A FOCUS ON HUC-JIR IN ISRAEL:

Reform Leadership and the Zionist Ideal  ■  A Historical Timeline  ■  Planning for the Future  ■  A Decade of Educational Initiatives

Visionary Rabbis Take the Lead  ■  Bringing Archaeology into the Community  ■  Alumni and Faculty Reflections

and What Does Kiryas Joel Tell Us About Liberalism in America?  ■  Faculty Features: The Burton Lehman Retreat,

Eugene B. Borowitz, Michael J. Cook, Reuven Firestone, Stephen M. Passamanec  ■  Graduation/Ordination/Investiture 2008
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Martin Buber, the great Hebrew University social philosopher and student of Hasidism, taught that God cannot be addressed if we leave the world to its own devices. Rather, God asks that we approach the Divine by confronting and embracing the world. While the Holy One deprives us of the capacity to judge each moment and assert that this or that is its true meaning, we can yet identify and take responsibility for the challenges that the world presents in each and every generation.

These thoughts animate the ethos of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. We seek to carry out our mission of educating klei kodesh who will inspire and guide the Jewish community to fulfill their obligations to our people and humanity. Foremost among the challenges facing our graduates today and tomorrow is the State of Israel. HUC-JIR can and ought to play a role in inspiring rabbis and teachers who will speak in the much-needed life-enhancing Jewish voice of religious moderation and tolerance, both within and beyond the Jewish State. This issue of The Chronicle is primarily devoted to a presentation of how the College-Institute is engaged in meeting these challenges here and now in Israel.

In offering these descriptions, it is crucial to place them within historical context. Kaufman Kohler, who served as President of Hebrew Union College from 1902-1923, was an ardent supporter of the “universal mission of Israel.” This universalistic emphasis led to his unalterable opposition to the particularity of Zionist Movement with its emphasis upon a Jewish land for the Jewish people. During the first years of the 20th century, Rabbi Kohler dismissed every single faculty member from his Cincinnati campus who viewed Zionism in congenial terms and he refused to allow Modern Hebrew language and literature to be included in the curriculum.

However, other voices – great rabbis within HUC-JIR and beyond our walls – began to be heard regarding the place of Zion in Reform Judaism. Stephen S. Wise at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, HUC Professor of Theology Samuel Cohn in Cincinnati, Judah Magnes in Jerusalem, Abba Hillel Silver in Cleveland, and Felix Levy in Chicago transformed the Reform Movement and enthusiastically affirmed the role that Zion could and should play in Reform Jewish life.

Nelson Glueck walked in the footsteps of these men and under his leadership the Jerusalem campus of HUC-JIR was born.

(continued)
He established a School of Archaeology at HUC-JIR/Jerusalem and planted the seeds that would permit the College-Institute to play a role in the State of Israel. One can discern the fruits of some of those seeds in the essay entitled, “Bringing Archeology into the Community: The Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archeology’s Excavations at Givat Sher and Modi’in.”

Alfred Gottschalk – aided by great lay leaders such as Richard Scheuer and Stanley Gold – furthered the vision of Dr. Glueck and became the chief architect of an educational policy that has marked HUC-JIR for almost forty years. Indeed, since 1970, a year of study in Israel has been a mandatory part of the course of study for every rabbi ordained at the College-Institute. The articles “Against the Tide: Reform Leadership and the Zionist Ideal,” as well as “HUC-JIR in Jerusalem: A Historical Timeline” capture much of this past and provide a vital perspective for understanding how HUC-JIR and its educational programs as well as the Progressive Movement came to develop in the Jewish State. Furthermore, the piece, “To Build and Be Built: Alumni and Faculty Reflections on Israel,” testifies to the profound impact Israel has had upon our North American alumni and their understandings of Judaism and the Jewish people.

The articles by Dean Michael Marmur, “HUC-JIR/Jerusalem: Planning for the Future,” and Associate Dean Naamah Kelman, “A Decade of Educational Initiatives,” describe our current programs and aspirations as we face the present and plan for the future. At the direction of Sheldon Zimmerman and Norman Cohen, with the approval of Burton Lehman and the Board of Governors, and the financial support of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, the Goldman Family in San Francisco, Morton Meyerson of Dallas, and Peter Joseph and Elizabeth Scheuer of New York, a significant expansion of the Israeli rabbinical program was launched in the late 1990s. This expansion continues to the present day and has supplied Israel with a significant cadre of Israelis to build and guide Progressive Judaism in Israel in a native dialect. Thirty-four of the fifty-three Israeli rabbinical alumni of the College-Institute in Jerusalem have been ordained during the last seven years. The article, “Spirit of Reform: Visionary Rabbis Take the Lead in the IMPJ,” highlights the early fruits of these labors and describes the meaningful deeds and exciting efforts of a number of these alumni – as well as the ongoing challenges these alumni confront – as they seek to anchor a progressive Jewish spirit within Israel.

Of course, the story of Progressive Judaism in Israel and the place of HUC-JIR in that narrative are still rapidly unfolding. More than thirty Israeli students are scheduled to be ordained as rabbis during the next several years. Ten Israelis out of seventy applicants were admitted to the Jerusalem school for the current academic year and these students have been joined on our Jerusalem campus by another seventeen students who are earning their Master’s degrees in education in a program in the emerging field of “Pluralistic Jewish Education,” jointly sponsored by the Melton Center of Hebrew University.

The creation of the Blaustein Center for Pastoral Counseling three years ago has allowed for the development of required coursework in pastoral counseling and specialized placements within existing health and mental health care institutions for our Israeli rabbinical students. The Blaustein Center has also been responsible for the creation of Mesorim. This innovative program has brought together scores of individuals in both Tel Aviv and Jerusalem from the spectrum of caring professions for biweekly intensive days of study and reflection as well as supervised field placements.

HUC-JIR/Jerusalem now has more Israeli than North American students on campus. An Israel Committee of the Board of Governors – co-chaired by John Golden of New York and David Harman of Jerusalem and appointed by Barbara Friedman – is actively working in concert with the HUC-JIR Administration to plan creatively and responsibly for the directions we will take in Israel in the years ahead.

Foremost among the challenges facing our graduates today and tomorrow is the State of Israel. HUC-JIR can and ought to play a role in inspiring rabbis and teachers who will speak in the much-needed life-enhancing Jewish voice of religious moderation and tolerance, both within and beyond the Jewish State.

As we begin the New Year, we are grateful for all these directions and express gratitude to all of you who so ably and generously help the College-Institute to fulfill its mission – both in the State of Israel and everywhere the people Israel dwells. May the New Year be one of blessing, fulfillment, and peace.

Rabbi David Ellenson, President
October 2008  Tishri 5769
Against the Tide: REFORM LEADERSHIP and the ZIONIST IDEAL

Leah Kaplan Robins

Reform Judaism’s stance on Zionism has evolved dramatically in the last century. Although today the Movement is united in vigorous support of Israel, this wasn’t always the case. In the pre-World War II years, the leadership by and large did not approve of the nationalist movement, which was seen to negate the German Reform ideals of equal rights and separation of religion and state. The ethic of a return from exile that impassioned early Zionists was alien to the large majority of Reform intellectuals, whose 1885 Pittsburgh Platform explicitly rejected the Zionist ideal. They believed in being citizens of the nations of the world and did not identify with an ancient homeland.

Several members of the Hebrew Union College community swam against the prevailing tide long before the Holocaust illuminated the need for a Jewish State. These pioneers were proud to be Zionists and dreamed of an Israel that embodied their Reform values. Their tireless efforts helped build the infrastructure of the Israeli dream.

Dr. Judah L. Magnes, C. 1900, was ordained at HUC/Cincinnati in the first class of the 20th century. Magnes is remembered as the leader of New York’s progressive Jewish community. He helped found the American Jewish Committee in 1906, and served as president of the Kehillah of New York City throughout its lifespan from 1908 to 1922. In addition to having been a champion of human rights, education, and liberal values, and the spokesman for liberal tradition in North America, he was also an ardent Zionist, and came to be recognized as the Reform Zionist leader of his generation.

Magnes discovered Zionism after traveling in the Jewish towns of Galician and Russian Poland during his Ph.D. years. He returned to America a confirmed Zionist, and preached that rekindling Jewish life in Palestine would enrich life in the Diaspora rather than undermine it. Although his beliefs were highly unusual at the time, he expressed them publicly and took leadership roles that would help spread the movement. From 1905 to 1908 he served as Secretary of the Federation of American Zionists, now the Zionist Organization of America.

Magnes argued vehemently against the prevailing Reform belief that Judaism should be considered a religion and not a nation. Michael Langer’s anthology, A Reform Zionist Perspective: Judaism and Community in the Modern Age, records Magnes’s address to the Council of Jewish Women, in which he admonished Jews who reject Zionism on the basis of its emphasis on Jewish “peoplehood”: I am inclined at times to think that many Jews have not even today found the Jewish people. And yet, the discovery of this people breaks in upon you with wondrous freshness and surprise. To turn aside from the quibbles as to whether or not there is a Jewish people, and to come nearer to the beating heart of this people… to partake of its joys, its sorrows, its hopes, to delight in its keen mind and sharp wit, to fight its fights, to love its traditions and aspirations…to join in prayer to the God of your Fathers – that means to live Judaism.

Magnes always yearned for the ancient Jewish homeland, and when the British opened the gates to Palestine after World War I, he immigrated in 1922 to take part in the Zionist project. He helped build the Hebrew University, becoming its first Chancellor and later President. The University became the incubator for Magnes’s most strident goals – high-level education and reconciliation with the land’s Arab inhabitants. He viewed the Hebrew University as a bridge between eastern and western traditions, and a meeting ground for peace and dialogue. An ardent pacifist, for 25 years during the pre-state period he lobbied for creating a bi-national state that would grant equal rights to all of...
its citizens, both Jewish and Arab. He helped found the coexistence group Berit Shalom in 1925 to further this goal, and just a month prior to the establishment of the state and shortly before his death, he traveled to the U.S. as a delegate of the Ihud (Union) Association of Palestine to advocate for his bi-national dream. Magnes died in 1948, just five months after the State of Israel declared its independence.

The same year that Magnes immigrated to Palestine, Rabbi Stephen Samuel Wise founded the Jewish Institute of Religion. Trained at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Wise became an influential leader of the Reform Movement and was instrumental in engineering the political developments that led to Israel’s independence.

Wise threw off the cloak of apathy for Zionism long before most other Reform leaders came around to the cause. He served as a member of the International Zionist Executive Committee and was a delegate at the Second Zionist Congress in Basel in 1898. He was also named Honorary Secretary of the Zionist Organization of America.

When the American Jewish Congress convened for the first time in 1918, Wise was elected as a delegate along with other future luminaries, including Justice Louis Brandeis, Judge Felix Franklinfurter, and Golda Meier Meyerson. The Congress’s website today honors Wise, saying that he “set forth principles that were unique for the time and that continue to guide us today: that Jews are entitled not merely to charity, but to justice, and that there exist fundamental rights to which Jews and men and women of all faiths are entitled.”

In 1925, Rabbi Wise became Chairperson of Keren Hayesod, United Israel Appeal, increasing his efforts to change the Reform Movement’s official stance on Zionism. As Hitler came to power, he lobbied for Americans to protest the fascist leader, and helped create the World Jewish Congress to campaign against the Nazi regime. As the war progressed, he was elected to co-chair the American Zionist Emergency Council in the hope of rescuing as many Jews as possible.

Wise had the ear of two U.S. presidents whose decisions dramatically influenced Israel’s fate. In 1917, as Chairperson of the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs, he persuaded President Woodrow Wilson to support the Balfour Declaration – the letter from the British Foreign Secretary to Lord Rothschild that was the first political recognition of Zionist aims by a great power and provided the basis for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Wise was also a close confidant of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, whom he advised on issues pertaining to Zionism and the Jewish community in America.

Wise was a passionate advocate of Herzl’s legacy, preaching to his congregants at Congregation Beth Israel in Portland, Oregon in 1905: “It is of the essence of [Herzl’s] immortal service to the race to have by inspired work and high example made out of a mournful and tragic necessity a glorious and inspiring ideal. The Jewish consciousness re-awakened. Jewish unity re-asserted, Jewish self-respect restored, Jewish solidarity re-forged -- these together constitute the Jewish renaissance.

Despite this strong leadership, the Reform Movement’s official stance on Zionism remained unchanged until 1937, when Rabbi Felix Levy, C’1907, as President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), helped overturn the anti-Zionist sentiments codified in the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. Levy fought hard to pass a controversial new document, the “Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism,” known as the Columbus Platform.

The document’s ratification represented a shift in consciousness for American Reform Jews. As Hitler’s campaign threatened European Jewry, people began to realize that Israel wasn’t an abstract concept to embrace or reject, but a necessity for Jewish survival. The Columbus Platform, written by HUC faculty member Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon, endorsed the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and “affirm[ed] the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for
the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life.” The document also reintroduced the idea of chosenness into the Reform lexicon, a sharp ideological departure for the Movement.

Levy expressed his pro-Zionist ideas early on in his career. He explained his concept of the chosen people in a speech to the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in 1928, saying that “if by [chosenness] we mean that Israel should consciously set itself up as a people that is to function as priests of the ideal, if we mean that in a world constituted like that of today, materialist, deterministic, and mechanistic, some group should stand for the idea of the world, not as it is, but as it might be.”

Levy passed his vision on to another generation of progressive Zionists, his grandchildren, Rabbi Naamah Kelman, Associate Dean of HUC-JIR’s Jerusalem campus, and Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman, founder and spiritual leader of Jerusalem’s Progressive congregation Kol HaNeshama. Through their professions and lives in Israel, they both work to concretize their grandfather’s dream.

Activist Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman, N’44, who passed away at the age of 89 on March 31, 2008, was an architect of clandestine rescue missions that gave thousands of Holocaust survivors a home in pre-state Palestine, during the wave of immigration historically known as Aliyah Bet—the second aliyah. He became a U.S. Army chaplain in Germany after his ordination at HUC and was appointed Assistant Adviser on Jewish Affairs to the Commander of the U.S. Occupation Forces. He responded viscerally to the inhuman neglect of the homeless survivors after the war, made to wait in displaced persons camps, some of which were the same Nazi prisons and concentration camps from which the survivors had been liberated. Incensed that the British refused them entry into Palestine, he commandeered U.S. army trucks to ferry them to Italian ports and onto ships (including the S.S. Exodus) that would attempt to outrun the British blockade.

In his preface to his 2000 autobiography, Roots of the Future, Friedman explains that these rescue missions and his later work smuggling arms to the Haganah—the underground military organization of the yishuv (Jewish community) in Eretz-Israel from 1920 to 1948—and bringing medieval religious documents out of Germany were simply an extension of the heroism that he saw at home. Just prior to the war, his mother took in three German Jewish children who fled the Nazis, even though the family of five already lived in a tiny two-bedroom apartment and subsisted on rations because they had lost their home during the Depression. For Friedman’s family, the chance to save three Jewish lives outweighed the demands of poverty. He developed from this example a value system that guided his life of activism:

We are what we believe, and for as long as I can remember, my fundamental beliefs have been these: the primary sacredness of Jewish survival, both for the Jews as a people and for humanity at large; the value of every single Jewish life, especially now, in the aftermath of Hitler’s genocidal attack; the inestimable value of Israel as a physical and spiritual center; the responsibility of every Jew for every other and for the homeland.

Rabbi Friedman became a patriarch of organized Jewish life in America, holding the post of Executive Chairman of the United Jewish Appeal for more than two decades in the 1960s and 1970s. He conceived of the “missions” to Israel that became the ubiquitous core of American Jewry’s support of the State. He created the organization’s National Young Leadership Cabinet, whose first conference took place in 1960, led the Israel Education Fund, and was Co-founder and President of the Wexner Heritage Foundation.

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, C 1915, was a visionary orator and relentless advocate for the Zionist cause in the mid-twentieth century. He captured the world’s attention in 1947 as the rabbi who addressed the Assembly of the United Nations on behalf of the Zionists, just months before the U.N. announced its approval of the partition plan and the establishment of the State of Israel.

Lithuanian-born and New York-raised, Silver spent most of his career as the rabbi of Cleveland’s Congregation Tifereth Israel, a post that became the backdrop for his outstanding work in the leadership of organized Jewish life in America. He was Founder and Co-Chair of the United Jewish Appeal, President of the United Palestine Appeal, Chairman of the Jewish Agency, representative of the American

Abba Hillel Silver addressing a meeting of Zionists, pre-1948.
Zionist movement at Zionist Congresses, and simultaneously President of both the Zionist Organization of America and the Central Conference of American Rabbis from 1945 to 1947.

Silver led these organizations with his vocal chords, rallying his American audiences – both Jewish and non-Jewish – through inspiring speeches in support of the creation of the State of Israel. While most Zionist leaders at the time were against pushing the U.S. government to action during wartime, Silver believed that America must intervene in Palestine. His public outspokenness shaped world opinion, and taught Americans that they held great power in the public sphere.

In his Founder’s Day address at HUC in 1950, Silver spoke jubilantly about his hopes for the new State:

*The restoration of the State of Israel, with its tremendous psychological implications, has freed our people from the spirit of depression and forlornness, the fears and the confusions of the long, weary, and homeless centuries. It is now possible, if so we will, to move forward on our appointed tasks as a covenanted people with a new heart and a new song.*

*Dr. Harry M. Orlinsky* was Professor of Bible at HUC-JIR/NY and one of the leading Biblical scholars of his generation. He was known for his translation of Rashi’s commentary on the Pentateuch and as Editor-in-Chief of the Jewish Publication Society’s 1962 translation of the Pentateuch. Ancillary to his academic work, he played a vital role in one of the lesser-known but fascinating dramas of Israeli history, the top-secret acquisition of the last four Dead Sea Scrolls. The first three scrolls had been purchased from Jordan by Professor Eliezer Lippe Sukenik, founder and head of Hebrew University’s Department of Archaeology, coincidentally on the eve of the U.N resolution on the Jewish State in November 1947. Sukenik intended to acquire the others when they reached the antiquities market, but when the War of Independence began, the Jordanian owners whisked the remaining four scrolls away to the United States to prevent them from ever falling into Israeli hands. Israeli scholars thought they would never see the scrolls again, until seven years later, when a nondescript advertisement under “miscellaneous for sale” appeared in the Wall Street Journal.

In his book *Essays in Biblical Culture and Bible Translation*, Orlinsky recounts the day in July 1954 when his departure for a family vacation was disrupted by a phone call concerning this astonishing advertisement.

Sukenik’s son, Yigael Yadin, was calling from the office of the Consul-General of Israel in New York City, requesting his immediate presence for a classified mission. Orlinsky’s task was to meet the merchant selling the scrolls in a hotel room at the Waldorf Astoria, examine the texts to ensure their authenticity, and buy them for the Israelis. His whole adventure would take place under the pseudonym “Mr. Green.”

Orlinsky knew the scrolls intimately because he had used a reproduction for his research on the *Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament*. When he entered the room he was allowed to examine the merchandise by hand, including the 22-foot-long Isaiah Scroll, carbon dated to approximately 335 B.C.E. - 107 B.C.E. Sure that they had found the real thing, he called the Consulate to report success, using the agreed-upon code word – “le-hayim!”

Rabbi Stephen A. Schafer, C ’55, fought for the State of Israel quite literally. In 1948, while a student at the University of Delaware, he responded to a call for volunteer soldiers to join in defending the new State against the attacking Arab nations. He was only twenty at the time, but he was already a veteran of World War II, and together with the other 3,500 volunteers who enlisted from 43 different countries, he contributed crucial military skills that bolstered the Haganah, by then the nascent Israel Defense Forces. The special unit that was created for the volunteers, called Mahal, still exists today for Jews from abroad who come to Israel to serve in the Army.

Schafer’s wife Nina explains that her husband’s dedication to the emerging State was a byproduct of what he witnessed during World War II. Even when the rabbi of his home congregation advised him against fighting in Palestine, he knew that there must be a place for the Jewish people, and was willing to risk his life to secure it. When the war was over, he remained in Jerusalem for a few years, paying his way through courses at Hebrew University by making post-war repairs in his neighborhood. He fixed blown-out windows and repaired bullet-riddled walls, all so he could learn Hebrew and study philosophy with Martin Buber. The entire experience had a profound impact on Schafer, and he decided to return to America to enroll in rabbinical school at HUC-JIR.

Schafer’s rabbinate has always echoed the ideals of freedom and human rights for which he fought as part of the Israeli Army. An activist by nature, he led his community to march for civil rights with Martin Luther King, Jr. supported fellow Mahal pilot Abie Nathan’s humanitarian efforts in Israel and around the world, and built homes for the homeless long before Habitat for Humanity ever existed.

His first love as a rabbi was experiential Jewish education, and as the founding head of the URJ’s Youth Department, he created an integrated Zionist youth program that is the basis of today’s camps, NFTY, and Israel programming. He organized opportunities for...
young people to live on a kibbutz, and helped to create ARZA, the Association of Reform Zionists of America, to encourage aliyah as the point man in America for the founding of Yahel and Lotan, the first Reform kibbutzim. Nina remembers joining her husband to collect petitions for ARZA in the 1970’s. She remembers his vigor for grassroots activism, and unflagging and contagious passion for Israel.

Dr. Ezra Spicehandler, C ’51, founding Dean of HUC-JIR/ Jerusalem and Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Hebrew Literature at HUC-JIR/Cincinnati, also fought in Israel’s War of Independence. In November 1947 he and his wife Shirley traveled on a rickety Greek ship from Marseilles to Haifa, where he had resided as a child in 1929-30. Ten days into his studies at Hebrew University for a doctorate in Talmudic history, with a graduate fellowship from HUC, he was recruited to join the ranks of the Hagannah (see page 29).

Rabbi Richard Hirsch, C ’51, is known as “the architect” of the international Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ). Under his 26-year stewardship, the Movement ballooned to include nearly 40 countries and gained a strong foothold in Israel. Inspired by the trauma and victory of the Six Day War, he advocated for Reform Jews around the world to embrace Zionism, saying “The State of Israel is central to Jewish existence.” He moved the World Union for Progressive Judaism’s (WUPJ) headquarters from New York to Jerusalem when he assumed leadership in 1973, and made alliances with the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Hirsch explains why he pushed for transfer of the headquarters to Israel: “The State of Israel had become the center stage in the Jewish drama, where the character of Jewish life would be shaped and the destiny of the Jewish people determined. If we as a Movement continued in the path of restricting our role to spectators, we would be marginalized and tangential. It was not enough for Reform Jews as individuals to be active Zionists. The Movement as a collective had to exert the full force of its major institutions on the new central stage of Jewish life.”

His proposals for building a Progressive religious movement in Israel included synagogue-community centers, kindergartens, schools, kibbutzim, cultural programs, and training indigenous rabbis and professional and lay leadership to develop the Movement. His plans also called for the construction of facilities throughout the country and the development of a world education center for Progressive Judaism on the HUC-JIR campus in Jerusalem. He says, “The decision to transfer the international headquarters to Jerusalem and to build a substantial Movement in Israel represents the most historic action taken by Reform Judaism in the 20th century. In so doing we catapulted our Movement to play an integral constructive role in restoring Jewish peoplehood, reviving Jewish civilization, and perpetuating Jewish heritage.”

Before making aliyah in 1973, Hirsch led several Chicago and Colorado congregations, was director of the Chicago Federation and the Great Lakes Council for the URJ, and served for ten years as Founding Director of the Reform Movement’s Religious Action Center in Washington, D.C.

He and his wife Bella were actively involved in the struggle for Soviet Jewry, and in the late 1980s worked to create a Progressive presence, establishing the first liberal congregation in Moscow in 1990. Hirsch says, “I consider the reawakening of Soviet Jewry to be one of the miraculous ramifications of the Zionist revolution. The victory of the Six Day War propelled Soviet Jewry to revive their Jewish national consciousness. The development of a growing liberal movement in the FSU corroborates our recognition that in order to perpetuate Jewish identity it is essential to blend Judaism as a faith and culture with Jewish ethnicity.”

Named Honorary Life President of the WUPJ at his official retirement in 1999, Hirsch continues to lead on the international scene, as Co-Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel’s Commission on Eastern Europe and as a member of the Executive Boards of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization.

He summarizes the Movement’s trajectory as a pairing of ambition and responsibility: “In establishing the Religious Action Center in Washington, Reform Judaism became a full and equal partner in aspiring to fulfill the American dream. In moving Reform Judaism to Israel, we became a full and equal partner in aspiring to fulfill the Jewish dream. In the process, as a Movement, we discovered that full partners cannot be silent partners. We also learned that equal partners not only have the right to demand equal rights; they also have the duty to assume equal responsibility.” With this imperative Hirsch helped build institutions that today’s Israeli Progressive Rabbis and community leaders continue to nurture, contributing to the Jewish State’s vibrant future.

Rabbi Richard Hirsch at the dedication of the Reform Movement’s Kibbutz Yahel, 1976.
THE BEGINNING: Dr. Nelson Glueck, President of HUC-JIR from 1947 to 1971 and an internationally acclaimed biblical archaeologist, was determined from the onset of his administration to establish a branch of the College-Institute in Israel. The partition of Palestine and the division of Jerusalem excluded many scholars from previously available research and academic facilities. Dr. Glueck also believed, strongly, that Liberal Judaism should have an academic center in Jerusalem.

In 1952 HUC-JIR’s Board of Governors approved, in principle, the establishment of an “HUC House” in Jerusalem. In 1954 the government of Israel offered HUC-JIR a two-acre site on King David Street for the symbolic rental of one Israeli pound per year, and the official building permit was granted by the municipal government in 1956. Formal groundbreaking exercises were foregone so as not to arouse Orthodox opposition, which had calmed somewhat during the previous few years. Scores of letters from Israel’s citizens had appeared in the nation’s press, supporting the College-Institute’s right to build a center in Jerusalem, and prominent public figures voiced their support. Yet due to continuing resistance by the Orthodox religious establishment and construction problems, nine years passed before the school was formally opened in 1963.

A gala convocation marked the opening of the Hebrew Union College Biblical and Archaeological School on March 27-31, 1963. Despite continuing controversy about projected Reform synagogue services, nearly all of the leading figures in the Israeli government willingly as-
sociated themselves with the event. The ceremony included speeches by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, Jewish Agency Chairman Moshe Sharett, Minister of Education Abba Eban, Foreign Minister Golda Meir, and Jerusalem Mayor Mordechai Ish-Shalom. The first regular meeting of the Board of Governors in Jerusalem was convened and renowned biblical archaeologist Yigael Yadin and classical archaeologist Carl William Blegen were awarded honorary degrees. Congratulations were received from such world leaders as President John F. Kennedy.

Designed by architect Heinz Rau and built of white Galilee limestone, the School included the William Murstein Synagogue, where regular Shabbat morning services were instituted in the summer of 1963. With services held entirely in Hebrew, large numbers of Israeli worshippers began attending High Holy Day services at HUC-JIR, and the synagogue increasingly became a place of pilgrimage for American visitors.

The launch of the Jerusalem School's academic program was celebrated in June 1963 by a second dedication ceremony, held in the presence of some 150 members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) and an audience of leading Israelis. The summer also witnessed the first of a series of institutes on Near Eastern civilization initiated by Dr. Paul M. Steinberg, z”l, who served as Executive Dean of the Jerusalem School (1963-1970) and later as Vice-President and Dean of the New York School. These institutes, which would annually bring Jewish and Christian scholars from the United States to Israel for an intensive program of lectures and visits to archaeological sites, were supported by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the Department of State and the Smithsonian Institution, which soon after also supported HUC-JIR’s archaeological excavations. By 1965, the School of Biblical Archaeology, in cooperation with the Semitic Museum of Harvard University and the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, launched excavations at Tel Gezer, one of the great cities of ancient Palestine. This project was supervised until 1971 by Dr. William Dever and Dr. Joe D. Seger.

Dr. Ezra Spicehandler, a young scholar of Hebrew literature, was appointed the first permanent Director of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem in 1966. Dr. Avraham Biran, the noted archaeologist and director of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, was intimately involved with Dr. Glueck’s development of the Jerusalem School during the 1960s.

**EXPANDING THE VISION:** The College-Institute took a historic step in 1970 when it became the first American seminary to require all rabbinical students to spend their first year of study in Jerusalem. While the focus of this program was to be the acquisition of Hebrew language skills, students also would experience an in-depth encounter with Israel’s land and people, and leave with a deep understanding of the social, political, and religious character of Israeli society. The Year-In-Israel Program also included volunteer work at youth centers, hospitals, and homes for the elderly, meetings with Israeli leaders, and participation in the College-Institute’s archaeological excavations.

For the administration, the Year-in-Israel program was of utmost importance for the College-Institute’s American students. “Spending a year in Israel is necessary to help rabbinical students understand the country, its people, culture, and history in a way that classroom education simply cannot provide,” says Dr. Spicehandler.

Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, Chancellor Emeritus of HUC-JIR, notes the significance of the expansion of the College-Institute’s academic program in Israel. “This was a reconceptualization of the whole school. The archaeological program gave us great strength and recognition, but this wasn’t a substitute for developing a modern religious and humanistic program.”

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1 | **1963** Prime Minister Ben Gurion at the dedication of HUC-JIR/Jerusalem.

2 | **1963** The Murstein Synagogue designed by architect Heinz Rau.

3 | **1970** Golda Meir and Dr. Nelson Glueck (at right) greeting Year-In-Israel students and Dr. Ezra Spicehandler (center).

4 | **1974** Dr. Avraham Biran examining archaeological fragments from Tel Gezer with students.

5 | **1974** The 4,000-year-old mud brick gate of the ancient Canaanite city of Laish is discovered at Tel Dan, the oldest such structure ever uncovered in Israel.
The Jerusalem campus grew in 1970 with the dedication of the Rosaline and Meyer Feinstein Building, which housed a student lounge, residence facilities for visiting scholars and research fellows, and additional office space. Ceremonies surrounding this dedication included the granting of an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree to Golda Meir.

In 1971 scholars and communal leaders worldwide joined in mourning the passing of President Nelson Glueck. His successor, Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, Professor of Bible and Jewish Thought and an authority on the Zionist philosopher Ahad Ha-Am, took office with a firm commitment to continuing the program in Jerusalem. He and Dr. Ezra Spicehandler, who was appointed Dean of the Jerusalem School in 1973, expanded the campus’s academic, cultural, and archaeological programs.

The academic program broadened to include coursework for high school and college students studying in Israel under the sponsorship of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism) and its Department of Youth Activities, and a program in cooperation with the National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) was also begun. The Year-in-Israel Program was expanded to include students at the Rhea Hirsch School of Education and the School of Jewish Communal Service; future educators and communal workers would now also spend their first year of study at the Jerusalem School, taking intensive Hebrew language courses in combination with appropriate electives and visits to Israeli schools, social agencies, and educational institutions.

In 1972 the first publication of the Biblical and Archaeological School, *Gezer I*, won international attention. The exhibition of findings from Tel Gezer at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem further enhanced HUC-JIR’s reputation in Israel, reinforced by Dr. Spicehandler’s instituting a broad program of symposia, seminars on religious pluralism, lectures, and daily and holiday services reaching out to the larger public.

In 1973 HUC-JIR’s archaeology school was renamed the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology at a convocation at which an honorary degree was presented to President Zalman Shazar. By 1974, the excavations at Tel Gezer were completed, and more than 1,000 students and volunteers had shared in the ten years of archaeological discovery. For the following decades, virtually every archaeological excavation in Israel had on its staff graduates of the Nelson Glueck School.

In 1974 Dr. Avraham Biran was appointed head of the archaeology program and initiated a new dig at Tel Dan, in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities and Museums. Located at the foot of Mt. Hermon on Israel’s northern border, the 50-acre Tel Dan is the location of the biblical city of Dan and, previously, the Canaanite city of Laish, which was conquered by the ancient Israelites.

A NEW ERA: HUC-JIR marked its centennial in 1975 with various festivities in Jerusalem. An academic convocation was convened in July, and attending were such “old friends” of the College-Institute as Golda Meir, Avraham Harman of the Hebrew University, and Knesset member Gideon Hausner, former prosecutor of the Eichmann Trial. An honorary degree was conferred upon President Ephraim Katzir, who delivered an impassioned call for religious pluralism on this occasion.

This year also saw the inauguration of the Jerusalem School’s Israeli Rabbinical Program, which trains Israeli students for the nation’s growing Progressive Movement. Dr. Gottschalk took this historic step out of the conviction that an Israeli-born and educated rabbinate could best address the nation’s need for, and expanding interest in, liberal forms of Judaism. “We need to train rabbis in the environment in which they are to serve,” says Dr. Gottschalk. “This is what caused Isaac Meyer Wise to open Hebrew Union College in America, and it’s why we created the Israeli Rabbinical Program in Israel.”

In February 1980, before an audience of hundreds, Mordechai Rotem, a 33-year old sabra from Haifa, became the first Israeli ordained by President Gottschalk at HUC-JIR in Jerusalem. “We knew with Moti’s ordination that the program was truly up and running,” recalls Dr. Gottschalk. “This was the beginning of something truly significant for the Progressive Movement and the State of Israel.”

In 1981 Dr. Michael L. Klein, a noted scholar of Targum, succeeded Dr. Ezra Spicehandler as Dean of the Jerusalem School and further expanded the College-Institute’s outreach to the general Israeli community. Under his leadership, the school advanced from an American “island” in Jerusalem into part of the cultural and educational fabric of the city, as well as a vital link between American and Israeli Jewry.

Inspired by the vision of Dr. Gottschalk and Richard J. Scheuer, Chair of the Board of Governors (1983-1990) and the Jerusalem School Building Committee, the Board of Governors embarked on a building program to expand the Jerusalem campus. It was designed by the internationally renowned architect Moshe Safdie, whose model provided for the construction, in stages, of an archaeology center, a classroom building, and a library. In October 1983 the Jerusalem School marked its 20th anniversary by breaking ground for the major expansion on the four-acre site adjacent to the original HUC-JIR buildings.

November 1986 saw the dedication of the Skirball Center for Biblical and Archaeological Research and the Skirball Museum (a “site museum” where artifacts were presented in their Biblical and historical contexts), the Academic Center’s classrooms and faculty facility (later dedicated as the Dr. Bernard Heller Torah Center), and the World Union for Progressive Judaism’s adjacent Beit Shmuel Youth Center/Hostel (serving as a cultural center and home base for American Reform Youth groups on their visits to Jerusalem). Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir addressed the gala banquet at the Knesset during these celebrations, and Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek was awarded an honorary doctorate. “We could not have done anything in Jerusalem without the caring, nurturing spirit of Mayor Teddy Kollek, who was vitally important in the physical expansion of the campus,” said Dr. Gottschalk. “Nothing happens if the establishment doesn’t want it to happen, and Teddy fought with us and for us.”

Richard J. Scheuer’s leadership and the S. H. and Helen R. Scheuer Family Foundation’s generous support made possible the new facilities at the Jerusalem School, and seventeen members of the Scheuer family participated in the dedication convocation. Hailed as among the most beautiful buildings in the city, the expanded HUC-JIR campus provided much needed space to expand its archaeological, academic, and outreach programs.

The 1980s saw additional milestones that cemented the Jerusalem School’s importance for the worldwide Progressive Movement and the land of Israel. Five more Israelis were ordained who played instrumental roles in bringing the message of Liberal Judaism and religious pluralism to the Israeli people, and also served as leaders in the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism and the World Union for Progressive Judaism. A Jerusalem Board of Overseers was founded, with distinguished attorney S. Zalman Abramov, former Deputy Speaker of the Knesset, serving as Chairman; Dr. Ephraim Katzir, former President of Israel, as Honorary Chairman; and such prominent Israelis as Haim Cohen, former Chief Justice of Israel’s Supreme Court, and Gideon Hausner as members of the Board. “The Board was composed of individuals who wanted to create a vibrant modern Judaism side-by-side with a vibrant modern Zionist theology,” says Dr. Gottschalk.

In 1986 cantorial students joined their rabbinical and education classmates for the required Year-in-Israel, their Hebrew language classes enhanced by field research and special courses in Jewish music and liturgy. An Early Childhood Center for three- to five-year olds

| 1 | 1980 | Mordechai Rotem is the first Israeli to be ordained by President Gottschalk at HUC-JIR/Jerusalem. |
| 2 | 1981 | Dr. Michael Klein, the new Dean, teaching a class of Year-In-Israel students. |
| 3 | 1983 | Architect Moshe Safdie presents his model for the expansion of the campus. |
| 4 | 1980s | Israeli Air Force aerial photograph of HUC-JIR’s archaeological excavations at Shiqmim in the northern Negev desert. |
| 5 | 1986 | Richard scheuer, Chairman of the Board of Governors, chaired and coordinated the week of dedications of the expanded campus. |
was established at the request of more than 50 young Israeli parents, strengthening the reach of the Israel Progressive Movement to the youngest generation.

During the 1980s, HUC-JIR’s archaeological excavations expanded to the Chalcolithic sites at Gilat and Shiqmim in the Negev, under the direction of Dr. Thomas Levy, Assistant Director of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, and saw the publication of additional volumes documenting the digs at Tel Gezer.

The S. Zalman and Ayala Abramov Library was dedicated in March 1988 (HUC-JIR’s 25th anniversary in Israel) and two major library acquisitions were announced: Dr. Fritz Bamberger’s Spinoza collection and the personal library of biblical archaeologist Yigael Yadin. Honorary degrees were presented to President Yitzhak Navon, Amos Oz, and Vice Premier Shimon Peres.

The Jerusalem Community Choir, comprised of cantorial students and singers from the Jerusalem community, was formed in 1989. By 1991, the municipality provided an elementary school building for the graduates of the Early Childhood Center, whose young children and parents remain a vital entity on the HUC-JIR campus to the present day.

The Year-In-Israel students played a special role in demonstrating the Zionist commitment of the North American Reform Movement to Israel during the Persian Gulf War of 1991. A group of students remained on campus, saying, “We are Zionists. We understand a commitment to social justice and personal conscience to be at the fore of Reform Judaism, and thus are compelled to stay.” Together with HUC-JIR’s faculty and administration, they assisted in the distribution of personal protection kits, including gas masks and atropin, to high school students in Israel in programs organized by the Reform Movement, to the ALYN Rehabilitation Center for handicapped children, to foreign guests at Beit Shmuel, and to HUC-JIR alumni and their families on sabbatical in Israel. The students helped the elderly and handicapped in sealing off their rooms against the threat of gas attack, continued their studies, conducted worship services, and met on campus with scholars and Israeli leaders, including Mayor Teddy Kollek, Dr. Gottschalk, URJ President Rabbi Alexander Schindler, and Stanley Gold, Chair of the Board of Governors.

During scud attacks, the HUC-JIR community shared its shelter with Soviet and South American immigrants who were on campus for ulpan classes, and with Jewish, Christian, and Moslem scholars and clergy during an Israel Interfaith Association seminar on campus. Those members of the first-year class whose young children and other family responsibilities compelled their return to the United States volunteered at Jewish communal agencies, assisted in fund raising for Soviet Jewish absorption in Israel, and maintained close contact with their Jerusalem classmates. Most of the class returned to Israel by mid-February.

In 1992 the ordination of the first female Progressive rabbi in Israel, Rabbi Naamah Kelman, caused a stir among the Orthodox community and received a great deal of public attention. “The Israeli press was amazed by us,” says Dr. Gottschalk. “Here were rabbis who spoke...”
modern thoughts and wanted to create a new kind of Jewish leadership in Israel, one that had a place for women alongside men. With the ordination and the beginning of the influx of women into the Israeli rabbinate, the school changed most dramatically.”

In 1992 HUC-JIR also launched a certificate program to train Russian immigrants as communal leaders. During the next four years, over 12,000 new immigrants participated in HUC-JIR’s ulpan.

The Skirball Museum developed an innovative program for blind visitors in 1992, and *Dan - 25 Years of Excavations* and the *Biran Festschrift* were published. On July 21, 1993 Dr. Biran made a sensational discovery at Tel Dan that was covered on the front page of *The New York Times*. A fragment of a basalt stele, dated to the 9th century BCE, was inscribed with 13 truncated lines of Aramaic text that mentioned a “King of Israel” and a king of the “House of David” – the first mention of the House of David outside of the Bible.

By 1994, the campus had embarked upon in-service courses for primary and high school teachers that reflected HUC-JIR’s liberal and pluralistic tradition. In 1996 the Ministry of Religious Affairs signed an agreement entitling HUC-JIR’s rabbinical, cantorial, and education students to government subsides similar to those granted to Orthodox yeshiva students, but this agreement was reversed in the following years.

Dr. Michael Klein was succeeded by Dr. Michael Marmur, a 1992 ordinee of the Israeli Rabbinical Program, who was appointed Dean of the Jerusalem campus in July 1998. This past decade has seen the rise of new programmatic directions and the vibrant development and growth of HUC-JIR in Israel, as reported in the following articles by Dr. Marmur and Rabbi Naamah Kelman, Associate Dean.

1 | 1986  The Early Childhood Center introduces young Jerusalem families to Progressive Judaism.

2 | 1991  Year-In-Israel students wearing gas masks in the campus shelter during the Persian Gulf War.

3 | 1992  Rabbi Naamah Kelman is ordained as the first Reform woman rabbi in Israel.

4 | 1993  A stele fragment discovered at Tel Dan, inscribed with Aramaic text, with the first mention of the House of David outside of the Bible.

5 | 1994  Dr. Paul M. Steinberg, HUC-JIR Vice President, Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, and Leo and Julia Forchheimer dedicating the Forchheimer Courtyard.

6 | 1997  Year-In-Israel students overlooking the Old City.

7 | 1997  Ruth O. Freedlander (center), Co-Trustee of the Dr. Bernard Heller Foundation, dedicating the Dr. Bernard Heller Torah Center.

8 | 2006  Rabbi Ellenson teaching the Year-In-Israel students.

9 | 2007  President Shimon Peres is greeted by Barbara Friedman, Chair, Board of Governors, and Rabbi Ellenson at a meeting with the Board of Governors in Jerusalem.

10 | 2007  The Israeli Rabbinical Class of 2007 at Ordination.
Sixty years. Six decades of building and struggling and searching for a way to live together – Jews with Arabs, and no less challenging, Jews with Jews. HUC-JIR/Jerusalem has been a beacon of Progressive Jewish values, emitting its light onto the Jerusalem landscape for 45 of those 60 years. What kind of impact have we had, and what role can HUC-JIR/Jerusalem play in Israel’s next sixty years?

Archaeology
In the early years, the College-Institute mainly served as an institute of archaeology, offering West Jerusalem the possibility of a centrally located research hub. Archaeology was our way into Jerusalem, and sixty years later we can reflect with pride on some outstanding achievements in this field. As I write these words, we are waiting for the final decision of a committee considering the designation of our site at Tel Dan on Israel’s Northern border as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

So much has changed in Israeli archaeology since the school was established. Now in 2008, we are engaged in reviewing and re-imagining the role that our Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology should play. What does the future hold for the study of the past? There are a number of possibilities: for example, HUC-JIR/Jerusalem has become a leader in the emerging field of Community Archaeology, in which local residents are encouraged to learn about their communities. Projects in Lod and Modi’in are providing a model for this approach, and this may prove to be an important new direction (see page 26).

The Year-In-Israel Program
In 1970 the decision was made to bring all stateside rabbinical students for a year of study in Jerusalem, and later, students from the School of Sacred Music (SSM), Rhea Hirsch School of Education (RHSOE), and New York School of Education (NYSOE) were included as part of this policy. Hundreds of students – the current spiritual leadership of the Reform Movement in North America – have spent their first year in Israel. This fact has made a major impact on the face of Reform Judaism and of Israel-Diaspora relations.

For the second year, the American students have been joined by their first-year peers from the Leo Baeck College in London, England, and the Abraham Geiger Kolleg in Potsdam, Germany. The Year-In-Israel Program comprises five key components: studies of the Hebrew language (Biblical and modern); a basic grounding in the Jewish texts (particularly Bible, prayers, the Talmudic literature, and Jewish history); the Israel experience; community building; and professional and personal development. One day each week, Israeli society in all its diversity becomes a classroom, as the students explore aspects of the Jewish State.

Through this encounter the students are encouraged to assume spiritual, educational, and communal leadership in the Diaspora, and to address key issues in Jewish identity that emerge through the unique context of the Jewish state and the Jewish-majority society it maintains. Through various avenues of learning, including textual study, film, independent research, and field trips, students explore Israeli society and culture, the complex history of Zionism and the State of Israel, and the social and political challenges facing Israel. This experience deeply imprints itself on the students’ development as spiritual leaders in the Diaspora, strengthens their connection to Israel and Israeli society, and helps shape their Jewish identity.

The Israeli Rabbinical Program
For over three decades the Israeli Rabbinical Program has trained Israeli men and women to serve in rabbinical positions in the congregations and institutions of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ), and in numerous other bodies active in Israeli society in the fields of education, community, spiritual counseling, and social justice. The graduates of the program have exerted a profound influence on the character of the IMPJ through their social and religious values, their spiritual charge, and their capabilities.

The curriculum seeks to expose students to the roots of our ancient heritage, while providing tools for coping with the challenges of the present and the dilemmas of the future. The program is currently based on a four-year cycle, although a recent proposal approved by the Jerusalem Board of Overseers would see it move to a five-year model.
Israeli rabbinical studies include a wide range of subjects in the fields of Jewish and human studies, professional rabbinical training, training in the fields of education and spiritual counseling, specialization in one of the fields of Jewish studies, and addressing the philosophical and value-based issues raised by the fundamental questions of Jewish and Israeli existence and by issues in the field of faith and religion. Special emphasis is placed on the personal, spiritual, and professional development of the students; on nurturing their unique individual approaches and voices; and on inculcating a sense of responsibility for their own development as spiritual guides and mentors.

The number of students in the program has risen steadily in recent years. There are now some fifty graduates, constituting a majority of the members of the Council of Progressive Rabbis in Israel (Maram) (see page 25). These rabbis are working to develop new ways for Israelis to express their Judaism and apply the values of justice, equality, and tolerance. We sense that a broad spectrum of Israeli society is looking for modern, up-to-date, and progressive ways to express its Judaism, and sees the IMPJ as the natural address for doing so. The main challenge facing the graduates of the program is to answer, enrich, and encourage this search.

In recent years, the students joining the program have come from a diverse range of backgrounds, communities, and population groups, including circles that have until now tended to be less involved in Progressive Jewish activities and leadership. The extraordinary variety, versatility, and quality of these students need to be seen and experienced to be believed!

Education and Professional Development

The issue of education is at the forefront of Israel’s concerns. It is generally agreed that the education system is in crisis, and the extraordinary human potential – our only natural resource – is not getting the education it deserves. Since Rabbi Naamah Kelman, the first woman to be ordained in Israel, became a member of the HUC-JIR/Jerusalem team a decade ago, we have made significant strides forward as we strive to play a meaningful role in the struggle to establish Pluralistic Jewish Education in Israel.

A new program introduced this year is a specialization in pluralistic Jewish education under the auspices of the M.A. program at the Melton Education Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This program is run jointly with the Education Department of the IMPJ and the Lorry Lokey International Academy of Jewish Studies. The Department of Educational and Professional Development also runs seminars for educators from around the Jewish world, and for congregations in search of high-level consultancy and assistance. Affiliated with this Department is the Pedagogic Workshop, a center specializing in topics related to Jewish tradition and Israeli culture. While including all the usual elements of a pedagogic center, the Workshop...
focuses on the development of unique curricula relating to Israeli-Jewish cultural themes within the formal curriculum of Israeli schools. The Workshop staff works with and provides individual support for diverse clients, including principals, subject coordinators, school staff, pre-school teachers, and students.

Pastoral Care

One of the most exciting fields in which HUC-JIR/Jerusalem is now involved is that of pastoral care and spiritual support. Only ten years ago, these terms were a mystery to Israelis. Now, increasing numbers of Israelis are looking for ways to turn to Jewish sources for strength and succor.

The Blaustein Center for Pastoral Care is developing the field of spiritual counseling in Israel and supports the professional training of Israeli rabbinical students. The Center runs two unique programs in the field of spiritual counseling open to students from inside and outside the Reform Movement. The first class of graduates of the Mezorim program completed its studies in the summer of 2008. This intensive four-semester program combines academic study of Jewish texts, the development of tools for support and counseling, and profound spiritual introspection. The program trains spiritual counselors who bring a wide range of approaches and techniques for use in the community and in therapeutic and medical institutions.

Another program, “Aspects of Life and Healing,” is developing an innovative approach to the teaching of classical and sacred texts. This year, Mapah is running a Beit Midrash program for senior citizens.

Where Now?

There is much activity at HUC-JIR/Jerusalem. There are concerts, lecture series, special learning events, exhibitions, seminars in Tel Aviv and Haifa, a Hebrew ulpan, the Murstein Synagogue, the Abramov Library. Even more than the programs currently in place, the Jerusalem team is constantly searching for new ways to be relevant and significant in today’s Israel. An extraordinary teaching faculty and an entrepreneurial management team aim to put HUC-JIR/Jerusalem at the heart of what is best about Israel.

As we salute Israel at sixty, HUC-JIR/Jerusalem strives to provide Israeli society with a coherent liberal alternative; to be a living bridge between Israel and the Diaspora; and to train leaders capable of effecting change in congregations and institutions.

If the founder of the Hebrew Union College, Isaac Mayer Wise, were to pay a visit to the Jerusalem branch of his institution, much would seem strange. Since Wise’s death in 1900, the world has undergone some of the most radical upheavals in history. Rabbi Wise would probably have been alarmed at the thought of a college operating in a sovereign Jewish State with Jerusalem as its capital. After all, it was Wise who said: “We think it about as well to let the old Jerusalem rest under the accretion of ages as it is described in the Bible and Josephus. The consequences to mankind cannot be found under the rubbish of 2,000 years.”
This was and remains the historic “watershed” moment for Reform Judaism in Israel. So looking back over the past 22 years, and particularly over the past ten, one can only be deeply grateful and humbled by the incredible opportunity to help grow an indigenous Israeli Progressive Movement through the graduates of our Israeli Rabbinical Program and other programs; create deep bonds between our students and the State of Israel in general and our Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism in particular; become an international Jewish address for Reform Jews for a variety of educational and enrichment programs; and slowly earn our landmark status in Jerusalem as a hub of events and activities.

In 1986 Michael Marmur and I were first-year students in the small Israeli Rabbinical Program. Five rabbis had been ordained by then, and each had tackled the challenge to forge a Movement. They faced almost impossible conditions of limited budgets, hostile religious establishments, and often cynical secular Israelis. They, the Israeli rabbinical students following their lead, and others who joined their ranks from sister seminaries, poured their energies and passions into changing Israeli Judaism by shaking it from its pat religious/secular bifurcation while creating compelling alternatives.

As students, we dreamed together how we would “run the Institutions of Reform Judaism” when one day we took leadership positions. In 1998, when Rabbi Michael Marmur was appointed Dean, he was the first graduate of the Israeli Rabbinical Program to take this position. Now was the moment to transform the Jerusalem School and its programs and to fill the beautifully enlarged campus to full capacity and really turn its face to Israel.

Under Michael Marmur’s visionary leadership over these ten years, a series of dramatic processes and changes were put in motion. First, the Year-In-Israel Program was redefined, placing the Israel Experience at the center as every Wednesday became Israel Seminar Day. Hebrew and foundational text courses remained the building blocks of the program, with a growing emphasis on community building and first steps in professional development. Second, the Israeli Rabbinical

A Decade of EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

Rabbi Naamah Kelman, Associate Dean; Director, Year-In-Israel Program, HUC-JIR/Jerusalem

In the fall of 1986, the College-Institute in Jerusalem celebrated the dedication of its new and expanded campus. President Alfred Gottschalk, Dean Michael Klein, and Chairman of the Board of Governors Richard Scheuer, had positioned the campus in its rightful and worthy place. Situated at the intersection where the ancient Jerusalem calls to the modern Jerusalem, literally and figuratively where East meets West, Old meets New, nothing could define the vision of Reform Judaism for Israel better than that meeting place. Now, the incoming first-year rabbinical, cantorial, and education students from our stateside campuses would have a real campus and a home away from home. Now, the Nelson Glueck School of Archeology could find its rightful place, where its research center and museum could tell the story of Tel Dan and other biblical sites. Now, a beautiful Abramov Library could serve scholars and students from all over. Now, the Beit Shmuel Youth Hostel and Cultural Center, adjacent to HUC-JIR and under the auspices of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, could launch the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism.
Program was greatly strengthened by the appointment of Dr. Yehoyada (Yoki) Amir as its Director, thus allowing for a complete overhaul of the academic program and the addition of a serious professional development component to the program. In the process, the student body was tripled over time. Third, with more students available and eager for engagement, the Year-In-Israel and the Israeli Rabbinical Programs could now engage in more substantial encounters. Fourth, two critical areas – both discrete and intrinsic to the other programs – were nurtured and developed: Education and Spiritual Care. Fifth, an international agenda reaching to Europe and the Former Soviet Union was set in motion.

Dean Marmur has elaborated on many of these developments in his article. I would like to turn our attention toward the question of how we push these processes and changes to intensify our impact on North American and Israeli Jewry. Looking at the Year-In-Israel Program in 2008 and beyond, we are now asking the question, how do we keep the Israel Experience compelling to our students, who are becoming our future professionals in an age where Israel is a complex and often confusing place? Ironically, as the Israel Progressive Movement gains more ground, it also uncovers some of the real cleavages in Israeli society, where the growing fundamentalist Orthodox establishment makes our students feel estranged and angry. How can interaction with our Israeli rabbinical students or other serious encounters with Israeli peers bridge the gap? We are very engaged with this question as our students have expressed their desire to feel connected. We want to send them home to North America and Europe as ambassadors for Israel and for a Progressive Israel with which they can wrestle.

Jerusalem, with its demographic changes, remains both enchanting and difficult for our students. But for locals and the greater Israeli society, we must be a beacon of liberal Jewish programs and initiatives. This gem of a campus now pulsates with programs whose impact will be felt in the years to come as we slowly bring forth Israeli rabbis, pastoral support professionals, educators, and more.

Our Israeli rabbinical graduates are trained first and foremost to serve the institutions of our Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, specifically our congregations and educational institutions and other programs. There are now a number of important synagogues throughout the country that need more than one rabbi to serve the growing needs of that area. One fact is irrefutable: wherever dynamic and energetic graduates of HUC-JIR have been put on the ground with reasonable support, it has been transformative. These places include Tel Aviv, Haifa, Modi’in, Jerusalem, and more (see page 25). In addition, our rabbis are leading educational programs with serious impact.

These are just some of the “ordinary” placements in extraordinary circumstances. Building these congregations — with thriving pre-schools, a growing youth movement, and adult education programs — where such models of community previously did not exist for secular Israelis, is one of the small miracles we experience here. We have transformed the notions and practices of bat mitzvah, weddings, baby namings, and funerals. These more personal, inclusive, and affirming rituals are being adopted and integrated into the mainstream by others, in Orthodox and secular settings.

Our pre-Army Mechinah Program in Yaffo, now with some 30 youths and reaching 40 next year, is one of the most exciting and promising year-long leadership programs. These young people are our future, and their role models are our rabbis! The Israel Religious Action Center, where a number of our students are working with Rabbi Gilad Kariv, truly embodies the idea of Israel as a “Light Unto the Nations.”

There is more. Some of our rabbis are serving institutions that are not Reform but reach out to an Israeli secular public searching for connection. Rabbi Mira Regev at Tel Aviv’s
secular Yeshivah is one example. Increasingly, Israelis of diverse backgrounds who are involved in creating community and educational programs are in our Rabbinical Program, and they serve the so-called unaffiliated in frameworks that try to re-define Judaism in Israel. It is crucial that we be a spiritual and intellectual home for these people and their initiatives, even at the risk of their independence. Let us all keep our “eyes on the prize” – the engagement of Israelis in a meaningful Jewish life in the 21st century that embraces pluralism, egalitarianism, and democracy.

Our rabbis are not alone as they forge a new Jewish identity paradigm for Israelis. As Progressive rabbis, they represent a different kind of rabbinate. Some of them are being trained, along with social workers, educators, and nurses, to be the first generation of Spiritual Caretakers (aka Chaplains). We are literally creating the language and the vocation as Israelis turn to this support in times of illness, crisis, and joy. Our students are in health care facilities (hospitals, hospices, rehabilitation centers) that we could not approach a mere four years ago. Some are leading support groups in community settings with texts and techniques previously unknown to Israelis.

This “experiment” has sparked a second track of professional enrichment and training. We are now developing a unique approach to Beit Midrash study where group study of ancient texts, coupled with creative writing and group dynamic techniques will facilitate human development. This will not be an academic approach but rather a place for real spiritual and personal encounter. This is a quiet revolution where the College-Institute is a lead player. Most gratifying is the fact that our stateside colleagues, Professor William Cutter of HUC-JIR/Los Angeles, and Dr. Nancy Wiener of HUC-JIR/New York, have provided invaluable input to the development of our Spiritual Care programs.

Our new Master of Arts in Pluralistic Jewish Education will surely have a great impact on the institutions from which our education stu-

dents come: teachers from our own IMPJ preschools; high school and senior educators from the Leo Baecck Center in Haifa; and our youth movement educators, among others. The M.A. cohort includes educators from secular and even Orthodox institutions. Our faculty is articulating a language and methodology of Jewish education. We now have the capacity to train our people for our institutions. One day soon, an HUC-JIR-trained educator will lead a major high school in Israel, or perhaps head an educational effort in the Israeli Army. This program is another way for HUC-JIR to enter the mainstream in Israel.

All of these programs have placed us in conversations with colleagues and partners, both in the U.S. and Israel, at the epicenter of Jewish renewal and renaissance. Thanks to our deep connections with the World Union for Progressive Judaism, we are also in ongoing dialogue with the leadership in Europe and the Former Soviet Union. Our campus must be an international address for Progressive Jews worldwide. In order to fulfill the promise that every Jew may feel at home here in the Promised Land, Progressive Judaism must thrive. We cannot and must not do it alone. We need a reciprocal flow of ideas between us and the Diaspora – we can and must strengthen each other. This crucial dialogue can take place on our campus and reverberate throughout Israel.

The Torah: A Women’s Commentary, just published by Women of Reform Judaism with the input of scores of our alumni and edited by leading women scholars on our faculty, is just one example of this kind of interchange. When “launching” this groundbreaking new volume here in Israel, it was covered on the front page of the Haaretz newspaper and other important media venues and attracted prominent public attention. The possibility of translating it into Hebrew generated tremendous excitement. These developments and more will make our historic landmark campus the “jewel in the crown” of King David Street…for Jerusalem, for Israel, and for world Jewry.
**Spirit of Reform:**
**VISIONARY RABBIS TAKE THE LEAD IN THE IMPJ**

Leah Kaplan Robins

“Every Israeli Reform rabbi has an unusual path,” says Rabbi Ayala Sha’ashoua-Miron, founding rabbi of Kehilat Bavat Ayin in Rosh HaAyin, Israel, and a recent graduate of the Israeli rabbinical program at HUC-JIR/Jerusalem. Sha’ashoua-Miron refers to the ever-growing cadre of pioneering Reform rabbis (or Progressive, as they are known in Israel) who are building the Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) stone by stone. Progressive Judaism is still largely uncharted territory in Israel, and they must work tirelessly to create a fresh, contemporary, and rich Judaism that speaks to the values and lifestyle of modern Israelis. As a result of their efforts, the Movement is gaining ground and attracting disenfranchised Israeli Jews to tradition in exciting new ways.

Rabbi Ayala Sha’ashoua-Miron came of age in northern Tel Aviv (what is today the suburb Ramat Aviv), the child of Zionists who emigrated from Iraq in the socialist 1950s. Sha’ashoua-Miron’s parents left tradition behind in Iraq when they came to Israel, and she was raised as a product of the secular Israeli metropolis. She says that she never really considered her Jewish identity until she left Israel to pursue a master’s degree in screenwriting at UCLA, and found herself on Yom Kippur eve suddenly longing for home. She found Rabbi Jonathan Omerman’s progressive study center, Metivta – A Center for Jewish Meditation, and for the first time felt the ritual and tradition resonate. Sha’ashoua-Miron acknowledges the irony of her discovery. “My parents left Judaism to come to Israel, and I had to go to the other side of the ocean to find it again, to pick up the suitcases that my parents left behind.”

When Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated 11 years later, Sha’ashoua-Miron and her family decided to return home. After living comfortably as Reform Jews in the U.S., the dearth of liberal options in Israel was deeply disappointing. Rather than compromise, she decided to get involved, resolving that “if I want it to happen in Israel, I need to take responsibility and become a part of it.” After the age of 40, without prior training in Jewish texts or leadership, Sha’ashoua-Miron entered rabbinical school at HUC-JIR. She recalls, “There was so much I needed to learn. This was not in my bones, in my family, but I really thrived on learning something new myself and getting to share it with others.”

A year before her ordination, in November 2005, she helped found and became rabbi of Kehilat Bavat Ayin, the 25th Progressive community in Israel. The congregation is in Rosh HaAyin, a diverse town of 35,000 near Tel Aviv that began as a small Yemenite village. Rosh
HaAyin is a very traditional town steeped in Sephardic religious heritage, yet is slowly adjusting to the liberal values that the congregation brings to the table. The recent election of a secular, non-Yemenite mayor for the first time is illustrative of the tide of change. Kehilat Bafat Ayin attracts a core of 25-30 families and others who come for b’nei mitzvot, holidays, and education. Around 250 people came to worship on Rosh Hashanah. “Gaining momentum, we become more and more a natural part of Rosh HaAyin and people know we are there,” Sha’ashoua-Miron says. Despite the growth, the community must constantly lobby for acceptance by its Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox neighbors, many of whom perceive this new phenomenon in their midst as an infiltration of American Ashkenazzic culture notwithstanding its rabbi’s Iraqi heritage. She is saddened that the community is perceived as a threat since it provides such a valuable service, welcoming secular Israelis who would otherwise have no Jewish practice.

The congregation has been meeting in a local matnas (community center) for over a year, and is vying to receive one of the prefabricated buildings that the government supplies to new synagogues and has only recently agreed to give to Reform congregations. It needs to overcome an additional hurdle – to win approval from the city to use public ground for the building – but has been thwarted because of pressure on the mayor from the Orthodox parties in the municipality. “They want us to be quiet until the end of the election year, but we will not be quiet!” She knows that it may take some time before the Israeli religious right accepts that the Movement is here to stay. In the meantime, she believes in a firm, proud stance. “The word “Reform” is a red flag in Israel. But the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMP) is a Reform community, and we don’t want to hide under the ‘Progressive’ label.”

Sha’ashoua-Miron has found a spiritual home at HUC-JIR, whose Jerusalem campus is one of the most meaningful places in the holy city to her. “HUC-JIR was more of a journey than just going to school,” she says. “It will always occupy a corner in my heart.” She and her classmates continue to learn together once a month with Dr. Michal Muzskat-Barkan, Director of the Department of Education and Professional Development, who was their student advisor. “We feel that when we go out into our rabbinites, we still need the support from our peers.” This year she is giving back as well, teaching a course for first-year students in the Israeli Rabbinical Program.

Though she works to make room for Reform Judaism in Israel, she believes that Jews living in the Diaspora play a very important role in Jewish revival. “When I meet groups I never tell them the Zionist story that you must be in Israel. I tell them that they are needed where they are. I discovered my Judaism in the Diaspora, and it has a very active role in revealing Judaism and creating different phases of Jewish life.”

Rabbi Dr. Edgar Nof represents another non-traditional path to Reform Judaism in Israel. A native of Buenos Aires, Argentina, he was studying to become a Conservative Rabbi before he made aliya in 1982.

Shortly after his move, he attended a lecture that would change his career trajectory. Rabbi Uri Regev, who was then the Director of the Israeli Rabbinical Program and today is the President of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), led a discussion about the status of women in liberal movements. Regev’s passionate account of women’s equality in Reform Judaism inspired him and led him to enroll at HUC-JIR. His classmates were other future Movement leaders, Rabbis Dr. Michael Marmur, Naamah Kelman, and Meir Azari. Shortly after he was ordained, he became director of the Israeli Rabbinical Program (1990-97).

In 1997 Nof moved to Haifa to serve as rabbi of the Ohel Abraham synagogue. In 2000 he became the rabbi of Or Hadash, the largest Reform synagogue in northern Israel, a vibrant congregation that conducts 350 lifecycle ceremonies a year and attracts 150-180 people on a typical Shabbat. There are a quarter of a million Jews in Haifa, and Nof is proud that 8% of them become b’nei mitzvot at Or Hadash. In just half a decade, the number of girls who have a bat mitzvah at the shul has grown from only two or three per year to more than 120-150 annually.

What is most striking about the congregation and Nof’s vision is its tikkan olam (healing the world) agenda, a kaleidoscope of programs designed to meet the needs of Haifa’s ethnically and culturally diverse community. Among many others, the synagogue hosts “Soccer for Peace,” which brings together Christians, Jews, and Muslims to play Israel’s national sport; a pre-school and holiday meal program for Ethiopian immigrants; a “bibliotherapy” program that helps traumatized children deal with emotional problems; and three support groups for more than 50 mothers of children killed by terrorism.

During the recent Second Lebanon War, when Hezbollah Katyusha rockets rained down on Haifa, Or Hadash operated one
of the largest bomb shelters in the city, one of only five in all of Haifa with activities for children. The Union for Reform Judaism-funded initiative provided educational programming for children and families from morning to night for the duration of the war. The synagogue is also the home and spiritual backbone of the only Religious Action Center (RAC) office in Israel’s north, with the first Ethiopian-born lawyer ever to serve in the Movement.

Nof believes that Or Hadash is creating a better Jewish world and that Israeli society desperately needs Reform Judaism to become more pluralistic and egalitarian and more appealing to the younger generation.

In his eyes, the challenges that Reform Judaism faces in Israel are to be expected – change takes time, especially radical change. “I see myself as one of the pioneers,” Nof says. “If you compare the development of Reform Judaism with the birth of the State of Israel, we’re still in the 1880s.”

He believes that the hard work will eventually pay off. “Right now we are 25 Reform congregations up against 6,000 Orthodox synagogues. It will take 200 years to get equal rights in Israel, but it will come. Being realistic, we have to take what we have and make it stronger so that our work will pay off down the line.”

Rabbi Maya Leibovic broke barriers in 1993 as the first Israeli-born woman to become a pulpit rabbi in Israel. American-born Naamah Kelman had been ordained the year before, but to Israelis, a sabra (native-born) of their own entering this office was a landmark event. Leibovich remembers a quip by a local journalist that “now the Reform Movement also has a Rabbi Maya,” a play on the name of an ultra-Orthodox Shas Knesset member, Rabbi Moshe Maya.

For Leibovic, the day when the term “Israeli woman rabbi” was no longer just a dream was a transformative, highly personal moment. She remembers the pride that she shared with the HUC-JIR community and her family on that day, and the “deep sense of coming back home” that she felt. “When I think of my ordination I miss my father who banished God from our home as a result of losing his family during the Holocaust. The personal journey I made at HUC-JIR allowed me to reconnect to Jewish text, prayer, and spirituality and has made me a more complete, whole human being.”

Leibovic has experienced the full spectrum of reactions to her choice, but believes that Israeli public opinion has made progress in the 15 years of her rabbinate. “I think Israel as a society has learned to recognize the different voice of women in the rabbinate and to value their leadership.”

She thinks that her gender is an asset in her career, especially at the congregation that she calls home. Kehilat Mevasseret Zion (known by its acronym, pronounced “Kamaz”), was established the year she was ordained, and the two have matured together. The vibrant, 450-family-strong congregation, which recently built a beautiful new building, took some time to gain acceptance. Leibovic describes some of the worst incidents of the early years, including arson and hate letters, and the tragic loss of a kindergarten teacher in the first Intifada. She doesn’t look back to those times, however, and focuses instead on the synagogue’s present vitality. Under her leadership, Kamaz has nurtured partnerships with other institutions and organizations in the city and has built a very successful social action program called Time Bank. “Our work is admired by both the local municipality and the mayor. No one makes it too easy on us and yet we are a well-known congregation.”

Leibovic revels in the personal aspects of her rabbinical role, “the teaching, sharing in life events, guiding and being guided by others.” She urges American Reform Jews to develop their personal, spiritual connection to their brothers and sisters in the Progressive Movement in Israel. “Please come visit us. Please remember we are one people. Become active partners.”

Rabbi Ofer Sabath Bet-Halachmi was pursuing a Ph.D. in Talmud at the University of Haifa and working for HaMidrashah, an organization that teaches secular Israelis about Judaism, when he decided he wanted more. He was looking for a spiritual connection to his Jewish identity but didn’t know where to look for it in Haifa. He discovered liberal American Judaism for the first time at B’nei Jeshurun in New York, and was inspired by the pluralistic, progressive practice that he felt would really appeal to Israelis.

“My Israeli Jewish identity was always strong, but to explore it in a different way, with people with different perspectives, opened me up. I went immediately to HUC-JIR in Jerusalem and started to study.” He was ordained in the class of 2005 with Ayala Sha’ashoua-Miron and is married to Rabbi Rachel Sabath, NY ’95, who teaches liturgy at
Sabath Bet-Halachmi is passionate about carving out a uniquely Israeli Progressive Judaism. He says that “we need to renew the way we speak in an Israeli way about Jewish questions, to create a Movement that will address the realities of the Israeli social structure.” He came from a pioneer family and was raised on Kfar Vitkin, a moshav near Netanya started by his grandfather with 19 comrades. In recent years, he has watched the strong community structure on which Israel was built unravel in favor of privatization. He believes that Progressive kehilot are the communities of the future, and must play a role in creating new Jewish identities in modern Israel.

His kehillah, Tzur Hadassah, is located on the Israeli edge of the Green Line, 20 minutes south of Jerusalem. The 100-family congregation was founded a decade ago by a tight-knit group of committed Anglo olim and sabras who were exposed to Reform abroad. The emerging community is becoming a popular suburb for young Israeli families, and now supports a growing kindergarten, furthering the membership boom. The congregation is the incubator for Sabath Bet-Halachmi’s unique vision of amplifying tradition with experimentation and diversity. He encourages his congregants to write new music and liturgy, and to participate in a “value-centered community,” in which the Be’it Knesset (worship sanctuary) is just one component among many, and not necessarily the center. “Our community is united by shared Jewish values, but not necessarily in the same space and time,” he says. Some of his congregants want education to give a stronger identity to their kids; others want to study texts, and so join in the Be’it Midrash but rarely come to services; many want to articulate Jewish values through social action. “My congregants who do tikkan olam are dealing with the same spiritual work that others express in worship services,” he says.

This alternative model plays out in a very out-of-the-ordinary building, made of several joined shipping containers. The community must juggle the nursery school, worship, and educational activities in the limited space, and a lot of energy these days goes toward fund raising for a new building. The members want to build a “green,” environmentally-friendly structure that embodies their values of environmental justice.

Weiman-Kelman considers it a privilege to be a Progressive rabbi in Israel, offering an alternative to Israelis for Jewish identity, prayer, and social action. His life as a rabbi is very different than it would have been in America – his congregants speak Hebrew and don’t need a rabbi to translate the Torah for them. Kids who grow up attending Kol HaNeshama don’t go on Birthright Israel trips; they serve in the Israeli Army and are willing to sacrifice their lives for the defense of the Jewish people.

Weiman-Kelman and his colleagues must offer this next generation an alternative to the extremes of Orthodox and secular worldviews. They are in agreement that the Israeli
Progressive Movement must provide a model for community that embraces tradition, Zionism, and humanism, and a Jewish vision for the complex, modern Israeli future.

For two decades, Weiman-Kelman has taught Israeli rabbinical students and North American rabbinical, cantorial, and education students on the Year-in-Israel Program at the College-Institute’s Jerusalem campus. He teaches a “front lines” approach to prayer and liturgy, using his experience in the field to help his students open themselves to prayer and learn to lead from within. “The main message I try to convey is that prayer must be meaningful to you first before you can lead others.” His students learn that finding meaning as they talk to God is a constant struggle, but one that is well worth their while.

Rabbi Meir Azari became executive director of the IMPJ, at age 27, before completing his ordination thesis at HUC-JIR/Jerusalem. He deferred his studies in order to take the post, and may be the only rabbinical student ever to lead the Movement prior to becoming a rabbi. In 1986 the organization was still in its infancy, and Azari built the infrastructure that would become the Religious Action Center and the Departments of Education and Outreach. He is a product of the Progressive Movement’s Leo Baeck School in Haifa, was ordained at HUC-JIR in 1992, and went on to build and lead Kehillat Beit Daniel, the single Reform congregation serving metropolitan Tel Aviv.

Beit Daniel is a thriving, lively community that has Shabbat services and a 500-student preschool network. The congregation’s newest development is Mishkenot Ruth Daniel (MRD), a multi-purpose community center and guest house and in the old city of Jaffa. Opened in April 2007 and built with the sanction and support of the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality and the Tel Aviv Foundation, the 250-bed center offers young people a place to sleep, socialize, study, and volunteer, and to discover Reform Judaism in the midst of the vivid Jaffa port. “Its structure, location, and spirit symbolizes the delicate intersections of diverse segments in Israeli society. As a crossroads between Arabs and Jews, between immigrants and longtime citizens, between the affluent and the less advantaged, between ancient and new, between west and east, Mishkenot Ruth Daniel aims to promote an inclusive, egalitarian, and pluralistic spirit of tikkun olam.”

MRD was designed as an urban hub for the Progressive Movement, and its launch is considered a big milestone. HUC-JIR honored its opening by presenting the Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa, to Gerard Daniel there, the first time such a ceremony took place outside of campus. Azari considers the facility “a dream come true. It holds within it possibilities for the Reform Movement in Tel Aviv and Israel.” Azari developed a passion for the fight for religious freedom in Israel at HUC-JIR, where he had the unique opportunity to be mentored for two years by Haim Cohen, Deputy President of the Israeli Supreme Court and famous for his lifetime battle for human and religious rights. Azari studied one-on-one with Cohen, who he says was an “amazing influence from whom to get my understanding of the Jewish world.” He is deeply involved in the ongoing struggle for recognition by the State. Though he performs hundreds of weddings each year, his congregants still must go to Cyprus for a civil ceremony, because weddings performed by Progressive rabbis are not accepted by the Orthodox Israeli Rabbanut. This situation is deeply insulting, but his committed congregants prefer to be married spiritually and according to their values by Azari than by an Orthodox rabbi sent by the State.

Rabbi Azari wants American Jews to know about the struggles and successes of the Movement in Israel. “In every type of community that exists in Israeli society, Reform rabbis are there and we need your support. There are beautiful developments in Jewish life in Israel, and we hope to have a shared dialogue with our counterparts in America.” He believes that a strong Reform Movement in Israel is vital, not only for Israel, but for the Jewish people at large, and he works to reach out to the millions of potential Reform Jews in Israel who would empower the Movement and its causes with their participation.

Though Azari is often asked to speak to American groups about his advocacy for the Movement, he yearns for the time when he will simply be viewed as “a teacher, not a fighter.” He says, “I want to be perceived as a rabbi with the ability to think and create. We are up against so much but look how much we have accomplished.”

Mordechai Rotem (‘80) served as Rabbi of Or Hadash Congregation in Haifa for over twenty years and currently serves Temple Rodef Sholom in Waco, TX.

Ze’ev Harari (‘82) is Rabbi of Congregation Am Echad (Conservative), Waukegan, IL.

Gil Nativ (‘82) is Rabbi of Magen Avraham Congregation (Conservative) in Omer, near Beer Sheva.

Moshe Yehudai (‘83) served previously in congregations in Israel and in the United Kingdom and is not currently involved in rabbinical work.

Uri Regev (‘86) serves as Coordinator of Ma ram, the Israel Council of Progressive Rabbis, and previously served as Senior Rabbi in Moscow.

Mira Raz (‘01) is Rabbi of Manhattan Congregation in New York and currently researches and teaches Liturgy at HUC-JIR/Jerusalem.

Gregory Kotlar (‘01), the first Russian-speaking graduate of the Israeli Rabbinical Program, currently serves as Coordinator of Ma ram, the Israel Council of Progressive Rabbis, and previously served as Senior Rabbi in Moscow.

Mira Regev (‘05), currently researching a Ph.D in Jewish Mysticism in the United States, has worked in youth, education, and peace initiatives.

Ofer Sabath Bet-Halachmi (‘05) is Rabbi of the Tzur Hadassah Reform Congregation, near Jerusalem.

Ayala Sha’ashoua Miron (‘05) is Rabbi of the Bavit Ayn Reform Congregation in Rosh HaAyin.

Ilana Baird (‘06) is a freelance rabbi and educator in Jerusalem, and serves congregations in the Former Soviet Union.

Ezra Ende (‘06) is Associate Rabbi of Temple Sinai, Pittsburgh PA.

Nava Hefetz (‘06) is Education Director of Rabbis for Human Rights, Israel.

Ofek Meir (‘06) is Rabbi of the Leo Baeck Education Center in Haifa.

Stas Voichkovitch (‘06) is Rabbi of the St. Petersburg (Russia) Reform Congregation.

Corrie Zeidler (‘06) is Rabbi of the Ma’aleh Tivon Congregation in Tivon, in the north of Israel.

Golan Ben Chorin (‘07) is Director of Congregational Learning, Temple Emeth, Chestnut Hill, MA.

Nir Barkin (‘07) is a Rabbi at Yozma Congregation in Modi’in, and Associate to the Dean, HUC-JIR/Jerusalem.

Yishai Ron (‘07) is Rabbi of Yedid Nefesh Congregation in Carmiel.

Moshe Navon (‘07) is a lecturer at David Yellin Teacher’s College and a member of the faculty at the Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum.

Tania Segal (‘07) is Associate Rabbi of Beit Warszawa in Warsaw, Poland.

Silvana Kandel (‘07) is an active partner in Kehillat Shachar in Yokneam, and works as a freelance teacher of Judaism in north Israel.
In the outskirts of the sprawling new town of Modi’in lies a verdant site of great antiquity – Givat Sher. The low hill is covered with wild oak and pistachia and old almond and olive orchards; it is carpeted with daffodils, anemones, and cyclamen in the spring. But there are also strange stone cairns, rock-hewn cisterns, tombs, and stairways to nowhere on Givat Sher. Most of the year the hill is quiet and empty of people, but at Pesach-time and in the month of August, Givat Sher comes alive with hundreds of people of all ages, social groups, and orientations who come to excavate history’s hidden treasure.

The excavation’s young staff is comprised of students from different Israeli universities, working under the auspices of HUC-JIR’s Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology (NGSBA). We have special requirements for our staff; they must be good field archaeologists, but they must also share our sense of mission: to make archaeology more accessible to laypeople and to help the local community achieve a sense of rootedness in its surroundings.

Over the past four seasons of fieldwork, both volunteers and archaeologists have developed a feeling of belonging to Givat Sher. But we remember, and remind others always, that other people belonged to Givat Sher and Givat Sher once belonged to them. Archaeology can and should be a tool of multi-vocality, of multiple, even competing narratives about the past and how the past is “created” to inform the politics and ideologies of the present.

ARCHAEOLOGY IN ISRAEL, THEN AND NOW
There was a time when archaeology was Israel’s national hobby – part of the excitement of building a new country over the foundations of the past. It was one of Zionism’s tools for putting down roots. But as the new nation developed and prospered and its existence became a fact, a new generation of Israelis turned to other fields of interest – often
involving material prosperity and travel. More to the point, many Israelis tired of Zionist slogans and ethnocentricity, feeling that these have contributed to Israel’s ongoing conflict with its Arab neighbors and citizens. Since Israeli archaeology has traditionally been seen as an expression of Zionist ideology, much of the younger generation that grew up in the 1960s and after has shown little interest in the physical remains of Israel’s past. One only has to look at the declining visitation numbers at the country’s archaeological parks.

This does not mean that archaeology has no attraction. But the attraction lies, as it does in many other western countries today, in the study of ancient people and civilizations as a more general search for human origins and a more inclusive curiosity about the mysteries of the past. Nationalistic archaeology is passé, but the adventure of archaeology is definitely “in.”

The adventure of archaeology is the jumping-off point for our Givat Sher Community Archaeology Project, established in the new town of Modi’in. The Nitzanim Elementary School has adopted Givat Sher, which is located within walking distance of the school. Together with the kids, teachers, and parents, we are surveying, excavating, and reconstructing various elements of the site. Our research format has a landscape archaeology orientation, which means that we collect environmental data and investigate agricultural installations, burial features, and inter-site relations. This will be a long-term project that has already expanded to include other parts of the community – the Modi’in municipality and the Society for the Preservation of Nature are full partners.

THE SITE: HORVAT SHER
Horvat Sher (Umm es-Sur in Arabic) was first mentioned in the publication of the British Survey of Western Palestine, conducted at the close of the 19th century. Since then it has been visited by several archaeological surveys who reported various features – stone columns, walls, and strange stone edifices of unknown function.

The results of our own surveys, conducted prior to our excavations, have shown that the site is comprised of several concentrations of archaeological remains. At the lower, western reaches of the site, bordering on a small, gentle valley, we have identified the main settlement area. This is a ruin approximately two to three acres in size, with lots of stone heaps, terrace walls, and at least three water cisterns.

Well-dressed stones can be seen in some of the terrace walls, indicating residential use. Sherd collected from the surface of the site teach us that the place was first settled during the Hellenistic (Hasmonean or Maccabean) period, during which time there existed a thriving village with a synagogue at nearby Umm el Umdan. Umm el Umdan was excavated several years ago by the Israel Antiquities Authority and identified tentatively by the excavators as ancient Modi’in of the Maccabees.

The second period of occupation is the end of the Byzantine period (this is also the period during which the Talmud coalesced). A stone lintel with two crosses carved into it must have belonged to a church, so there was clearly a Christian community here. Were there Jews and Samaritans here too?

The last settlement of the site existed in the medieval period, when it must have been a small farmstead, probably occupied by Muslim peasants. Today the area is a semi-wild olive grove, perhaps planted just prior to the 1948 war by peasants from the neighbouring village of Salbit, who fled with the onset of war (the site of Salbit is now occupied by a religious kibbutz, Sha’alabim).

Our research is still in its infancy. We now have our eye on the hill to the east where all the ruins reported by the explorers of old are found. Here we can make out stone-fenced enclosures and a great many agricultural installations – wine and oil presses, cisterns, terrace walls, and threshing floors. The many stone huts and caves may have been dwellings. The date of these features is unknown, but our work in the coming years should provide answers.

HOW COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY WORKS AND WHO IT WORKS FOR
We have conducted three seasons of full-fledged excavation. Generally we dig with the Nitzanim Elementary School kids in the spring, just before Pesach, and then again in August. So far, approximately 2,500 people have gotten their hands dirty. We estimate return visits at about 20%, though this figure increased toward the end of our last August season. The summer season continued the Nitzanim project but also opened it up to the whole town and to guests from outside the Modi’in area.

The idea of community archaeology is that almost anybody can dig. It takes an hour or two to learn how to use the tools and a couple of days to learn to use
them well. Most people can dig reasonably effectively with just a little tutoring and end up enjoying it immensely. We are careful not to put neophytes into contexts where they might do damage and it is probably true that, here and there, we probably do lose some information to less-than-professional techniques. But we have no doubt that this small sacrifice is worthwhile given the benefits. The Givat Sher dig is serving other communities beyond the Modi’in region, including HUC-JIR’s students and faculty. The students in the Year-In-Israel Program dig in at least two different frameworks. One of these is an enrichment program for students who chose to spend a week in the field, learning the nitty-gritty of how field archaeology works. The other framework is that of the program’s Land of Israel course in which all the students come to dig for a day, to get at least a taste of what archaeology is about. The program is now open to other organizations in Israel and abroad. Our excavations at Tel Dan and Lod now operate according to this model as well, to some extent. An excavation is a great place for building bridges between different constituencies and for just making friends.

WHAT WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE WITH COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY

Over the last few decades, archaeology in Israel has become an elite, academic pursuit. But archaeology should be for people, not just for a select few. Why shouldn’t more people be part of the fun? Moreover, should we academics really be the only ones to determine the research agenda, to ask the questions to be investigated? What we propose is to reverse the roles of the public and the professional; we the archaeologists can be public servants and enjoy a different kind of dialectic. The kids from the Nitzanim Elementary School and the Talmud Torah students ask the research questions and we provide possible paths to arrive at answers. It’s teamwork, rather than hierarchy.

The outcome of this should have positive repercussions for cultural resource management (CRM) in Israel. Funding for archaeology has been cut by the government and a significant part of our historical heritage is being decimated by development and antiquities theft. By creating new cadres of people who enjoy and identify with archaeology we are building a foundation for the future of our field. Archaeological enthusiasts will report and prevent vandalism and support museums and other heritage projects. Perhaps one of our diggers will one day be a government minister. Archaeology can help build community by creating an emotional connection and identity with a place of antiquity. Fieldwork also creates new relationships, often between people with little else in common; it’s like summer camp.

This social dynamic has great potential for conflict management, at least on an interpersonal level. The archaeology of ethnic or national identification has not gone away. It’s still here and it still motivates important sectors of Israeli society. Does this mean that nationalistic archaeology is illegitimate? Not necessarily. Archaeology that identifies with a particular narrative is negative only when it claims exclusivity or sole ownership of the past. We feel that we can accept nationalistic identification and interpretation as long as other narratives are not excluded.

Community archaeology at a site with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim strata is a means of examining competing narratives and those narratives’ implications for the political present. This theme will be especially important in our excavations at Tel Dan and our new project at Lod, where Arabs and Jews have begun working together in the hope of creating a new reality, from under the ground.

We will report on these adventures in future issues of the Chronicle.
2008 ISSUE 71 • 49

The 2006 Dr. Fritz Bamberger Memorial Lecture

WHAT DOES KIRYAS JOEL TELL US ABOUT LIBERALISM IN AMERICA?

Dr. David N. Myers, Professor and Director, UCLA Center for Jewish Studies
Nomi M. Stolzenberg, J.D., Nathan and Lilly Shapell Chair in Law, University of Southern California Law School

David Myers:

How is this that we ended up speaking on the subject of Kiryas Joel in the bastion of Reform Judaism here in New York? I’d like to propose two answers, one genealogical and the other historical. First, there is actually an intriguing family connection at work. Michael Bamberger, son of Dr. Fritz Bamberger and prominent New York lawyer, has written a book entitled Reckless Legislation, whose main theme is the tendency of legislatures, both state and national, to ignore their sworn obligation to uphold the Constitution by enacting legislation that is manifestly unconstitutional. Curiously, and unbeknownst to Nomi and me until several months ago (when he kindly sent us the book), Michael Bamberger discusses at some length the case of Kiryas Joel, New York. In particular, he was interested in and concerned by the creation of a public school district in 1989 in Kiryas Joel, populated exclusively by Satmar children, that became the subject of nearly a decade and a half of litigation. To Michael Bamberger, Kiryas Joel is a clear case in which a legislature, here the New York state legislature, ignored its constitutional obligation to preserve the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment (as well as key provisions of the 1894 Constitutional Convention in New York) by voting overwhelmingly to create a public school district in a town whose population is almost entirely (99%) made up of Satmar Hasidim.

There is a second historical reason why we think it makes sense. I suggested at the outset that the subjects of Dr. Fritz Bamberger’s research – Spinoza and especially Moses Mendelssohn – were pioneers in forging a new path into the modern world. In fact, they were confronting, and to a great extent, embracing what we know of as the process of secularization – that process that entailed a sustained assault on the foundations of traditional religious authority. Logic would dictate, given the power and ubiquity of secularization in the West, that traditional religious affiliation, observance, and leadership would wane from the late 18th century on. But historical experience suggests quite the opposite. Not only has secularism not bested traditionalist forms of religion, it has spawned new forms of traditionalism over the past two centuries – Orthodoxy and ultra-Orthodoxy in the Jewish case, and various incarnations of fundamentalism in the Christian and Islamic cases…

This is hardly an original insight. The great Jerusalem historian, Jacob Katz (with whom David Ellenson studied), investigated this development in his research on Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews in Hungary and Germany. His student, Michael Silber, declared in a classic article that the advent of Orthodoxy in Judaism is “as much a child of modernity and change as any of its ‘modern’ rivals.” (Silber, 24) That is, there was something decidedly new in the self-presentation of this form of Judaism as traditional, authentic, and even anti-modern.

What this suggests to us is that the balancing act of tradition and modernity that gives form to this institution in which we sit tonight engages widely divergent branches of Judaism as well. All of them enter the same prism of secularization, though they exit it at different angles. This point certainly applies to the case of Kiryas Joel, which, on one hand, seems to be caught in a time warp, adhering to a deeply traditionalist form of Judaism, and yet dwells in the midst of a modern, secular, and decidedly liberal ambience.

To give but one example of this dynamic, here is a Kiryas Joel website advertising the community as “a successful (sic) experiment” that rose from the ashes of the Holocaust to
become a modern day municipality at home in America. The KJ Voice website serves as “a clearinghouse for information and communication about the Kiryas Joel community” – principally toward the world outside of the village. This informational website is a reflection of the community’s desire to speak the language of the surrounding society, and as such, reflects a certain degree of assimilation. And yet, it is also necessary to mention that recreational use of the Internet by residents of Kiryas Joel, along with the use of television and radio, is forbidden. The Internet, TV, and radio are deemed to be dangerous seductions in a community intent on assuring strict adherence to the norms of Jewish law, as well as to clearly demarcated boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

Herein lies the enigma of Kiryas Joel, and other such Orthodox communities (including New Square, Monsey, and Lakewood, among others) on the American landscape. How do they assure boundary maintenance, as the sociologists would have it, while permitting the kind of economic and political interaction essential to their survival? The challenges are many, the vectors of change are constant, and hermetic insularity is very difficult to preserve. One intriguing illustration is this Internet chat room for Satmar Hasidim, including messages from residents of Kiryas Joel on an array of topics – this, of course, in defiance of the ban on home Internet use (and, even more audaciously, on an Israeli website, given the ferocious anti-Zionism of the Satmar Hasidim).

And yet, despite this example, we’d be missing the big picture if we didn’t grasp that Kiryas Joel has survived and, in fact, flourished – as an illiberal sub-community in a larger liberal society. How is this so? Indeed, why has America been so receptive to such a community? This is the question that Nomi will address in her remarks. What I’d like to do in my remaining time is answer the question of what about the Satmar community explains the success of Kiryas Joel.

Nomi and I tend to think of KJ as an “American shtetl” – American in its demand for free religious expression, as well as in its sense of entitlement to engage the political process to advance its interests. But it is also a shtetl, a densely concentrated Jewish town, indeed, more dense and homogenous than many of the towns and cities of pre-War Europe in which Jews dwelt. Let’s have a look at the 2000 United States census. Kiryas Joel’s population of 13,138 (five years later, it is probably closer to 18,000) is 99% white. Apart from a smattering of Latino and African-American, and a small number of Polish nannies, this is an almost exclusively Satmar Hasidic village. We see further evidence of this when we read that 93.7% of the village of Kiryas Joel speaks a language other than English at home. Overwhelmingly, that language is Yiddish, which is spoken not only at home, but on the streets, in businesses, and at schools.

Yet another defining feature of the community is its poverty. We see that 61.7% of the community (as opposed to the national average of 9%) lives below the poverty line – a striking contrast to the general picture of American Jewish affluence. And yet, it is important to add that there is little hunger and no homelessness in the community. For there is an extensive network of volunteer and government social service organizations that provides health and child care, as well as food for the needy.

A final feature of KJ that I’d like to bring to your attention from the census is the community’s educational record. Fewer than 3% of the villagers hold a bachelor’s or graduate degree – about as alien a prospect in today’s Jewish world as could be (where 55% of all adults and 80% of those under 35 have college degrees). This does not mean that education isn’t taken very seriously. Indeed, half of the community is enrolled in primary and secondary schools. Moreover, hundreds, perhaps even thousands, more adults are employed as teachers or other kinds of workers in the Kiryas Joel schools. But here it is important to add: not in the Kiryas Joel Union Free School District that was the subject of so much intense legal scrutiny. That school has about 300 special needs children. Rather, the schools that educate and employ thousands in Kiryas Joel are the private heder, yeshivas, and kollels of the community.

Education is not only a key economic pillar of the KJ economy; it also is an organizing principle of the community. This commitment to Torah education stands alongside other key criteria – ethnic homogeneity, linguistic difference, and, of course, a shared ritual regimen – to create an intense cohesiveness that undergirds the village. To be sure, there are other Orthodox communities – nearby Monsey or New Square, the Tasher community in Canada, Lakewood, NJ – that share some or all of these qualities. But there is at the same time a distinctive Satmar way that helps explains the ambition and success of this unique American shtetl.

To retrace the path to this unusual community, we must venture back to that region of Central Europe known as the Unterland of Hungary (in the northeast quadrant of that country). This region became, in the wake of the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the First World War, part of Romania (according to the Treaty of Trianon). It was there, at the crossroads of East and West, proximate to but separate from the most potent modernizing forces found in Budapest, Vienna, Prague, and Berlin, that ultra-Orthodoxy was born in the last third of the 19th century.

One of the most distinguished rabbinic families in this region was the Teitelbaum family, whose ancestor, Rabbi Moses Teitelbaum, known as the “Yismach Moshe,” had settled in the region in the early 19th century. The son of Moses Teitelbaum made his way to the town of Sighet, which became an important center of Hasidic activity (and is the birthplace of Elie Wiesel, among others). Of greatest interest to us is that from the Teitelbaum line came a young Talmud prodigy, born in 1887, who was known for his stringent piety and charismatic demeanor. This young man, Joel Teitelbaum, also known as Reb Yoelish, served as rabbi in a number of Unterland communities before becoming
rabbis of the Romanian town of Satu Mare (previously called Szatmar) in 1928. There, he assembled a legion of reverential adherents who became the first Satmar Hasidim.

Unlike Kiryas Joel, Satu Mare did not consist either exclusively of Satmar Hasidim or, for that matter, of Jews. The more than 15,000 Jews in town represented about a third of the population, and were divided among Hasidim, Orthodox, “status quo,” Neolog, and Zionist factions. Relations could be and were at times strained among these factions. For example, the Hasidim of Satmar regarded the more mainstream Orthodox with disdain—indeed, as lax in warding off the seductions of modern life; but they held in even greater contempt the advocates of Zionism, who were responsible, according to Reb Yoelish, for the “greatest form of spiritual impurity in the entire world.” Time does not permit more discussion of this important feature of Satmar ideology. But it does remind us that, from the group’s birth, there was a combative quality, borne of the Satmars’ unique sense of pietistic virtue, that was largely directed against fellow Jews.

That quality, itself an important ingredient in the Satmars’ sense of cohesion and desire for insularity, stands alongside another striking and rather surprising trait: the group’s accommodationist stance toward Gentile authorities. By accommodationism, I mean a willingness to engage local and regional political leaders in order to advance the group’s interests. We see a curious reflection of this approach in the following picture of the Satmar Rebbe greeting Romanian King Carol II in 1937. Out of this blurry picture emerges more than the quietistic submission of a Jewish leader to a Gentile monarch. Rather, this encounter bespeaks a certain political sagacity, an instrumental view of the value of cordial and respectful relations with the ruling polity that is deeply rooted in the culture of modern Jewish traditionalists, and particularly the Satmar Hasidim.

The fruits of such accommodationism were not destined to reach full maturity in Europe. In 1944, a mere decade after the Reb Yoelish was elected Rabbi of Satu Mare, the Nazis reached the Hungarian Unterland, tearing asunder the fabric of Jewish life and community. In an act of remarkable irony, the Satmar Rebbe’s life was saved by a Zionist, the controversial Rudolf Kaszner, who arranged for the safe passage of 1,684 Jews to neutral Switzerland in December 1944. From there, Rabbi Teitelbaum made a brief sojourn to Palestine before arriving in the fall of 1946 to American shores. It was here, in the United States, that the Satmar experiment achieved a measure of success scarcely imaginable in Europe...

On the face of it, America would seem singularly inhospitable to their aspirations. Would not the robust American commitment to individual liberties trump the collective impulse of the Satmar? If not that, wouldn’t the separation of church and state prevent the rise of a strong Satmar community?

The evidence moves in the opposite direction. The Satmar Rebbe arrived in America and quickly made his way to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which was transformed, in no small part due to his impact, into a center of ultra-Orthodox life in America. In a matter of a few decades, the Rebbe succeeded in reconstituting and, in fact, far surpassing his original community. From dozens of followers in the late 1940s, the Rebbe presided over the spectacular growth of the community to between 40,000-50,000 in Brooklyn alone (and an estimated 100,000 worldwide). This growth was facilitated not only by the kind of social cohesion that the Satmars’ strict ritual observance mandated, but also by a number of principles rooted in the European old world: 1) the above-mentioned combativeness vis-à-vis other Jewish groups (and, we might add, toward dissenters from within); 2) the commanding authority of the Rebbe (as memorialized in the 1952 bylaws of the Yetev Lev synagogue; and 3) as time wore on, a willingness to engage secular political authorities to advance the community’s interests. It was this last task that the Rebbe entrusted to a series of advisors—known in Jewish tradition as shadlanim, intercessors—in men like Lipa Friedman and Leibush Lefkowitz whose job it was not only to manage communal affairs, but to deal with politicians and government officials on behalf of the community.

Over time, the community has proven to be remarkably successful in securing government benefits—loans, grants, housing, social services—to provide for its tens of thousands of members. To be sure, it has not been pure altruism on the part of New York city and state officials. The Satmar Hasidim were (and are) possessed of an extraordinarily valuable asset—the ability to produce a single bloc of votes in the thousands—that commands the attention of politicians.

And yet, for all of their success in building up their community, the Satmar faced constant shortages of space for their rapidly expanding families—and more menacingly, the challenges of a multi-ethnic urban environment surrounding them in Brooklyn. As a result, Reb Yoelish early on contemplated the prospect of establishing a Satmar enclave outside of the city—first, in Staten Island, then Mt. Olive, New Jersey, and finally in 1974, in Monroe Township, New York, about 55 miles from New York City. It was in that year that some forty Satmar families came at Reb Yoelish’s urging and exercised their basic right to purchase property. A few years later, the group numbered over 500 and, as a community of 500 people, exercised its right under New York state law to seek recognition as a municipality. Notwithstanding resistance from some local neighbors who feared the ultimate development of a Hasidic city, the Satmar residents won the right to municipal recognition, and in 1977, Kiryas Joel, the Village of Joel, was officially born.

The Satmar Rebbe did not have long to revel in the explosive growth of the community. He died in 1979. But as we know, Kiryas Joel survived his death, and has grown over three decades into a large, ethnically homogeneous, Yiddish-speaking ultra-Orthodox town—on American soil. At the end of tonight’s talk, we will see how the source of the community’s success may also be the source of its undoing. But for now, I will pass the baton to Nomi, who will address more directly the question of how Kiryas Joel could have arisen on the landscape of American liberalism.
Nomi Stolzenberg:

So, David has addressed the question of what it is about Satmar culture that has made it so remarkably adaptable to American culture, notwithstanding its professed aspiration of resisting assimilation to outside cultural norms. I’m going to look at the other side of the coin: what it is about American liberalism that has proven to be so receptive to a community like the Satmars? Our argument is that the Satmars have succeeded not despite but because of the liberal democratic nature of American society. This is a contention that flies in the face of the common understanding of modern secular liberalism. Since the dawn of modernity and the attendant rise of liberalism as the dominant political philosophy in the West, the expectation has been that liberalism, with its doctrines of secularism and individualism, would spell the demise of traditional forms of community and religious faith. Communitarians and religious critics of liberalism have continuously voiced alarm about the impending dissolution of traditional belief-systems and ways of life. Conversely, many liberal secularists have celebrated the emancipation of the individual from the shackles of traditional religious authority. Others, less aggressively secularist, have still insisted on the retreat of religion from the public realm into the domain of private conscience and individual belief, where it would be shorn of any coercive force. Whether radical or moderate in their secularism, virtually everyone in the liberal world believed until fairly recently that they were presiding over the burial of traditional forms of faith, community, and authority.

Yet our claim is that far from preventing the establishment of religiously grounded forms of political community, liberal principles of individual rights have positively enabled the formation and perpetuation of strong communities like Kiryas Joel. This may seem counterintuitive. After all, the classic liberal model of religious faith is one in which individual choice is paramount, and in which religion is deprived of the powers of collective governance. Yet we mean to demonstrate precisely the opposite: that the establishment of political institutions and the assumption of the powers of government by a religious community take place in accordance with, and with the active support of, liberal norms. In fact, the individual rights safeguarded in a liberal political order provided the building blocks for the Satmar community – and those same rights serve as potential building blocks for other religious communities with similar aspirations.

The legal controversies surrounding the Satmars of KJ provide a particularly illuminating window into this claim, especially the case of Kiryas Joel v. Grumet that made its way to the Supreme Court in 1994. It’s important to clarify what the Supreme Court actually decided in this case, which involved a constitutional challenge to the establishment of a public school district in Kiryas Joel. By a majority of 6-3, the Court held that the New York state statute authorizing the creation of the KJ school district – a statute known as Chapter 748 – constituted an establishment of religion in violation of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution, because it violated the principle of separation between church and state. And yet, what the Court held was actually very narrow, and the reasoning left ample room for passing new state legislation re-authorizing the Kiryas Joel School District.

So what exactly did the Supreme Court hold? The constitutional defect that it found in Chapter 748 was based on two principles, each of which limited the scope of the holding that struck down the original legislation. The first principle draws a distinction between intentionally favoring (or disfavoring) a religious group versus a neutral law that treats intentionally favoring (or disfavoring) a religious group versus a neutral law that.

But what about all of the ways in which the community has successfully resisted “Americanization,” secularization, and liberal norms? KJ has not only replicated many of the essential features of shtetl life – it is, in many respects, more insular, more homogeneous, more exclusive than the European shtetl. It is stricter in its observance and, symptomatically, the rates of yeshivah learning and life-long Torah study are far higher in KJ than they ever were in Europe, in part because the American welfare system alleviates the pressure to find a parnasah that weighed on most European Jews. All of these features that distinguish the “American shtetl” from the European one are clearly signs of the community’s success in resisting assimilation.
and Americanization (even as the community avails itself of the American system’s largesse).

But this raises an interesting and unsettling question: Is the kind of social insularity – indeed, segregation – that we see in Kiryas Joel really at odds with American liberalism? Or is it a quintessential expression of American liberalism? Well, the answer is both. Or to put it another way, American liberalism is ambivalent about the phenomenon of group-based segregation, as our ongoing experience with race-based and gender-based segregation makes painfully clear. On the one hand, at least since Brown v. Board of Education, it has seemed obvious to many Americans that group-based segregation offends our basic principles of equality and antidiscrimination law. On the other hand, there has never been any consensus about how far this anti-discrimination principle extends. Does it apply only to legally enforced, governmentally imposed “de jure” segregation or does it apply to “voluntary” private segregation as well? Private – or self – segregation seems to go against the liberal norms of pluralism and equality, but it is also an expression of personal autonomy, of individual freedom of choice, and of freedom of association – fundamental liberal values. Which is to say that “self-segregation” is as deeply rooted in fundamental principles of liberalism and individual rights and the free market as it is opposed to them. It is easy to think that liberal principles necessarily stand in opposition to segregation, but as we know from the long and sorry history of race relations in America, the economic and cultural forces unleashed in a liberal market-based economy privileging individual choice have served to perpetuate and actually to increase residential segregation. The formation of KJ and other religiously homogenous ultra-Orthodox communities is entirely of a piece with these broader American social, economic, and racial dynamics.

**David Myers:**

For the most part, the lines that Nomi and I have been tracing, that is, the distinct American and Satmar strands of the Kiryas Joel narrative, add up to a remarkable success story. A group nearly extinguished during the Holocaust makes it way to American shores and creates a stable foundation in New York, imparting its distinctive brand of ritual observance to the surrounding Orthodox world, exerting considerable political influence, and deriving a fair measure of economic benefit. Moreover, it even manages to create a full service Satmar municipality.

And yet, as Nomi and I have intimated at various points in time, the very source of the community’s rise may spell challenges to its continued success. This prospect also has distinct, but intersecting Satmar and American narrative threads. The community, we recall, was shaped in the image of its founding leader, Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum. It was under his supervision that the first forty families moved to Kiryas Joel, which is named after him. As most Satmars would attest, it was the Rebbe’s leadership and charisma that served as the social glue for the community. Not surprisingly, upon his death in 1979, a contentious succession battle broke out, pitting his widow, Feige, against his nephew, Rabbi Moses Teitelbaum, who was appointed to succeed Reb Yoelish in 1980. The tension between the two never subsided, and became a fixture of the communal culture of the Satmar community. In fact, this tension permeated the next generation of Satmar leaders, Rabbi Moses’s sons, Zalman and Aaron. They fought bitterly over succession of the Satmar community during the last decade of their father’s life, waging intense legal wars in New York courts, intensifying their battles after the Rebbe’s death in April 2006 and gaining the attention of the New York City media throughout.

One of the interesting features of the battle between Zalman and Aaron is that it brings into focus their respective bases of power – indeed, the two centers of power in today’s Satmar world: Williamsburg and Kiryas Joel respectively. And yet, we must now dispel a certain illusion that we have created and fostered throughout – namely, that Kiryas Joel is itself a cultural and political monolith. Indeed, one of the curious after-effects of the leadership vacuum created by Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum’s death was the emergence of a dissident faction of Satmar Hasidim in Kiryas Joel itself. The dissidents were initially led by the Rebbezain, Feige, in opposition to the new Satmar Rebbe. By the 1980s, the dissidents had rallied to a new cause: opposition to the creation of the Kiryas Joel public school district. Remarkably, they couched their stance in the language of good old American liberalism; a public school district, they argued, would violate the Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution. Over time, the dissidents have become an organized opposition known as the Kiryas Joel Alliance, and in the last mayoral election in Kiryas Joel, their candidate polled 46% of the vote. This prompted one astute observer in the village to declare that Kiryas Joel had become “a two party system” – the mainstream and the dissidents as relative equals, a rather striking acknowledgement of the Americanness of the community.

The dissidents’ position and rhetoric hint to us that the boundaries of Kiryas Joel are not, cannot be, hermetically sealed. The penetration of social and cultural values from the outside world is inevitable, especially given the community’s historic willingness to open the door to political engagement and economic betterment. It may well be that the very liberal norms and practices that enabled the insularity of the community will one day undermine it. Time will tell.

In the meantime, the community continues to buck trends. Along with the signs of internal dissension, Kiryas Joel continues to grow at a breathtaking pace, with one of the highest birthrates in the State of New York. Moreover, we learned in the recent mid-term election that the community voted as a solid bloc to defeat incumbent Republican Congresswoman Sue Kelly. By many accounts, it was the last-minute switch of the Kiryas Joel establishment camp, previously supportive of Kelly, to join the Kiryas Joel Alliance that elected challenger, John Hall. The fact that Kelly’s conservative social values were much more consonant with those of the Satmar community mattered less than the perceived benefits of a new political alliance with Hall. What this electoral gambit reveals, in conclusion, is the lingering, albeit fragile cohesion of an American shtetl, straining to hold true to its Old World principles even as it settles more comfortably into the soil of its transplanted homeland.
The entire College-Institute faculty convened in Lisle, IL, from June 16 to 18, 2008, for the Burton Lehman Faculty Retreat, endowed in honor of the past Chair of the HUC-JIR Board of Governors. Organized by a steering committee, led by Dr. Isa Aron and comprised of Dr. Michael Meyer, Dr. Carole Balin, Dr. Dvora Weisberg, and Dr. David Levine, and coordinated by Joy Wasserma, National Director of Alumni Affairs, the Retreat brought together faculty from HUC-JIR's Cincinnati, Jerusalem, Los Angeles, and New York campuses. Faculty had the opportunity to study and worship together, address emerging trends in Jewish studies, and confront current issues in American Jewish life. Throughout the formal sessions and ongoing informal conversations, they were able to collaborate in shared teaching areas, hone pedagogical skills, and share best practices.

Dr. Norman Cohen, HUC-JIR Provost, stressed the significance of this biennial event. "As in past years, the Lehman Faculty Retreat was indispensable in advancing a number of key goals in HUC-JIR's strategic plan: enhancing faculty, promoting academic excellence, strengthening student assessment, and integrating HUC-JIR's four campuses into one institution."

Presentations by guest scholars sparked intensive and far-reaching discussions. Guest scholar Dr. Shaul Kelner, Associate Professor of Sociology and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University, addressed the faculty on trends and controversies in American Jewish life in a session chaired by Dr. David Kaufman, with responses from Dr. Steven Cohen and Dr. Tali Hyman. Pointing to cultural production, he proposed "looking not at how people are taking things from the salad bar, but at how the chefs of Jewish culture are setting it." Rather than identity studies, which "will always be lagging indicators, not leading ones," he argued that "if we want a window onto the American Jewish future, we will find it by looking at the producers. This means we should go back to our studies of leadership, of social movements, of organizational change, and reread them as hints of where things might be headed."

Small group discussions explored the implications of Dr. Kelner's presentation in the areas of synagogue life, led by Rabbi Renni Altman; recruitment, led by Dr. Aaron Panken; leadership development, led by Dr. Norman Cohen; changing Jewish institutions, led by Dr. Rob Weinberg and Dr. Sam Joseph; Diaspora-Israel relations, led by Dr. Michael Marmur; education, led by Dr. Michael Zeldin; outreach, led by Rabbi Jerome Davidson; authenticity in searching for meaning, led by Dr. Lawrence Hoffman; and social justice, led by Rabbi Richard Levy.
Guest scholar Dr. Moshe Rosman, Professor of Jewish History at Bar-Ilan University, spoke on “Trends and Controversies in Judaic Scholarship” at a session chaired by Dr. Michael Meyer, with responses from Dr. David Aaron and Dr. David Levine. Dr. Rosman discussed five issues that challenge the continued existence of Jewish studies as we know it: the instability or indeterminacy of definitions of Jews and Jewishness; multiculturalism in the academy; research that undermines the supposition that Jewish civilization is original, valuable, generally salutary, and even inspiring; Jewish studies not being Jewish enough, by not sufficiently bolstering students’ Jewish commitment and sparking attack from the Jewish religious right; and the migration of the locus of Jewish Studies from Israel to America, resulting in the American Jewish experience becoming the axiom for a new master narrative of all Jewish history. (See www.huc.edu/news/08/6/facultyretreat/fulltext for his presentation).

Rabbi David Ellenson spoke to the faculty about the College-Institute’s academic and fiscal goals, and expressed enthusiasm for the new e-classrooms and their capacity to promote collaboration in teaching and learning across the campuses. Faculty shared insights into new ways to invigorate teaching. A presentation on Sakai technology enhanced the faculty’s familiarity with enrichment resources for classroom teaching, while Gregg Alpert, National Director of Distance Education, presented “Wikis, Blogs, and Google Docs.” Dr. Michael Zeldin and Dr. Tali Hyman discussed teaching in the ‘Smart Classroom’, while Cantor Benjie Schiller explored nurturing spiritual, professional, and intellectual growth. Dr. Lewis Barth and Dr. Mark Kligman reported on working with an artist in residence, and Dr. Aaron Panken facilitated a session on teaching students to use textual resources.

The faculty were joined by Barbara Friedman, Chair of the Board of Governors, Sheila Lambert, Vice Chair and Chair of the Board’s Academic and Faculty Affairs Committee, Frederic Lane, past Chair of the Committee, and Joan Pines, incoming Chair of the Cincinnati Board of Overseers. “What a delight it was to spend three days with our entire faculty and participate in their intensive dialogue and shared learning,” said Barbara Friedman. “The depth of their conversations and discussions of scholarship and new research reflected their intellectual excellence. I was impressed by their eagerness to develop new partnerships in teaching across our four campuses, and to advance our mission of academic integration into one institution. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet our newest faculty appointments, who are most impressive and were fully involved and engaged in the discussions. We thank Burt Lehman for recognizing the importance of the faculty retreat in advancing our institutional mission and for underwriting the 2006 retreat, and thank the members of the Board of Governors for their generous endowment support of this biennial program to honor Burt’s retirement as Chair of our Board.”

Amid the intellectual deliberations, there were also opportunities for spiritual refreshment. Faculty-led worship, organized by Cantor Eli Schleifer, Dr. Michael Marmur, Rabbi Shirley Idelson, Dr. Nancy Wiener, and Merri Arian, reflected a diversity of liturgical traditions and the introduction of movement, as well. Cantor Schleifer’s impending retirement was honored, and he composed a new piece of music to mark this milestone. The screening of the powerful Israeli film “Beaufort” prompted much discussion and questions posed by the Americans to their Israeli colleagues.

The three days of sharing knowledge and kinship bound HUC-JIR’s community of scholars more closely together. They returned to their home cities recharged and ready to resume their sacred task as teachers and mentors to the next generation of Jewish leaders.
Dr. Stephen M. Passamanek, Professor of Rabbinics and an esteemed member of the HUC-JIR/Los Angeles faculty for over four decades, was honored this past year with the publication of a *festschrift* in recognition of his achievements in the field of Jewish law. *Studies in Mediaeval Halakhah in Honor of Stephen M. Passamanek* was co-edited by Dr. Alyssa Gray, Associate Professor of Codes and Responsa Literature at HUC-JIR/New York, and Professor Bernard S. Jackson, Alliance Professor of Modern Jewish Studies and Co-Director of the Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Manchester, United Kingdom, and issued as the XVIIth volume of *Jewish Law Association Studies*.

“Dr. Stephen Passamanek has been one of the foremost students of halakhic literature within the Reform Movement and the larger academic world for almost half a century,” stated Rabbi David Ellenson. “His work has always been exact, and the range and volume of his books and articles on so many topics in Jewish law – from his first monograph on Jewish maritime law through his translation of vital sections of *Shulhan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat*, to his path-breaking book on Jewish law and police ethics – have earned him a well-deserved worldwide reputation as a leading scholar of *Halakhah*, and has enhanced the reputation of HUC-JIR in this area immeasurably.”

Dr. Passamanek was presented with the *festschrift* at the first regional conference of the Jewish Law Association (JLA), which was held at HUC-JIR/Los Angeles on December 11-13, 2007. Fifteen scholars from the U.S., Israel, and Europe, a number of whom had contributed articles to the *festschrift*, attended the conference, where they engaged in presentations and discussions in all areas of Jewish law – criminal, civil, and family law, practical and theoretical. “This *festschrift* and the regional conference at our Los Angeles campus are indicators of the major role that Dr. Passamanek has played in the field of Jewish law in general and in the work of the Jewish Law Association in particular,” said Dr. Dvora E. Weisberg, Associate Professor of Rabbinics and author of an article in the book.

The idea of the *festschrift* originated in April 2005 with Professor Bernard Jackson, Dr. Passamanek’s friend and collaborator in the JLA. Jackson contacted Dr. Gray and they chose to focus the book on medieval Jewish law in recognition of Dr. Passamanek’s association with that research area. The call for papers yielded a broad array of articles exploring a diversity of medieval halakhic issues, rooted in different geographical locales and chronological periods, and a range of denominational approaches, from Reform to Orthodox.
“Jewish law was really formed in the medieval period,” explained Dr. Alyssa Gray. “The Talmud comes into existence around 600, spreading to North Africa and Europe from Babylonia, with Jewish law crystallizing during the Gaonic period beginning in the 9th century and culminating with the Shulhan Arukh in the 16th century, which is early modernity.” The volume offers a window into Jewish history, values, life, and thinking and features the scholarship of six HUC-JIR faculty members: Dr. Dvora Weissberg on Dr. Passamanek; Dr. Michael Chernick on polysemous sugyot as a source of rishonite debates about normative halakhah; Dr. David Ellenson on Rabbi Hayyim David Halevi’s response to the Talmudic principle of forestalling murder in Israeli public policy; Dr. Alyssa Gray on married women and tzedakah in medieval Jewish law; Dr. Aaron Panken on Meikara as a marker for legal change in Talmud Bavli; and Dr. Mark Washofsky on Rabbi Yehezkel Landau on autopsy and the absence of method in Jewish bioethics. Other articles include Judith Baskin on ritual immersion; Leah Bornstein-Fusson duress in the law of sales; Yaakov Elman on Babylonian heresy; Yosef Rivlin on ethics in medieval Jewish law; Dr. Aaron Panken on Rabbinic Law Enforcement and Reflecting on the Experiences of Civil Law with an Emphasis on Business Law, followed by articles on marital law—the latter opening a new avenue of research in Jewish law. His book, The Traditional Jewish Law of Sale: Shulhan Arukh Hoshen Mishpat 189-240 (1983) translated fifty chapters from Karo’s code of Jewish law as an accessible text for a modern audience. In Insurance in Rabbinic Law (Edinburgh University Press, 1974), he traced Jewish approaches to insurance from the Talmudic period through the middle ages through the analysis of medieval rabbinic response. Passamanek’s most recent work, Police Ethics and the Jewish Tradition, addresses contemporary law enforcement and reflects his experiences as a Reserve Deputy Sheriff and Chaplain of the Los Angeles Field Division of the ATF.

Dr. Passamanek’s courses for students at HUC-JIR/Los Angeles have included introductory classes in Mishnah, Talmud, codes, and Aramaic, and advanced electives in rabbinics exploring “Capital Punishment and the Jewish Tradition,” “Intergenerational Respect and Jewish Law,” “Working with Responds,” and “Maimonides on Repentance,” and he has also directed rabbinical theses. He and the HUC-JIR faculty contributors to this festschrift, as well as Dr. Jonathan Cohen, Director of the HUC-UC Ethics Center and Rabbi Michael Matuson Professor of Talmud and Halakhic Literature at HUC-JIR/ Cincinnati, are ensuring that the study of Jewish law is a vital component of teaching and scholarship at the seminary for the Reform Movement.

Addressing the College-Institute’s abiding commitment to the study of Jewish law, Dr. Gray noted, “Nobody can question that Judaism has a religion of Halakhah and you can’t possibly understand its historical development and manifestations if you don’t understand Halakhah. If the Reform Movement is going to use autonomy and choice, then you really have to be very informed about Jewish law.” To that end, HUC-JIR’s rabbinical students are expected to have proficiency in this area, through the core curriculum and electives, and cantorial and education students are also required to study rabbinic literature.

In fact, Dr. Gray’s festschrift article grew out of a course unit on tzedakah given by dependents, which led to her interest in the differing views on married women giving tzedakah. The gestation of her article speaks to the HUC-JIR classroom as a laboratory for learning, innovative scholarship, and mentorship. Faculty are not only teachers but role models, as they develop new understanding based on original research and writing, which they transmit to their students, at the same time encouraging a number of them to consider an academic direction for their careers.

“It’s very important that HUC-JIR be out there producing new knowledge and facilitating the production of new knowledge, building our reputation and contributing to the field, so that we are recognized as a major address for scholarship,” concludes Dr. Gray. Such scholarship, as exemplified by Dr. Passamanek, Dr. Gray, and the faculty contributors to this festschrift, contributes to the fulfillment of a priority in HUC-JIR’s strategic plan: academic excellence.

For more about Dr. Passamanek, please see “Law and Order: Dr. Stephen M. Passamanek” at: www.huc.edu/chronicle/63/passamanek.pdf

Is Our God Experience Authentic?

Directly stated, there is no infallible way to know whether we have had an authentic encounter with God. In other words, when we reflect on our sense that God was present to us, we probably remember feeling a certain confidence, perhaps one accompanied by an aura of well-being – although the tone may also be one of skepticism rather than assurance. If we regularly guard against being taken in by our own emotions or by spurious others, we may come away from any intimations of the holy feeling quite dubious, or even the opposite! With fraudulent gurus abounding and all sorts of spiritual leaders promising to assuage our anxieties, most of us are more gullible than we readily admit. What might have first seemed like religious truth may on second look be something quite different.

It would be nice if Jewish tradition supplied a foolproof way to keep us from error in matters of religious experience; unfortunately, in this case the tradition can take us only so far. For example, there have been two major schismatic groups that perverted Jewish belief: the ninth-century Karaites and their successors, who rejected rabbinic teaching; and the followers of Shabbatai Zvi, whom many Jews considered the Messiah even after he converted to Islam, in the seventeenth century. The Torah’s words about distinguishing between true and false prophets are of limited help. They advise us that if what was predicted comes true, we were indeed dealing with a true prophet. We can’t do much with such after-the-fact confirmation these days, since prophecy has long since ceased among us.

Far more useful is the test applied by the Rabbis to those they suspected of being the Jewish equivalent of heretics. The most famous case is their early second-century archvillain, Elisha ben Abuyah. Once a noted rabbi and the cherished teacher of the famous Rabbi Meir, ben Abuyah was excommunicated, put in herem, by his rabbinic colleagues after he espoused a type of paganism. When his beliefs led him to stop observing Jewish law, the Rabbis knew he had left their covenanted community and gone to an “evil” way of life. While liberal Judaism today is not as law bound as were the Rabbis, most Jews would agree that the best evidences of an authentic encounter with God are the actions that such an encounter prompts.

A second, subtle indicator of an authentic meeting between a Jewish person and God is that it changes our relationship with the Jewish religious community. Of course, having a sense that one has been close to God, even momentarily, changes us personally. But for all that God is involved with us individually, our God has been concerned with the Jewish people for millennia. As valuable as you and I are as individuals, God didn’t give the Torah to us merely as a self-help manual. A genuine encounter with God should deepen our participation in communal Jewish religious life as well as its ethical outreach. For some people, that may mean adopting more traditional practices; but it may well encourage others to
seek newer ways of piety. If it was truly God we connected with, we will want to build on and enhance that experience.

Something similar can be said of a third indicator, that we will want to know more of what the Jewish tradition has taught about what defines a worthy relationship with God. One important feature is to be open to what contemporary Jewish religious teachers are saying. God being so great, there is considerable variety in not only the views of the teachers but also in their ways of expressing their personal meetings with the Sacred. Music and poetry, new rituals and reinterpreted old ones, may deepen their and our own realizations of the Presence.

In such matters, it is good to have a learned Jew as your guide. In most cases, this will be a trusted rabbi; however, it could be any Jew whose character, actions, and knowledge of Judaism significantly exceeds your own. If you don’t have such a spiritual companion, let me urge you to begin the process of finding one.

All this will, I hope, help you find your Jewish religious way, yet there are no fail-safe guarantees whenever the heart or the soul is involved. Though you may bring high emotion and deep searching to your critical decisions about love, marriage, divorce, or other life-shaping matters, you can never be sure you have not gone wrong.

A religious ceremony performed during the Jewish Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, may bring comfort to our disturbing inability to find complete certainty. Rabbinic traditions recount what the high priest had to do in the Temple each Yom Kippur before he acknowledged to God the transgressions of the people. At this climactic religious moment, in front of everyone, the high priest had to first confess his and his family’s “sins, iniquities, and transgressions.” Similarly, today at the beginning of the Yom Kippur evening service, the clergy come before the open ark and first plead for forgiveness of their sins before leading the congregation in our own confessions.

Of course it would be nice to live a risk-free life, but Judaism teaches that no one, not Moses, not the high priest, ever lived flawlessly. No one can guarantee that what we have experienced with God is with the One God of the universe. But situating ourselves within the Jewish people’s vast experience with God should provide the best available direction.


The New Testament has been the most powerful external determinant of Jewish history, yet Jews overwhelmingly opt to remain ignorant concerning it. Yes, the Talmud declared the Gospels off-limits for Jews; but is this advice, by ancient sages, still sage advice for modern Jews living in a culture deeply Christian?

Dr. Michael J. Cook’s new book, Modern Jews Engage the New Testament, argues that Jews’ avoidance of the New Testament has undermined their well-being on communal as well as individual bases. Further, this posture runs counter to the time-honored Jewish approach to problem-solving, namely to amass not shun knowledge.

Dr. Cook’s concern is less that Jews read the New Testament than that they learn how to recognize the “Gospel Dynamics” underlying it – the term he has coined for those skillful problem-solving techniques by which early Christians, decades after Jesus’ death, remodeled his image to address needs of their day, not his. Countless powerful but fictional traditions – including Jesus’ Sanhedrin trial and the infamous blood curse (“his blood be on us and on our children!”) – have cost innumerable Jewish lives.

If these and so many similar traditions are only fictional, what then brought them into being, and why did they gain inclusion in Christianity’s sacred texts? Only by spotting the operation of the “Gospel Dynamics” involved, articulating and explaining them to their children, and enlightening Christian friends regarding them can Jews exchange their sense of victimization by the New Testament for confidence that they now control this literature and can become freer of its impact in the future.

The aims of Dr. Cook’s volume, then, are both to jump-start a revolution by most Jews and to accelerate one already underway by increasing numbers of others. For, indeed, gradually – and for the first time in history – significant numbers of Jews are now admitting the wisdom of the approach Dr. Cook is urging.

Besides allotting individual chapters to examining Mark, Matthew, Luke-Acts, John and Paul’s epistles (especially Romans), Dr. Cook explores what underlies presentations of the last supper (historically not a Passover meal); of Jesus’ Passion (with special focus on Judas’ betrayal, and the Sanhedrin and Barabbas episodes); and of “virgin birth” and empty tomb traditions. He also analyzes the roots of the “Christ-killer” motif, of modern missionary encroachments, and of millennialist end-time scenarios that draw on the Book of Revelation. Additional topics are whether the New Testament is antisemitic, and whether recourse to rabbinic literature helps or hinders Gospel study.

Accessible to lay people, scholars and clergy of all faiths, this book’s innovative teaching aids make it all the more ideal for rabbis, ministers,

2008 ISSUE 71 • 59
and other educators. Structured for weekly adult education sessions in synagogues, churches, and centers for Jewish-Christian learning, it is also suitable as a text for course offerings by Christian as well as Jewish seminaries, and by university religious studies departments.

On Gospel Dynamics:
Some Gospel traditions, although ostensibly focusing on Jesus, were actually adjusted, or even created, to address problems that had nothing to do with his time. [...] [Later] exigencies … induced alterations in how events, persons, and teachings became reported. The processes by which such results have emerged are what I mean by Gospel Dynamics. [...]

For most Christians, the historical details of Jesus’ ministry may not particularly matter to them as long as Gospel materials radiate existential meaning for their lives today. Jews need to understand this. In turn, Christians might consider that, for most Jews, it does matter what did or did not happen on the historical level if it is fictional material that incited or otherwise facilitated murder of untold numbers of Jews over later centuries. [...]

On the issue of whether Gospel Dynamics genuinely underlie New Testament texts, Christian friends will offer Jews their own answers as befit their faith, so there will be here a learning experience for Jew and Christian alike. But the particular concern of this book is that gaining facility in Gospel Dynamics will give Jews confidence not to win debates but simply to feel that they have something of substance to contribute, enabling them to come across as thinking persons, instead of blindfolded ones. It is ironic, of course, that I now ask Jews to master a new technique of reading Gospel texts when in reality most Jews have never read the Gospels in any manner at all!

On Jesus:
When we are told that “Jesus said” anything about the Jewish people or to the Jewish people, we should substitute: “the Gospel writer says that Jesus said.” Whatever the Evangelists put into the mouth of Jesus constitutes no evidence that Jesus himself said this. A later vindictive image of Jesus, disparaging of Jews and Judaism, became superimposed on an earlier, actual figure – with this later anti-Jewishly adjusted image ... being that to which Jews of subsequent generations inevitably responded, feeding a spiral of negative interchange within the troubled history of Christian-Jewish polemics. [...] Thus, reminiscent of a painting repeatedly overlaid by later retouches, what we have discovered in the Gospels are disparate Jesus images superimposed one on another, making it hard to accept that the historical Jesus and the Jesus of the Gospels were one and the same. [...]

Whenever we have good reason to suspect that a tradition is not about Jesus, but rather enlists him to deal with any of these or other matters arising decades after he died, then we are on the trail of Gospel Dynamics. [...]

On Paul:
Paul played a more determinative role than did the historical Jesus in the emergence of the Christianity that exists today. But Paul also distanced Jesus’ image from the actual historical figure so much that he thereby opened the way for Gentiles to remove Jesus from Judaism, both to co-opt this Jew as their own and also, eventually, to be in a position – should the need arise, as it indeed did during the 60s – to denigrate the very people from whom they had removed “Christ-Jesus” from the start. [...]

On the Last Supper and Church “Seders”:
Neither the earliest Christians nor Jesus ever practiced the kind of full-fledged Seders that many churches stage today to “re-enact” the Last Supper. The mature Seder, and the Haggadah to accompany it, evolved only much later than Jesus’ time, and were, moreover, rabbinic in creation, not derived from the biblical Israelite religion that Christianity professed to co-opt and supersede. Further, since early rabbinic Judaism seems distinctly anti-Christian in orientation it raises the question: did the Passover Seder itself reflect, in some respect, an anti-Christian animus? [...] The following analysis demonstrates that the Last Supper was originally understood by the earliest Christians themselves as an ordinary, non-Passover meal. [...]

On Judas’ Betrayal:
Judas’ deed seemed so hastily that either mode of death appeared too good for him, leading Papias to propose that Judas’ flesh became “so swollen that where a wagon could pass with ease he was unable to ... not even ... his head. [...] He died on his own property, which ... remained ... deserted because of the stench, and not even to the present day can one walk by ... without holding fast his nose ... so great had been the efflux from [Judas’] flesh upon the ground.” Worse still, in Dante’s Inferno Judas appears frozen at the very bottom, head first in Lucifer’s central mouth, clawed, bitten, and chewed for eternity (34.58–63) [...].

A fictionally altered Judas would have made it easier for Mark to affix the blame for Jesus’ death onto the Jewish nation whose name Judas bore [Judas = Jew], as if to say that not only Judas the Jew, but Judas as the Jew, betrayed Jesus.

On Blaming Jews for Jesus’ Death:
Most Jews have never hit upon any effective response to “Christ-killer” accusations.

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**Dr. Michael J. Cook**

Dr. Michael J. Cook is Professor of Intertestamental and Early Christian Literatures, and holds the Sol and Arlene Bronstein Professorship in Judaica-Christian Studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Renowned for his expertise in the sweep and history of Jewish-Christian relations, he lectures frequently to audiences of many faiths and denominations. His publications include innumerable essays and articles as well as two books: *Mark’s Treatment of the Jewish Leaders* (Brill Publishers) and *Modern Jews Engage the New Testament: Enhancing Jewish Well-Being in a Christian Environment* (Jewish Lights Publishing). He also co-authored *A Manual for Managing the Millennium*, and has produced with his students the acclaimed video, *Missionary Impossible*. Dr. Cook was one of the seven scholars invited by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to assess the advance-script of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*. He has served on many advisory boards in Jewish-Christian relations.
Notions to be countered are that: (1) the Jews were to blame for Jesus’ death; (2) this involvement requires that Jews be held accountable as a people; and (3) such “corporate” accountability is transmissible to all subsequent generations....

The Jewish predilection is to address this problem only on the historical plane, because that is where the battle is usually waged. By the end of this chapter, we will need to engage the theological plane, too, in all its traumatic dimension....

If it was indispensable for the world’s redemption that Jesus die, and if the Jews were a vital cog in effecting that “benefit,” then why “blame” the Jews for Jesus’ death rather than praising them for their key role in effecting it? This paradox [which I call “the hybrid riddle”] generates the most frequently asked question by Jews concerning the New Testament.... So vexing is it that it appears, unresolved, even in the Second Vatican Council’s landmark Nostri Aetate declaration! But the puzzle fades when we assign each component to a different time frame....

On the Empty Tomb:
Mark [ca. 72 CE] ends his Gospel by telling us that the women, discovering the tomb empty, “said nothing to any one for they were afraid.” Matthew [ca. 85 CE] – likely finding this preposterous – overrules Mark by showing the women running “to tell the disciples” (28:8). In my view, Matthew fails to spot the Dynamic underlying Mark’s statement: Having himself introduced (created?) the empty tomb story, Mark must account for why no one else before his day had heard it! His answer? The women kept it secret....

How, then, might the very notion of the empty tomb tradition have arisen? Potentially, by a quite natural deduction: if Jesus, after death, was reported sighted, then whatever the place where his corpse had lain became presumed vacant. And where specifically was that place? In all likelihood no one knew – especially since neither Jesus’ followers nor enemies were expecting his resurrection.4

On the Book of Revelation:
Instead of [Jesus’] Second Coming we have [in Revelation 19:15] a First Coming of a mechanistic warrior-king on a white horse:... “his eyes... like a flame of fire... clad in a robe dipped in blood... a sharp sword” issuing from the mouth – the diametric opposite of the teacher of Nazareth who warned: “all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52). If this is his Second Coming, then the Jesus of antiquity is a victim of his successor’s success!

On Missionizing:
There will always be attempts to convince Jews to join Christian ranks. Jews who react by feeling offended should also recognize that many a Christian is simply baffled that Jews appear to forgo what they have always most wanted: salvation from the Messiah who came expressly for them! Were Jews to accept Jesus as the Christian definition of who the Messiah was supposed to be, many Christians would not gloat but feel thrilled.

But the ordeal for Jews of losing a family member from the faith can be heartrending, with the pain intensified if proselytizers per se were involved.... Lack of awareness by most Jews concerning the talents and tactics of these operatives only facilitates missionary advances....

On “Proof-Texting”:
[Missionaries practice] recourse to ... Jewish scripture as a tactic to persuade Jews to accept Jesus. Many of those Jews who have converted to Christianity pinpoint proof-texting as having been the determining factor.... The knowledge that Jews need involves not that about passages but, rather, mastery of broad conceptual principles that will invalidate proof-texting as unworthy of thinking persons, thereby calling its practitioners into intellectual disrepute. And even if Jews cannot manage to do this in the public arena, all that is called for is their ability to do this for their own satisfaction, thereby making themselves, including children, immune to missionary encroachment.... Jews are certainly able to reframe the proof-texting game....

[Consider, e.g.,] the “Bull’s-Eye” Approach. A farmer once arrayed his barn wall with bull’s-eyes, with an arrow piercing the center of each. But appearances differed from reality: he had shot the arrows first and only thereafter painted a bull’s-eye around each! The end result looked the same but not to someone who knew the underlying process. The Jews’ task is to reveal that, often, so-called predictions from Jewish scripture are “arrows shot first,” with Jesus’ Gospel image a bull’s-eye made to surround each one. This is a classic Gospel Dynamic....

On Brief Answers for Complex Questions:
This sample listing, suitable for religious school discussion, attempts to explain Jewish positions ... within the framework that reasonable people may, and often do, differ on the great themes of religion, and accepting that candor is an indispensable tool in that effort. [Following each question a succinct sample answer is proposed.] Why will you Jews not accept Jesus as the Messiah? ... Is not Jesus predicted in your (Jewish) Bible? ... Did not Jesus die for your sins? ... Why won’t you observe Christmas? ... Doesn’t the empty tomb prove ... Jesus was resurrected? ... Why did you Jews kill Jesus? ... Why not become an authentic Jew by accepting Jesus?...

On Trespassing Upon Others’ Sacred Texts:
Does a volume entitled Modern Jews Engage the New Testament constitute trespassing beyond proper boundaries, since – in this case – it brings along Jews willing to venture into another faith’s hallowed domain? No, not if the sacred texts that are being newly explored have themselves intruded into the Jews’ own preserve by becoming the prime external determinant of all of Jewish history. Jews might have no inducement to explore the New Testament’s terrain if these writings had not irreversibly dislodged Jewish life from any of the courses that Jews would have wished to set for themselves. Moreover, when a younger religion co-optsthe scriptures of its elder and interprets them to the elder’s detriment, the new writings that do this – later themselves canonized as sacred – at the least stand open to examination and scrutiny.

There is the additional element that, to varying degrees among New Testament writers, Christians are claiming to explain to Jews what the Jews’ own Bible means and even to be the
“Jews” who the Jews themselves failed to become. Accordingly, for Jews, now on a most delayed basis, to decide to take a deeper look at the Dynamics underlying those texts that set forth this posture would seem a fair as well as permissible action. Further, the Jewish people, in their effort to comprehend their own history, need access to the New Testament because it has directed so much of it.

On the Problem of Timing:
But why, at the current juncture, should Jews be encouraged to reflect on Gospel Dynamics given that there has been such steady progress in Christian—Jewish relations over recent decades? First, I interpret this new pursuit as extending that progress. Second, I foresee a possibility for the resurgence of regressive tendencies in Gospel interpretation – indeed, has it begun? – at least because Christianity’s future history will be played out largely, even primarily, in the Third World. 3

It may be questioned whether this vast arena will exhibit the capacity to comprehend the Gospels in any fashion other than literally....

On Jews’ Incentive and Aptitude:
This book has covered a panorama of challenges – arising from the New Testament itself – that impact and disconnect Jews living in a Christian world. It has attempted to address, in a clear, direct, and concise way, this spectrum of problems by offering historical and theological analyses and practical applications that Jews require. And it has aspired to persuade Jews of the wisdom of accelerating a radical communal change whereby their seminaries, synagogues, religious schools, and college students will forgo a traditional mandate to shun the New Testament and instead seek to secure facility in Gospel Dynamics.... This book’s distinction between knowing New Testament and knowing Gospel Dynamics should not go overlooked. This is because Jews who feel no incentive to read the New Testament may feel every incentive to learn about the workings of those Gospel Dynamics that continually have impacted the Jewish people so deleteriously over two millennia.... Learning Gospel Dynamics ... is a ... venture ... for which Jews have shown a natural aptitude (cf. Chap. 7) and that they can find to be stimulating as well as consistent with the paradigmatic means of Jewish problem-solving: namely, seeking and building knowledge....

On “Gospel Dynamics” in the College-Institute’s Curriculum:
Remarkable above all in impact was the curriculum change by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) – urged, to start with, by alumni! This move was to accord core course status to what before had been offered only as electives. The change now made Cincinnati’s campus in particular the first Jewish seminary in history to require courses in the technical study of (what I have named) Gospel Dynamics for rabbinical ordination....

On Our Unprecedented Opportunity:
History has presented Jews today with an unprecedented opening to correct what Harris Weinstock bemoaned in his 1899 petition: that fellow Jews left themselves “helpless” to respond competently to anything dealing with the New Testament because of their “dense ignorance of the origin of Christianity, the life of the Christian Savior, and the causes which led to his death” (see Chap. 1). But Weinstock was unaware of why his petition could not succeed in his day: ... Today, by contrast, all of these [seven] prerequisites are not only fully in place but are also in convergence. This remarkable state of affairs is the result of several facts and factors: ...

Today [then] is literally the first period in history when sufficient numbers of the Jewish laity (not just their theologians, clergy, and academicians) are psychologically primed to end their nearly two-millennia-old avoidance strategies respecting the New Testament.... We must not lose the opportunity to capitalize on this unprecedented momentum.

1 Special Passover liturgy.
2 A second-century bishop of Hierapolis (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.36.2).
3 “Hybrid riddle” even in Numa Aetate: Blame: “... the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today....” Benefits: “Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation.”
4 Jesus’ “predictions” of [his own] resurrection were introduced after the fact – see Chap. 8 §1.


An Introduction to Islam for Jews
Dr. Reuven Firestone, Jewish Publication Society, 2008

What does the Qur’an really say about Jews? Why is Jerusalem so important to Muslims? Is halaal the same thing as kosher?

Jews have today, as never before, a pressing need to understand the history, theology, and practice of Muslims and Islam. In An Introduction to Islam for Jews Firestone explains the remarkable similarities and profound differ-
ences between Judaism and Islam, the complex history of Jihad, the legal and religious positions of Jews in the world of Islam, how various expressions of Islam (Sunni, Shi’i, Sufi, Salafi, etc.) regard Jews, the range of Muslim views about Israel, and much more. He addresses these issues and others with candor and integrity, and he writes with language, symbols, and ideas that make sense to Jews. An Introduction to Islam for Jews is both readable and reasoned, presenting to Jewish readers for the first time the complexity of Islam and its relationship towards Jews and Judaism.

The Qur’an in Relation to Other Scriptures

The Qur’an contains a great deal of material that is parallel to the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. The most obvious is the appearance of many biblical characters from Adam and Eve (though she is not named in the Qur’an) to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph and the tribes, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Saul, David, Solomon, Jonah, Elijah, Job, John the Baptist, Zakariah, Mary, and Jesus. Many narratives known from prior scriptures are referenced or related in the Qur’an, but in forms that clearly differ from earlier narratives, and some material may be found in the Qur’an that finds direct parallels with the Rabbincic literature of the Talmud and Midrash (Q.2:93, 5:27–32).

The natural reaction among Jews and Christians to the differences in the new revelation was to believe that it was an inaccurate or poor attempt to mimic their own “true” revelation. We have examined this natural response earlier in the context of Muhammad’s confrontation with the Jews of Medina, and we have noted how the Qur’an itself explains the differences by accusing the People of the Book of being untrustworthy regarding scripture and of even distorting their own.

That episode was only one example of the conflict and competition between scriptures. The Qur’an records some of the arguments that were made against it, such as the critique that it was not revealed all at once as was the Torah (Q.25:32), or that it is only the ravings of a man possessed (Q.16:6). Five times, God is depicted in the Qur’an as commanding Muhammad to challenge his detractors to produce verses or chapters equal to those of the Qur’an. “If you are in doubt about what We have brought down to Our servant, then bring a verse like it, and call on your mortal witnesses if you are truthful. But if you do not – and you will not – then get ready for the fire whose fuel is humans and stones, some who will not believe” (Q.2:23–24).

These verses, known in later Islamic tradition as the “challenge verses,” were taken a century or so later as proofs that the Qur’an is matchless and inimitable. The absolutely perfect, miraculous nature of the Qur’an thus emerged as a religious dogma in Islam in response to challenges to its authority and authenticity. Today, and for well over 1,000 years, the perfect nature of the Qur’an is a sine qua non of Islamic belief. Its miraculous nature applies not only to its unsurpassed language and style, but also to its perceived truth in every detail.

Because of the arguments over the accuracy and general status of the Qur’an between the early Muslims and adherents of previous religions, it was necessary to understand its historical and theoretical relationship with the earlier revelations of Jews and Christians. A theory of universal revelation emerged already in the Qur’an that made sense of the similarities and differences, but it was elaborated considerably in post-qur’anic literatures.

The basic position is that God, in God’s great love and compassion, sent prophets with instruction and revelation to all human communities (not only Jews and Christians) throughout history (Q.2:136, 21:25, 43:2–8). All divine revelation originates in the “Mother of Books” (ummul-kitab—Q.13:39, 43:4) that is found on the “preserved tablet” (Q.85:21–22), which is, in turn, located in heaven at the divine throne. Although there may be differences in the details, there is no difference in the essential moral message of the revelations (Q.3:3, 26:192–197).

This theory of universal revelation allows for an open attitude toward previous scriptures. Every prior scripture originates with God. The Qur’an emphasizes that the scripture revealed to the Arabs is in clear Arabic language (Q.12:2, 26:192–197, 39:28), which presumes that the scriptures revealed to other peoples were given in different languages. Later thinkers understood that the differences were not only linguistic, but were also cultural, thus making sense of the obvious parallels and no less obvious differences.

As explained in our earlier discussion of the natural tensions that arise between newly emerging religions and establishment religions, such a position makes sense for a new religion that is trying to gain a foothold in a world dominated by well-established religions. It says, in essence, “We are as legitimate as you are!” Established religions, however, are not interested in welcoming communities that would threaten their position. Jews and Christians believed that any new claims of divine revelation must be false. They therefore rejected any such new claims.

The natural reaction of those who believe in the new revelations is to be suspicious of the criticisms of those representing establishment positions. The new prophet is only acting like the biblical prophets when he responds to...
God’s command to go out and preach to the community. Why not welcome another prophet who is only confirming the monotheism that they already practice? The reason for not admitting the new prophet may be that those representing the establishment religions are arrogant or are jealous and care only for themselves. They are rebelling against God’s will by refusing to heed the message of a true prophet. The Qur’an therefore condemns the positions of the People of the Book and accuses them of going so far as to distort their own revelation in order to disfame the new prophet. “Woe to those who write Scripture with their own hands and then say it is from God in order to make some profit from it. Woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for what they earn” (Q.2:79). “When a messenger of God comes to them affirming what they have, some of those who were given Scripture throw the Book of God behind their backs as if they do not know” (Q.2:101). “O People of Scripture! Why do you deny the revelations [or signs] of God even as you witness?” (Q.3:70).

The problem of working out the relationship between the Qur’an and prior monotheistic scriptures was never resolved. After the success of the Conquests, Jews largely dropped out of the polemical arena, but Christians, under the protection and competition of the Byzantine Empire and later, Christian Europe, continued to challenge the authenticity of Qur’anic revelation. Scriptural differences became symbolic of larger issues when most of the known world was divided between the Christian Byzantine Empire and Europe, on the one hand, and the caliphate and the Muslim world, on the other. The contest for prestige and the political and economic competition between the two worlds were often articulated through religious terminology and polemic, and the polemical literatures in both communities made a deep and lasting impact. The current tensions and antagonism between “the West” and the Muslim World is not new, of course. Part of the difficulty in overcoming it results from the deep-seated prejudices on both sides, perpetuated in the polemical literatures for many centuries.

However, the complex relationship between the Qur’an and the Bible was not always articulated through heated polemics. Muslim, Jewish, and Christian scholars were also intrigued by the many similarities in form, content, and style, and this has stimulated much thinking and writing among both Muslims and non-Muslims from medieval times to the present. Today dozens of comparative studies of the Qur’an and the Bible are available in libraries and for purchase, and scholars continue to study the fascinating relationship between them.

But even conscientious contemporary scholars tend to retain a basic religious or cultural affiliation with their own scriptural tradition, and this maintains a certain low-level tension that continues to feed old arguments between the faiths. Jewish and Christian scholars tend to assume that the Qur’an represents a significant “borrowing” of data and style from preexisting literatures. Muslim scholars are inclined to view the differences as errors and attrition among the older scriptures that have been associated with the copying and passing down of ancient texts.

It is not really necessary to bridge the divide. The Qur’an and the Bible are different texts and they represent different revelations. They employ distinct languages and styles to convey similar but somewhat different messages. Both secular and religious scholars would do well to remain modest in response to the tremendous depth and complexity of relationship. It is likely that no solution to the issue will ever be suggested that will satisfy all the parties. As the Qur’an itself articulates: “We have appointed a divine law and custom. If God had wished, He would have made you all one nation but [the intent is] to test you by what He has given you. So compete together in doing good works! You will all return to God and He will then inform you of how you differ” (Q.5:48).


**Dr. Steven M. Cohen** “What Should We Know About Jewish Identity?” in *What We NOW Know About Jewish Education*, edited by Roberta Lewis Goodman, Paul Flexner, and Linda Dale Blumberg (Torah Aura, 2008).


**Dr. William Cutter**, “How to Pursue the Obligation to Heal” in *Life, Faith, and Cancer* by Douglas J. Kohn (URJ Press).

**Dr. Susan Einbinder**, “God’s Forgotten Sheep: Jewish Poetry and the Expulsion from France (1306),” *Maarei haPiyut 4*, eds. Benjamin Bar Tikva and Ephraim Hazan (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2008), pp. 55-82.


**Dr. Reuven Firestone**, “Islamic Exegesis on the so-called ‘Curse of Ham,’” in Tzvi Langerman, ed. *Adaptations and Innovations: Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the late Twentieth Century*. Dedicated to Professor Joel L. Kraemer (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2008).


**Dr. Lisa D. Grant** and **Dr. Diane T. Schuster**, “What We Know about Adult Jewish Learning” in *What We NOW Know About Jewish Education*, edited by Roberta Lewis Goodman, Paul Flexner, and Linda Dale Blumberg (Torah Aura, 2008).


**Dr. Samuel K. Joseph**, “What We Know About Lay Leadership” in *What We NOW Know About Jewish Education*, edited by Roberta Lewis Goodman, Paul Flexner, and Linda Dale Blumberg (Torah Aura, 2008).


**Dr. Leonard S. Kravitz**, “Bachya and St Thomas, Two Other Maimonides” and “Citizen and/or Religionist,” in *G’vanim* (*The Journal of the Academy for Jewish Religion*), Volume 4, Number 1 (2008).


Winifred L. Barrows, esteemed honorary member of the Cincinnati Board of Overseers, who expressed her commitment to Reform Judaism through support of HUC-JIR and the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.

Dax Clark, Administrative Assistant in the Rabbinical School and Director of Maintenance at HUC-JIR/Los Angeles, who transformed the campus by his commitment to energy conservation and respect for sacred books and worship spaces.

Joseph B. Heller, distinguished member of the Board of Governors (1976-1991), who provided guidance and support for HUC-JIR, and whose sculptures beautify the campuses.

Donald H. Newman, devoted Chair Emeritus of the Cincinnati Board of Overseers, who served with distinction on the Board of Governors (1977-1998) and its Finance, Nominating, and Governance Committees, and as Chair of its Pension Committee.

Patricia W. Tanenbaum, beloved wife of Governor Emeritus B. J. Tanenbaum, whose love for Reform Judaism, personal warmth, dedication to her congregation, and leadership of the Women of Reform Judaism endure as a source of inspiration.

Charles H. Tobias, Jr., founding member of the Cincinnati Board of Overseers, and a loyal member of the Board of Governors, serving as its Secretary and providing wise counsel to its Legal Committee.

RABBI A. STANLEY DREYFUS, Ph.D., z”l

I met Stanley Dreyfus more than fifty years ago and we became close friends almost immediately. I was still in rabbinical school and he, ordained eleven years before me, was already an established and highly respected rabbi.

From the first moment I was impressed by the breadth and depth of Stanley’s scholarship, which included his proficiency in Greek and Latin and covered the entire sacred tradition of our faith knowledge, whose Hebrew texts he was always available to teach to our students. No less was I impressed and always admired Stanley’s command of humanistic learning and the English language, which he used always deftly and often understatedly in his perceptive analyses of individuals and situations. But I must say that I was impressed even more by Stanley’s humble dignity, his transparent piety, his unstinting devotion to his students, and his care and concern for all individuals who sought his help or advice.

I always urged my students to study with Stanley whenever they could, and characterized Stanley to them as a giant of our faith, a rabbi who stood in the pantheon of the rabbinic greats of the Classical Reform tradition who were masters of Hebrew learning, scholars of the secular disciplines, and, above all, caring and committed pastors of their flocks.

Whenever speaking of Stanley to my students or others, I have always said that in addition to admiring and respecting Stanley, I revered him. And I shall always revere his memory.

– Dr. Martin Cohen

Rabbi Dreyfus’s obituary is at www.huc.edu/news/08/7/dreyfus/
On view through February 5, 2009: 

**Envisioning Maps**

Thirty-three contemporary artists employ maps – real or imagined – as metaphors for human relationships, historical experience, social values, global politics, and issues of identity and heritage.

**Arbit Blatas:**

*A Centennial Celebration*

A career retrospective of the celebrated School of Paris painter and sculptor, who portrayed the Jewish artists of Montparnasse, depicted Kurt Weill’s Threepenny Opera, and created the Holocaust memorials for Venice, Paris, and New York.

**Arie Bar Lev:**

*Israel, Then and Now*

Translating his personal feelings through a camera lens, Arie Bar Lev’s photography provides a unique insight into the rise and growth of the Jewish nation.

**To Speak Her Heart:**

*Leslie Golomb and Barbara Broff Goldman*

Illustrations of Jewish women’s devotional literature from Biblical times to the present.

**Ongoing**

**Living in the Moment:**

*Contemporary Artists Celebrate Jewish Time*

Innovative works of Jewish ceremonial art by renowned international artists.

**The American Jewish Archives at HUC-JIR/Cincinnati**

3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45220

Guided tours by appointment only. 

**Contact:** (513) 487-3000

Documentation of American Jewry’s religious, organizational, cultural, and social history.

**HUC-JIR Skirball Museum/Cincinnati**

3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45220

Temporarily closed for renovation and expansion of Mayerson Hall.

**Skirball Museum of Biblical Archaeology/Jerusalem**

13 King David Street, Jerusalem, Israel 94101

**Hours:** Sun., Tues., Thurs., 10 am – 4 pm

Guided group tours upon advance request. 

**Information:** (02) 620-3333

**Admission:** Free

Excavations of the ancient cities of Laish/Dan, Gezer, and Aroer.

**HUC-JIR Skirball Cultural Center/LA**

2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049

**Hours:** Tues.-Fri., 12 - 5 pm; Thurs until 9 pm (except for Noah’s Ark); Sat.-Sun., 10 am - 5 pm.

Closed Mondays as well as select major national holidays and Jewish holidays. 

**Information:** (310) 440-4500

**Tours:** (310) 440-4564

**Noah’s Ark at the Skirball – Ongoing**

Animals crafted of recycled materials teach the value of community.

**Visions and Values: Jewish Life from Antiquity to America – Ongoing**

HUC-JIR’s permanent collection traces the history and values of the Jewish people over 4,000 years.

**A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People Through January 4, 2009**

This exhibition profiles Pope John Paul II’s extraordinary efforts to improve the dialogue between Catholics and Jews.

**Stacie Chaiken: Artist-in-Residence**

The dramatist and artist-in-residence presents a public performance on December 11, 2008, partially funded by a grant from The Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles.

**New Works by Doni Silver Simons**

Large abstract paintings and drawings explore the use of sacred space and Jewish notions of marking time.

**Inner Easts: Mizrachs by Marcia Falk**

Brightly colored landscapes and contemporary poetry are combined in a traditional art form, the mizrach, orienting us in prayer and thought toward Jerusalem.
We are on the verge of an entirely new iteration of Jewish history and of Judaism itself, a time that is bursting with ideas and possibilities, music and art, wisdom and laughter, scholarship and movies. And holiness.

I call this new chapter Minhag America. The title comes from the famous prayer book published in 1856 by Rabbi Isaac Meyer Wise, who dreamed of uniting all of American Jewry with a single siddur... I use Rabbi Wise's title not to unite or paper over the differences and variations in American Jewish practice, but as an umbrella term to describe the rich diversity of Jewish life in America, and of a uniquely American Judaism, alive and kicking.

A few words about four of the defining elements of Minhag America.

The inclusion of women has changed everything so profoundly and so completely, that it is as invisible and essential as oxygen... This unprecedented participation of women grows from nearly two generations of Jewish women and men who understand that feminism is an expression of Judaism’s mission, part of the Torah’s mandate for justice and the sanctification of life.

Women’s participation has fostered new paradigms in virtually every aspect of Jewish life. More democracy. More congregational singing. More ritual. A redefinition of social justice and political action. And it has served as a model for the enfranchisement of all Jews, regardless of their physical abilities, their sexual orientation, their race, or their religion of origin.

The second feature of Minhag America I want to address is the democratization of Jewish learning... Until very recently, the idea of a commitment to life-long learning was not within the reach of most Jewish men – never mind women. And this made essential elements of Judaism – including God – seem inaccessible to the average person. But Minhag America presents a vision and a growing expectation of Jewish learning for all. No Jew left behind.

Let me stress that this is not a return to old ways of doing things. This is the radical democratization of study, emerging as the learning and learned practice of Minhag America, which is producing hundreds of books every year; theology, history, how-to’s, haggadahs. Also novels and short stories. And to get off the page for a moment, also movies and plays, operas, dances, paintings, photography, video, art.

For Minhag America, the arts are valued as never before. No longer suspect as a form of idolatry, the arts are understood as pathways for the soul’s journey; teaching tools and ways to converse and enter community, inspiration for tikun olam, opportunities to add new voices to our ongoing Jewish conversation. The arts open doorways to the larger community in which we live – doors that enrich American culture even as they challenge and strengthen American Jews and American Judaism...

The fourth and final element of Minhag America... For me, the most successful translation of spirituality into a Jewish idiom is embodied in the religious gestures, the personal dramaturgy of ritual enactment... Rituals make spirituality manifest without demanding too much in the way of explanation, which is essential, since language is essentially worthless when it comes to the sacred. Deed not creed. We perform religious gestures that give us a handle on the ineffable, the nameless. We light Shabbat candles and stop time. We wrap ourselves in prayer shawls, altering our appearance to approach the holy. And we immerse in mikveh to acknowledge the mystery of change.

Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh in Newton Massachusetts... is a mikveh imagined, designed, largely funded by and run under the leadership of Jewish women – and a lot of wonderful men... and serves the needs of everyone in the community: men, women, and children, gay and straight and transgendered, able-bodied and those who require physical assistance or an American Sign language translator: everyone.

So for me, as a practicing optimist, the mikveh – like the proverbial glass – is half-full. American Judaism is strengthened and nurtured by the full participation of all Jews. It is inspired by the study of ancient texts and hot-off-the-presses texts. It is challenged and informed by the lively arts and it is enriched by the unabashed exploration of authentic liberal piety.

I do know that as Jews we are asked to hold fast to the tree of life that is Torah, and to be like that tree ourselves. Without roots to soak up the moisture, the tree topples. But without new growth reaching for the sun, there is no photosynthesis and no fruit.

Ancient roots are no more authentic than new growth. Both are crucial, both are sacred. To paraphrase Rav Kook, “The old becomes new, and the new becomes holy.” And that is us. That is you and me. And that is Minhag America.

© Anita Diamant [Excerpted from the full address at: www.huc.edu/news/08/5/minhag]
Where will the American Jewish community be in ten years? In twenty? Will we be a strong and vibrant community, secure in our role in the country and in our sense of Jewish mission? Or will we be a weakened scattered remnant of what we are today? According to some of our leading scholars the news is not good. They tell us that we are fading away, intermarrying, aging, opting out and assimilating ourselves out of existence. And this is to say nothing of the external threats that face us as a people.

Predictions of the Jewish People’s imminent demise do tend to be cyclical. In 1948, the great and under appreciated Jewish thinker Simon Rawidowicz wrote that “he who studies Jewish history will readily discover that there was hardly a generation in the Diaspora period which did not consider itself the final link in Israel’s chain. Each saw before it the abyss ready to swallow it up.”

American Jews are increasingly disinclined to affiliate Jewishly in a world full of options, and are less connected to Jewish community. In a recent study, HUC-JIR Professor Steven M. Cohen argued that “it is now clear that a sense of commitment to a particular people – the Jewish People – is in decline.”

Scholars and communal leaders blame the drift on intermarriage and the dizzying myriad of personal choices afforded by life in 21st century America. And certainly, these factors have played a role in declining rates of Jewish communal affiliation among young Jews.

[But] those young Jews that we worry about losing, those Jews who are turning away from Jewish community and dropping out of Jewish life, have been telling us something important for the last several years.

In study after study, young Jews have ranked a commitment to social justice as the aspect of Judaism they find most compelling and of which they are most proud. It is not enough, they are saying, to ask us to connect with Jewish community because of our communal tragedies, or because of the imperative to make more Jews. We want to be actively involved, to feel that our energy and resources really make a difference to our community and to the world.

If we listen to them, if we as Jewish community leaders and professionals say, loud and clear, that to be a Jew in the world is to be a part of a community of obligation that exists both to secure a Jewish future and to build a better world for everyone, if we put social justice where it belongs – at the top of the Jewish communal agenda – we can do the right thing for the committed individual looking for connection, for the Jewish people, and for the communities in which we live.

In order to remain relevant and vital – and in order to be true to the essence of Jewish mission – we must reclaim the pursuit of justice, the potential of teshuvah, and the ethos of service as central, animating core Jewish values. And they are central values. They are in our DNA as a people.

We would do well to remember what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel – [once a member of the HUC-JIR faculty] – taught: that the greatest Jewish sin is despair. As you sit here in your transitional moment – counting the omer somewhere between your exodus from graduate school and receiving the laws of your next job – remember that, along with whatever additional responsibilities that job may bring with it, you are also responsible for securing the Jewish future and building a better world. And it is indeed not up to any of us to finish that work, but neither are we – any of us – free to desist from it.

So go forth from here and do great things. Educate, organize, and build. Lay the way for the Jewish future you want to see emerge. And remember also the words of that other great rabbi, Mahatma Gandhi, who taught us: Be the change you want to see in the world.

In my final semester of rabbinical school, there was only one class left that I needed to take… a course in homiletics and sermon writing. I found out that I’d be studying independently with Rabbi Solomon Franks… and at once, I realized his wisdom, his ability to understand even what he seemed not to hear. I grew very attached to Rabbi Franks…

When the term ended and I was about to become a rabbi, I turned to Rabbi Franks and said, “Rabbi, what words of wisdom do you have for me as I become a rabbi?” He sat for a moment in silence and then spoke these words. “Never wear brown.” That was it…

Today, I think he was telling me if you’re going to be a rabbi, then be a bold rabbi, be a brave rabbi. You’re not the UPS delivery guy leaving packages at people’s doors.
You’re a rabbi, a servant of God. You’re here to open people’s eyes, challenge their minds, wake up their souls, comfort their broken hearts. I believe Rabbi Franks, may he rest in peace beneath God’s shelter, was telling me, a frightened, insecure rabbi, to act with courage, speak with courage, teach with courage, take risks with courage, make mistakes with courage, pray with courage, fight for justice with courage, bury the dead with courage, comfort the bereaved with courage, say the word “no” with courage and, yes, dress with courage.

I’d like to share with you seven thoughts that give me courage. And I pray they will be sources of strength for you as well.

• Stay true to your calling, true to your unique rabbincic voice, to your unique rabbincic gifts. Don’t let your eyes and your heart and your ego and your vanity tempt you into situations that will make you miserable.

• Don’t let anyone crush your spirit.

• Don’t let your impediments define you. Lead with your strengths, know your faults. Lead by enlisting and empowering others to join you in all of your undertakings.

• Don’t forget your family. Live a life of balance. Treasure your friends. Don’t stop doing the things you love.

• When God spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, the rabbis asked the famous question “Why in the wilderness of Sinai?” And the answer given is, “anyone who doesn’t open himself or herself up like a vast and open wilderness cannot acquire wisdom or Torah.” We’ve all heard people say a rabbi needs to have thick skin. But staying closed can impede us. It can keep us removed and unmoved. Open yourself up. It’s in the vast open wilderness that our people received the Torah.

• Never wear brown, which is to say be bold and courageous.

• Whatever you dream for yourself doesn’t even begin to scratch the surface of what God’s been dreaming for you.

Let’s begin with Pastoral Care 205, Case study: family dynamics.

Abraham, an elderly father with an over-developed sense of patriarchal authority, is married to Sarah, also elderly but energetic, opinionated, and aggressive. They have one son, Isaac, who exhibits symptoms of some early traumatic conflict with his father. Abraham also has a mistress, Hagar. They have a son named Ishmael, a dreamer. And Sarah is obviously rather jealous of Hagar and of the attention Abraham gives to Ishmael. Each is able to express his or her feelings without any difficulty. And yet the tension seems to persist within this family.

Today these three children of Abraham – Jews, Christians, and Muslims – continue to try to make sense of their inescapable consanguinity in a much compressed world. With this institution and the work that the rabbis are doing, there are very many good signs that the Abrahamic colloquy is proceeding. However, it is also a time when among the blossoms, as we all painfully know, there are lots of thorns. People are willing not only to die for their faith; they’re also willing to kill for their faith.

Pick Jerusalem, where many of you have had the wonderful chance of studying, where the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Al-Haram al-Sharif all fall on that tiny plot of real estate, which has become a kind of a microcosm of our entire world. There they are, jostling each other in limited space. And here we are on our tiny globe in the same situation.

It is my hope that those of you who are graduating are going to become leaders, initiators in this enormously important colloquy, the Abrahamic colloquy. I see two of the most serious obstacles to the kind of movement we need to make. The first obstacle is a certain kind of tacit taboo that I have noticed in interfaith conversations about avoiding certain questions. Yes, we must find what we have in common, but not at the price of avoiding the issues which really do divide us. The second big obstacle is fundamentalists. Frequently they save their most destructive fuselage not for people outside, but for those within their own tradition with whom they disagree.

Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated, not by a Palestinian, but by a devoted Jew acting on what he believed God was requiring of him. Gandhi was killed, not by a Muslim, but by a fellow Hindu who thought that the Mahatma was going soft on Muslims. Benizir Bhutto was murdered by a fellow Muslim. In one tradition after another, all around the world, this internal struggle goes on. And what do we do – those of us engaged in interfaith dialogue and colloquy? We tend to stand back from it. We don’t like to mix into it. It’s difficult, it’s sticky. And if we do, we’re not welcome.

My commencement plea to you: the Abrahamic colloquy has to go on at the international, national, and local levels. The mosque is around the corner, not just across the ocean. The synagogues and churches are next to each other. In addition to interfaith dialogue, I suggest we inject a dose of intrafaith dialogue. It’s going to be just as hard, maybe harder. Let’s see if we can get more openness, more communication within each tradition. I don’t think God is going to give up. Maybe in God’s good time, the promise given to Abraham will come true: “I will make of your seed a blessing to all the nations.”
Rabbi David Ellenson awarded the 2008 Roger E. Joseph Prize to Father Patrick Desbois, who has devoted his life to confronting anti-Semitism, furthering Catholic-Jewish relations, and preserving Holocaust memory. At right, Sarah and Jesse Leopold and Roger Joseph, the grandchildren of Roger E. Joseph.

Since 2001, Father Desbois, advisor to the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and President of Yahad - In Unum: Catholics and Jews Together, has been crisscrossing the countryside in Ukraine trying to locate every mass grave of Jews from the time of the Holocaust. In accepting the Joseph Prize, he said, “My motivation for this sacred task was best expressed by Pope John Paul II when he told the Jews of Rome during his historic visit to their synagogue: ‘You are brothers of faith.’ Throughout the fields and forests of Eastern Europe, I have heard the echoes of God’s question to Cain, ‘Where is your brother?’, and I have heard Abel’s cry. We cannot keep silent.”

New York - May 4, 2008
The 2008 Roger E. Joseph Prize

School of Graduate Studies Master of Philosophy recipients at Graduation in Cincinnati - June 1, 2008

American Jewish Distinguished Service Award recipient Carmen H. Warschaw (left) and President’s Medal recipients Phyllis Cook (middle) and Rabbi Susan Laemmle (right), Los Angeles - May 19, 2008

Founders’ Medallion recipients Dr. John H. Walton (left) and Dr. William C. Gwaltney, Jr. (right), Cincinnati - June 1, 2008

Founders’ Medallion recipients Dr. David Altshuler (left) and Rev. Dr. John S. Luttrell (right), New York - April 30, 2008

Honorary Doctors of Humane Letters
HUC-JIR recognized the distinguished communal, civic, and scholarly leadership of:

Robert M. Heller, past Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Union for Reform Judaism; civic activist Sigmund R. Balka; author Anita Diamant; and Dr. Nechama Tec, sociologist and Holocaust scholar; at Graduation in New York.

Daniel Sokatch, Founder and Executive Director, Progressive Jewish Alliance and incoming Chief Executive Officer, San Francisco Jewish Federation; Christoph von Dohnanyi, Principal Conductor, Philharmonia Orchestra, London; Professor Jacqueline Powers Doud, President of Mount St. Mary’s College; at Graduation in Los Angeles.

Dr. Harvey Cox, Hollis Professor of Divinity, Harvard Divinity School; Professor Natalie Zemon Davis, Henry Charles Lea Professor of History Emerita, Princeton University, and Adjunct Professor of History, Professor of Medieval Studies, University of Toronto; and Martin Peretz, Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of The New Republic; at Graduation in Cincinnati.

Honorary Doctors of Humane Letters
HUC-JIR recognized the distinguished communal, civic, and scholarly leadership of:
Alumni Honorary Degree Recipients

HUC-JIR honored distinguished alumni for their 25 years of dedicated leadership and devoted service (see back cover).