewish study.

Now, you may be thinking to yourself, I thought we were talking about social responsibility! Why are we talking about study? We're talking about study because study is the indispensable basis of everything that happens in Judaism. It is through study that we immerse ourselves in the language and culture of Torah, in the vocabulary of Judaism as it has historically developed.

It is through study that we really know the rituals and beliefs and practices of Judaism. Study means engagement with a full range of genres of Jewish writing: from the Bible to the Talmud, to the mystical tradition, to cultural genres that may not necessarily have a religious component, such as novels and poetry. Study means being willing to engage with texts and traditions that will challenge your preconceptions. Study means that you're willing to expose yourself to the multivocality – the many voices – of the tradition, and that you'll be open and willing, if need be, to change your mind.

Study should be contrasted very sharply with prooftexting. Study is not prooftexting, and prooftexting is not study. Prooftexting is taking a verse, a Talmudic passage, a Hasidic story, or what have you, and using it to support a position you already hold. At the extreme, prooftexting can be used to squeeze Judaism into the Procrustean bed of a particular ideological perspective.

That is not what study is. Study properly pursued is a way that we can help to thicken ourselves up from any sort of "thinned-up" Judaism.

A second way is to invite our “thinned-up” Jews – which is all of us, I think, at one time or another – to think deeply about the term and concept of *mitzvah*. *Mitzvah*, of course, means commandment. Colloquially, it’s undergone a very interesting transformation of its own. It has been and is used to mean “good deed” or whatever seems like a nice, Jewish thing to do.

It may also interest you to know that in the third to fifth centuries in the land of Israel, the rabbis of the land of Israel used the word *mitzvah* as a synonym for charity. It meant charity. And it wasn’t only the rabbis, by the way. Their contemporaneous Christian neighbors also used a Semitic cognate word for *mitzvah* that meant charity.

We see this usage in the rabbinic literature of the land of Israel. The poor are portrayed as saying, “Give me a *mitzvah*,” meaning “give me charity.” People are described as *marei mitzvata*, the masters of the *mitzvah*, meaning “masters” of charity. It’s almost as if the rabbis that used this term wanted to say that charity was *the mitzvah*, the quintessential *mitzvah*. But what’s interesting and important to note is that, ultimately, the word *tzedakah* predominates as the term for charity in classical rabbinic literature.

The rabbis were well aware that the term *mitzvah* covers a full range of Jewish rituals: Shabbat, holidays, *kashrut* – the entire range of Jewish practices. By elevating the term *tzedakah* over *mitzvah* as their primary word for charity, the rabbis, as it were, put charity in its place. It is indeed a major *mitzvah*, a significant *mitzvah*.

There are hundreds and hundreds of rabbinic traditions that extol the religious merit of *tzedakah*. But at the end of the day, it is one *mitzvah* among the many *mitzvot*.

The notion then, that charity for the poor is called “*mitzvah*” and is *the* quintessential *mitzvah* does not survive the passage of time. In fact, the later Babylonian Talmud, a product of the seventh century, doesn’t know at all of *mitzvah* as a word that can mean charity. *Tzedakah* is *the* term for charity in the Babylonian Talmud.

The rabbis signal this tendency to view charity as one *mitzvah* among the *mitzvot* in yet another way. As a rule, one is not permitted to discuss business on Shabbat. There is an exception, however, when it comes to charity.

On Shabbat, we are permitted to discuss how much charity we will give *after* Shabbat. That’s as far as the exception goes. We’re not allowed to touch money on Shabbat, and charity is no exception. We’re not allowed to put our hand in our pocket on Shabbat to pull out the money to give as charity. Again, charity is significant, it’s holy, it’s a divine imperative, and it earns an exemption from the “no talking business on Shabbat” law. But rabbinic law does not allow the giving of charity to trump the observance of Shabbat, which ranks extremely high in Jewish tradition.

So, thus far, we have these two ways through which we can thicken ourselves up, thicken up this “thinned-up” Judaism: study, and reflecting on *mitzvah*. The bottom line is that social responsibility is a thread, a scarlet thread, a very important thread, but it’s *one* thread in the larger tapestry which is Judaism.

Then there’s a second type of Jew, which is me and, I suspect, some of you. This is the Jew who says, “I have a good, strong moral compass.” And these Jews may well be right, by the way. This Jew says: “I have a good moral compass, I’m an ethical person,

I have excellent principles. What I believe just *has to be* what Judaism teaches.” This is the Jew that I call the “projection Jew:” the Jew who projects her own very strong, moral, and ethical compass onto Judaism.

At an extreme you can get a situation where a Jew may say, “I’m a Democrat. I’m a Republican. I’m a socialist. I’m a libertarian. I’m a liberal. I’m a conservative.” These philosophies or perspectives all have points to commend them. We all want to do the right thing by society, and by the most vulnerable among us. We all have the right intentions, and try to come up with the best ideas. This Jew may go on to say: “I’m surrounded by good people. My ideology – Democrat, Republican, etc. – *must* therefore be what Judaism teaches. We’re good people trying to do good!” And, in fact, Jews *are* Democrats, Republicans, socialists, Libertarians, liberals, and conservatives – but Judaism is not.

Judaism was historically not apolitical, but it is not completely consonant with any of our current political perspectives and ideologies. Judaism should not be politicized. Judaism does not teach us to vote for this or that candidate, or to support this or that piece of legislation. This does not mean that the use of Jewish texts and traditions has no place in these conversations. But when we think back to what we said about study a few moments ago, we must remember that the use of Jewish texts and traditions has to take in the full range of what Jewish tradition has to say about an issue – whether I find its perspectives congenial or not. *Study*, yes; *prooftexting* positions I already hold, no.

Jewish legal tradition, the Talmudic legal tradition, is about discussion. It's about argument. It doesn't necessarily have to be friendly discussion, and it wasn't always friendly. But it's about discussion, argument, and debate. It's about making one's case through the use of reason and reasoned argument, and attempting to persuade others of the rightness of one's views based on having the most compelling interpretation of our sacred texts.

He goes on to say, "You know, if I get involved, it might offend that judge. He might think: 'Luria doesn't think I'm going to do the right thing by this woman.'" Ultimately, Luria overcomes his doubts and decides that he has to get involved. Apropos, you may remember the quote by the great sage and leader, Spider-Man: "With great power comes great responsibility." Luria essentially says something that comes down more or less to: "With great learning comes great responsibility."

individual and do what he thought was right. This is true heroism.

Thus far, we have discussed, in order: study, *mitzvah*, apoliticized (Judaism), and, finally, heroism. If we move these letters around a bit, we come up with the transliteration of SHMA: **S**tudy, **H**eroism, **M**itzvah, **A**politicized. SHMA (Deuteronomy 6:4) is the fundamental statement of our belief in God's unity. For our purposes today, maybe we can think of it in a different

Social responsibility is an important *mitzvah*, a definite holy imperative. But it is one thread in the larger tapestry which is Judaism. This unity of the large tapestry of Judaism is something that Tosafot could indeed have imagined: a unified Judaism in which all *mitzvot*, all texts, all practices are equally deserving of our attention.

This is how we should be relating to each other, not by saying, "I'm with this party and it represents what is right. You are with that party, or that tendency, or that perspective, and that represents what is wrong." I'd like bringing in one of my favorite characters, a rabbi from 16th-century Lublin, Poland, named Rabbi Shlomo Luria.

As I always say to my students, I'm in absolutely no hurry to get to the next world. But when I do get there, Luria is one of the people I would like to meet. Luria writes in one of his responsa (a learned answer to a question that was posed to him) about an issue involving a widow in the city of Lublin.

This widow was being taken advantage of financially by a man in the town. We don't need to be concerned right now with the precise details. Luria initially represents himself as hesitating to get involved. He said, "Well, there already is a judge on the case. It's not that nobody in Lublin knows about this situation. There's a judge appointed, there's a court that's going to be sitting to hear this widow's case."

What Luria actually says is: "When we go back to the Torah, we see that there's a covenant for the widow and the orphan. God represents Godself as being particularly interested in what happens in society to the widow and the orphan." And Luria says, "It is an obligation of anybody who has knowledge of Jewish law, who has knowledge of the Torah, and who is able to use that knowledge to rescue the vulnerable from someone who would prey upon them, it's incumbent upon that person to do that." So he says, "Notwithstanding my concerns about the little political difficulties I might get myself into here in Lublin, I'm going to get involved."

What did Luria do? In our contemporary terms, he represented truth to power and got ready to speak truth to power. He placed his responsibility to act on behalf of a vulnerable widow above his "party," as it were. Luria and the sitting judge on the case were on the same side. They were part of the same group, the same "party," so to speak: the learned elite of Lublin. Luria was willing to risk alienating someone from his own "party" in order to stand up as an

way as well: as a shorthand expression for a fundamental unity in Judaism, a unity in which all the *mitzvot* have importance, in which all the texts, all the traditions, have importance. Not that every text is uplifting, or every ritual recoverable for the modern liberal Jew. But everything in the tradition equally deserves our attention.

Social responsibility is an important *mitzvah*, a definite holy imperative. But, again, it is one thread in the larger tapestry which is Judaism.

This unity of the large tapestry of Judaism is something that Tosafot could indeed have imagined: a unified Judaism in which all *mitzvot*, all texts, all practices are equally deserving of our attention. This is something they could have imagined and that they practiced, and it is something that we can imagine and practice as well. Not Judaism as a window dressing for ideas and beliefs and preconceptions that we bring *to* it, but Judaism as the foundation *from which* our own dedication to social responsibility, among other things, flows. SHMA.

CELEBRATING PARTNERSHIP

LEADERS OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT GATHER AT THE JOINT HUC-JIR, URJ, AND CCAR BOARD MEETING

The Boards of Governors and Overseers of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the Boards of Trustees of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) gathered for a Joint Board Meeting at HUC-JIR's Cincinnati campus on June 6-8, 2014 in conjunction with Rabbi Aaron Panken's Inauguration as HUC-JIR's 12th President in its 139-year-long history.



"This meeting in Cincinnati was a wonderful opportunity for leaders of these three key Reform Movement partners to meet, discuss, and confer in order to align the important work of each organization," stated Andrew R. Berger, Chair, HUC-JIR Board of Governors.



Stephen M. Sacks, URJ Chairman, concurred, "The strength of our Movement lies in the ability of its various institutions not just to get along, but to come together and chart a common path forward. The wonderful added opportunity to come together in celebration of Rabbi Panken's Inauguration really drove both of those points home for me."



Rabbi Steven A. Fox, CCAR CEO, added, "The Joint Board meeting was a wonderful opportunity for the leadership of the Reform Movement to hear one another's ideas, concerns, and aspirations. A personal high point was when the 'Weinberg Torah' was transmitted by Rabbi Ellenson to Rabbi Panken. This Torah was commissioned by my great-great-great-grandparents on the occasion of their son's birth and used in our family synagogue in Germany, rescued during the Holocaust, and recovered by our cousin Dr. Werner Weinberg. The 'Weinberg Torah' is safely held by HUC-JIR today."

The three-day meeting began with Kabbalat Shabbat services at the Isaac M. Wise Center. Over 300 Reform Movement leaders from throughout North America joined the Cincinnati Jewish community, including clergy and congregants of Wise Temple, Rockdale Temple, Temple Shalom, and the Valley Temple. The joyous, participatory service featured HUC-JIR President Rabbi Panken, URJ President Rabbi Rick Jacobs, and CCAR CEO Rabbi Steven Fox, who spoke about "Writing the Next Chapter of Reform Judaism in North America." Wise Temple clergy (from right): HUC-JIR alumni Rabbi Lewis H. Kamrass, Rabbi Rachel Maimin, Rabbi Karen R. Thomashow, and Rabbi Sydney F. Henning.





1

HUC-JIR students and faculty led Shabbat services on campus: (1) rabbinical student Max Miller and Cantor Yvon F. Shore, Director of Liturgical Arts and Music, led a Classical Reform service in the Scheuer Chapel; rabbinical students Dana Benson and Nathan Farb led a *Mishkan T'filah* service in Mayerson Hall; and (2) rabbinical student Jessica Wainer and Rabbi Julie Schwartz, Certified Supervisor of Clinical Pastoral Education, led an alternative prayer service at the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati Pavilion at the Klau Library.



2

Following worship, Board members were invited to tour the campus, which is internationally recognized as a preeminent center for teaching, scholarship, and research. Its renowned faculty and resources attract students and scholars from around the world, while community outreach and public programs engage the larger Cincinnati community and region.



3

Participants visited the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati Pavilion and Klau Library, where Dr. David Gilner, Director of Libraries, presented rare manuscript treasures (7). They explored the significant archival materials preserved at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives with Kevin Proffitt, Senior Archivist for Research (4, 5). Board members toured the art collections of the Skirball Museum in Mayerson Hall with Director Abby Schwartz and docents (6). They also had the opportunity to see the Jewish Family Service - Barbash Family Vital Support Center (3), the Herrman Learning Center and Scheuer Chapel, and the Teller Student Lounge and Pines Faculty Center.



4



5



7



6



(1) Distinguished members of the HUC-JIR/Cincinnati faculty led afternoon Torah Study Lunch and Learn sessions for the Board members:

(2) “Biblical Sanctification of Dress” with Dr. Nili Fox, Director of the School of Graduate Studies and Professor of Bible.

(3) “Return of Angels and Demons to Contemporary Jewish Practices” with Rabbi Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D., Dean and Associate Professor of Talmud and Halakhic Literature.

(4) “The Jewish Frankenstein: A Look at the Golem” with Rabbi Samuel Joseph, Ph.D., Eleanor Sinsheimer Distinguished Service Professor of Jewish Education and Leadership Development.

(5) “Reform Books of Awe: A Preview of the New High Holy Days Prayer Book” with Rabbi Richard S. Sarason, Ph.D., Professor of Rabbinic Literature and Thought.

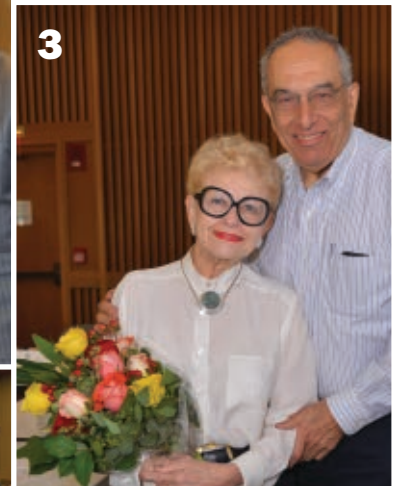
(6) The “Greetings and Graeter’s” reception honoring Lisa Messinger (center), wife of Rabbi Panken, was co-hosted by Rosalyn Engelman (left), wife of Irwin Engelman, and Renee Kamrass (right), wife of Rabbi Lewis H. Kamrass of Wise Temple. (7, 8) Cincinnati’s renowned Graeter’s ice cream was offered for this special occasion by the Graeter family, in celebration of the founding of their company four years before HUC was founded in 1875. The day concluded with *Havdallah* and the Joint Board Meeting, which continued the next morning.



On Sunday, Board members attended the Academic Symposium: "Imagining the Jewish Future" (see pages 24-44), and then joined leaders from across North America, Israel, and abroad and the larger Cincinnati community at the landmark Plum Street Temple for the Inauguration of Rabbi Panken (see pages 7-23), which featured the participation of Reform Movement leaders, alumni, faculty, and students. Following the Inauguration, a festive Inaugural reception was held at the Hyatt Regency Cincinnati (1).



(2) Gloria R. Lipson, LISW, a prominent leader of Cincinnati's Jewish and civic community (second from right), and Steven R. Pruzan, a distinguished attorney and national leader of the Reform Movement (second from left), were inducted into the HUC-JIR Board of Governors at its meeting on Monday. Rabbi Panken bestowed a special blessing upon Irwin Engelman (at left) for his four years of devoted service as Chairman of the Board of Governors. (3) A champagne toast and appreciative applause by the Board congratulated Rosalyn and Irwin Engelman for their abiding commitment to and support for HUC-JIR.



Rabbi Aaron D. Panken, Ph.D., *President*

Andrew R. Berger, *Chair, Board of Governors*

Rabbi Michael Marmor, Ph.D., *Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Provost*

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With centers of learning in **Cincinnati, Jerusalem, Los Angeles, and New York**, HUC-JIR's scholarly resources comprise the renowned Klau Library, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, research institutes and centers, and academic publications.

In partnership with the **Union for Reform Judaism** and the **Central Conference of American Rabbis**, HUC-JIR sustains the Reform Movement's congregations and professional and lay leaders.

HUC-JIR's campuses invite the community to cultural and educational programs illuminating Jewish heritage and fostering interfaith and multiethnic understanding.

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