

HUC-JIR CLERGY FORMATION INVESTIGATION

Curricular Pathways for Spiritual Formation & Leadership Development

SUBMITTED BY

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Table of Contents

- I. Executive Summary..... 3
- II. Background..... 5
- III. Defining Terms..... 7
- IV. Summary of Findings..... 9
- V. Dynamics That Inform Clergy Environment..... 10
- VI. Voices from the Field..... 12
- VII. Conclusions..... 13

- Appendix A: One-to-One Conversations..... 16
- Appendix B: Group Conversations 17
- Appendix C: Reflections from the Field..... 18
- Appendix D: Consequences of Not Having Training..... 21

I. Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

In response to the evolving Jewish community landscape and changing roles and expectations for clergy, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC–JIR) is redesigning its rabbinical and cantorial school curricula. This includes developing online options for clergy degree programs. Provost Andrea Weiss engaged HUC–JIR New York Dean Rabbi David Adelson and Rabbi Benjamin Ross to create a framework for leadership development and spiritual formation objectives to be integrated into HUC–JIR’s programs.

Historically, HUC–JIR has included professional development courses and fieldwork to support leadership development and spiritual formation. However, these initiatives have varied in success and impact, often depending on grant funding and individual campus efforts. This project aims to create a holistic and comprehensive structure for leadership development and spiritual formation that integrates these elements with Judaica courses, thus preparing students to be skillful and successful clergy upon ordination.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The project explored two main questions:

1. What core leadership skills and spiritual preparation do rabbis and cantors need to thrive in today’s communities?
2. How can HUC–JIR enhance its clergy programs to train the leaders needed for this moment?

Building on insights from 20 Clergy Formation Focus Groups facilitated by Rabbi Carla Fenves from October 2022 to March 2023, the project identified three essential categories for clergy formation: Talmud Torah (Jewish textual literacy), Neshamah (spirituality and self-awareness), and Kehilah (practical leadership and community building).

Dean Adelson and Rabbi Ross engaged in a series of conversations to explore and develop consensus around the type of spiritual and leadership skills that rabbis and cantors need to flourish in today’s organizational landscape. This outreach included 52 one-to-one conversations (Appendix A) with HUC–JIR faculty and staff as well as with thought leaders, movement leaders, and practitioners in the realms of leadership development, spiritual formation, and organizational change. Toward further refining their learning from the one-to-one conversations, they then held small group discussions (Appendix B) with 53 alumni, current students, lay leaders, educators and executive directors. From January–March 2024 we shared a draft report and collected feedback from over 25 respondents who participated in one-on-one and group conversations.

FINDINGS

Core Themes:

- **Jewish Knowledge and Wisdom:** A strong foundation in Jewish texts, practices, and history is critical for clergy effectiveness and authority.
- **Need for Cohesive Spiritual and Leadership Development:** A cohesive strategy with defined outcomes is necessary to prepare clergy effectively.
- **Immersive and Reflective Training:** Intensive training programs with space for reflection are identified as the most formative experiences for developing spiritual leadership skills.
- **Support for Cultural Transformation:** Respondents envision HUC–JIR as a dynamic learning community with robust mentorship and an emphasis on spiritual and leadership practices.
- **Curriculum Misalignment:** The current curriculum does not fully align with the demands on modern clergy.
- **Widespread Support for Curriculum Transformation:** Stakeholders universally endorse a shift in curricular focus to meet contemporary clergy roles and needs.

- **Challenges to Making Change:** Despite strong support for change, there are concerns about HUC-JIR's capacity to shift its culture and orientation.

Essential Skills and Competencies include:

- **Spiritual Competencies:** Pastoral authority, personal theology, spiritual authenticity, and the ability to be present and listen deeply.
- **Leadership Competencies:** Personal purpose, emotional intelligence, relational skills, reflective practices, ethical orientation, visioning, collaboration, talent development, power consciousness, creativity, civil discourse, entrepreneurship, and cultural competence.

CONCLUSION

The project highlights the urgency of integrating Torah learning, spiritual practices, and leadership skills within the HUC-JIR ecosystem. It also emphasizes the importance of cultivating ongoing spiritual and leadership practices, rather than achieving mastery. HUC-JIR has the potential to serve as a vibrant hub for leadership development and spiritual formation, essential for Reform and American liberal Jewish communities — especially after October 7th.

HUC-JIR aims to function as a learning laboratory, providing students with experiential learning opportunities, robust mentorship, and a safe space for reflection, feedback, and growth. By prioritizing rigorous academic learning alongside spiritual formation and leadership capacity, HUC-JIR commits to training clergy who are:

- I. Authentic interpreters and transmitters of Jewish tradition,
- II. Spiritually grounded and pastorally authoritative,
- III. Purpose-driven leaders capable of innovation and collaboration.

HUC-JIR aspires to prepare its students for dynamic and transformative leadership in a rapidly changing world.

II. Background

In response to the rapidly changing Jewish community landscape and shifts in clergy roles and expectations, HUC-JIR is redesigning its rabbinical and cantorial school curricula and developing online options for clergy degree programs. As part of these efforts, Provost Andrea Weiss engaged HUC-JIR New York Dean Rabbi David Adelson and Rabbi Benjamin Ross to develop a framework for leadership development and spiritual formation objectives and outcomes to inform and be integrated into HUC-JIR's rabbinical and cantorial programs.

HUC-JIR has long included professional development courses and required fieldwork experiences which support leadership development and spiritual formation. Over the years, additional initiatives have been introduced to further cultivate those goals for rabbinical and cantorial students.¹ These initiatives have been driven by passionate administrators or faculty on a given campus, responding to the perception that a critical missing element of training was needed to develop a well-rounded clergy. Their success and impact have varied, depending in part on the continuation of grant funding. Over the years some initiatives have been incorporated into the curriculum;² others are available to only a select handful of students or only to students on a given campus, while several others lost their funding and were phased out. At all times, individual mentoring and attention from faculty members, both inside and outside of the classroom, have been essential to clergy formation for students.

This investigation was charged with exploring a more holistic and comprehensive architecture for leadership development and spiritual formation. Attention to the thoughtful integration of spiritual and leadership competency with Judaic and academic content will elevate the educational experience and better prepare students to be skillful practitioners upon ordination. The project focused on two essential questions:

- **What are the core leadership skills and spiritual preparation that rabbis and cantors need in order to thrive and meet the needs of today's communities?**
- **How might HUC-JIR enhance, change, and/or transform its clergy programs to train the spiritual leaders this moment demands?**

This project builds on the learnings from twenty Clergy Formation Focus Groups facilitated by Rabbi Carla Fenves that took place from October 2022 to March 2023 as part of the research and design phase for the development of online options for HUC-JIR's seminary programs. After speaking with over 100 stakeholders—including alumni, current students, faculty, lay and movement leaders, board members, and more— three essential categories for clergy formation emerged from the focus groups:

1. **Talmud Torah:** Building a strong foundation of Hebrew and textual literacy that allows lifelong access to Jewish sources. This foundation provides an authentic connection to Jewish tradition and history, understanding of the canon, and ability to translate them into modern life with meaning and relevance.
2. **Neshamah:** Developing self-awareness, cultivating one's spirituality and pastoral presence, and developing a personal theology and distinct rabbinical/cantorial voice while managing ego and boundaries.
3. **Kehilah:** Gaining the practical leadership and organizational skills needed for being a builder and sustainer of an evolving community.

¹These include current grant-funded opportunities like Tisch and Star Fellowships (for New York students), the Be Wise entrepreneurship fellowship, and the Spirituality Initiative; and have included others like the Mandel Leadership Initiative. Clergy students also have the option of taking advantage of supplemental degree opportunities available in the School of Education (additional one-year MA in Educational Leadership) and the Zelikow School of Jewish Nonprofit Leadership (MAJMN or certificate).

²Examples are the 4th year leadership course for rabbinical students, 2nd and 3rd year integrative seminar in NY (Ma'agal HaChayim) CPE and other fieldwork requirements, and individual and group supervision.

Building on these conclusions, from August through December 2023 Rabbis David Adelson and Benjamin Ross engaged in a series of conversations to explore and develop consensus around the type of spiritual and leadership skills that rabbis and cantors need to flourish in today's organizational landscape. This outreach included 52 one-to-one conversations (Appendix A) with HUC-JIR faculty and staff as well as with thought leaders, movement leaders, and practitioners in the realms of leadership development, spiritual formation, and organizational change. Toward further refining their learning from the one-to-one conversations, they then held small group discussions (Appendix B) with 53 alumni, current students, lay leaders, educators and executive directors.

The final stage of strengthening this document was to share an almost-final draft with interviewees, both one-to-one and in small groups, as well as with leaders within HUC-JIR, January-March 2024, to inquire if the report was reflective of the challenges clergy face and the essential leadership and spiritual capacities and dispositions they need to thrive. The 36 respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of the findings and urged the work forward. Additional conversations within HUC-JIR reflecting on the draft provided critical feedback toward refining and tightening the language and focus.

This report summarizes the consensus of insights about the skills and dispositions cantors and rabbis require today and how they will best acquire those core competencies while in cantorial or rabbinical school. It then explores how to concretize these broader goals into learning outcomes and programmatic ideas.

A final note of gratitude. We are grateful for the time taken by HUC-JIR staff and faculty, Reform movement leaders, cantors and rabbis, and other partners and thought leaders to support this investigation. Their passion and support for HUC-JIR and its vision to train Jewish clergy and leaders to meet the urgency of this moment and serve future generations was inspiring and pushed us to do our best work. Thank you!

III. Defining Terms

Informed by the final round of feedback from HUC faculty, clergy in the field, and thought leaders, we are providing working definitions for Leadership, Spiritual Formation, and Judaic Wisdom. They are not finished definitions. But we are asserting that Jewish spiritual leaders need a high degree of facility in all three to thrive. This pivotal moment for human history, Reform Judaism, liberal Judaism in the US and around the globe, and well-being of our planet require nothing less.

All three require a certain amount of base knowledge and instruction, practiced and refined skills, and ongoing reflection and integration. In this way, all three capacities might be understood as cultivated dispositions one practices as opposed to a perfected competency.

Spiritual Formation: A Jewish understanding of the spirit may be understood as the part of ourselves which perceives the self as connected to something more. We might use terms to describe spiritual awareness like being created in the image of God, or being a part of the whole of creation, or experiencing moments of transcendence. It is critical that a clergy person work steadily — employing spiritual practices like study, prayer, communal singing, embodied practices like yoga, working toward justice, meditation, and participating in personal and communal Jewish life — to cultivate their personal spiritual grounding. Such grounding will support clergy to courageously serve their sense of calling and incline away from serving other ends, like ego gratification, status, or financial reward.

Leadership:³

Leadership is building and exercising personal and collective power toward achieving a collective goal. Clergy are most powerful when they know who they are and work to intentionally embody middah-informed qualities such as humility, generosity, compassion and strength. Their ability to be fully present to themselves, others, and God is needed to effectively articulate the depth of Jewish wisdom and how it can apply to our lives and our moment in history.

Exercising personal power requires the ability to 1) articulate a clear sense of personal purpose and vision, 2) listen deeply and in a reflective and skillful manner to give and receive feedback, 3) employ and refine systems for prioritizing and managing time, 4) cultivate spiritually grounding practices to weather personal, organizational, and societal storms as they arise, and 5) maintain a mature sense of one's capacities and limitations.

Exercising collective power requires the ability to 1) successfully exercise personal power, 2) identify and develop leaders, 3) co-create and advance a vision in partnership with others, 4) encourage a culture of reflection, innovation, and entrepreneurship, and 5) create systems and processes which are inclusive and productive with clarity of roles and responsibilities.

Judaic Competency

HUC-JIR engages its students in the study of Jewish history, thought, and all strata of classical Jewish literature. Its curriculum seeks to integrate academic methods of study with traditional Jewish modalities of “chevruta” and “beit midrash” study. Academic methods include (without being limited to) a focus on historical development of all genres of Jewish writing, of the historical contexts from which these literatures emerged, and of the changing historical contexts in which different communities of Jews and

³For the sake of this document, we are not including what might be considered management skills, although the definitional boundaries between leadership and management are certainly porous. We define leadership skills in the context of this report as distinct from management skills such as budgeting, supervising people, fundraising or nonprofit board governance. Currently, cantorial and rabbinical students have the opportunity to gain some of these types of skills by studying for an MA in Jewish Nonprofit Management or a Certificate in Jewish Organizational Leadership from HUC-JIR's Zelikow School of Jewish Nonprofit Management or related skills with an additional year of study to earn a Master of Educational Leadership degree with HUC-JIR's School of Education.

Jewish cultures produced, practiced, and transmitted Judaism. Academic methods of necessity require that students learn to read, critically evaluate, and appreciate the contributions of scholars outside of Jewish Studies whose research illuminates our understanding of our people's past. Traditional Jewish modalities of chevruta and beit midrash are more focused on seeking insight through dialogue and intertextual readings of the Jewish canon.

Upon ordination, students should be able to analyze a text and understand it in its historical context. It is this facility to access our primary sources through a contemporary lens that provides an essential pillar of a clergy person's authority. That authority as a translator of the sources of Judaism (figuratively, as well as literally) allows a rabbi or cantor to speak as a spiritual leader. The authority that derives from textual facility provides the language and framework for spirituality and leadership skills. It is what makes their leadership and religiosity particularly Jewish.

IV. Summary of Findings from 10,000 Feet

A number of consistent themes emerged in the conversations with more than 100 stakeholders.

- A) **There is widespread support for the broader goal of HUC-JIR transforming and adapting its curriculum to meet contemporary clergy roles and needs.** Stakeholders across roles universally endorse a shift in curricular focus and are deeply invested in HUC-JIR's success in establishing and maintaining its primacy as a relevant, modern training institution for clergy.
- B) **Jewish knowledge and wisdom are central.** Instilling in clergy a strong foundation in Jewish text, practice, and history is mission critical. Clergy authenticity is rooted in a blend of deep Jewish wisdom and personal spiritual practices.
- C) **HUC-JIR's current program does not align with current post-ordination demands on clergy leaders.** There was universal agreement, inside and outside of HUC-JIR, that the leadership development and spiritual formation training spiritual leaders need today is profoundly different than it was 10, 20, and most certainly 30 years ago and that, as a result, the current curriculum is not fully meeting the demands facing rabbis and cantors.
- D) **A cohesive spiritual formation and leadership development strategy is needed to train and prepare clergy for the breadth of post-ordination roles.** There was widespread consensus that there is a critical need for an articulated cohesive narrative around spiritual formation and leadership development with defined outcomes and objectives to be achieved by ordination.
- E) **Rabbis and cantors identified immersive and reflection-oriented training as the most formative modality in helping develop their spiritual power as leaders.** Across the board, rabbis and cantors cited intensive training programs and opportunities featuring space to test and evaluate as the most influential experiences that have shaped their growth and development.⁴
- F) **Stakeholders support a cultural transformation of HUC-JIR as a learning laboratory.** Respondents envision HUC-JIR creating a more robust mentorship infrastructure, investing more in functioning as a dynamic and accountable learning community, and increasing the emphasis on spiritual and leadership practices. Individual and group opportunities would ensure integration of what is learned from these practices. Many also noted interest and value in inviting greater transparency around HUC-JIR's transformation as the clergy programs evolve.
- G) **Despite strong support for change, there are widespread reservations about whether HUC-JIR will in fact be capable of shifting its culture and orientation.** Although there was broad alignment, internally and externally, that change is needed, there is significant doubt about whether change can and will be achieved.
- H) **There are significant negative consequences for clergy who do not have high-level leadership and spiritual training.** Prompted by leadership in the Cantorial School, we added a question about the consequences of not having this training in the questionnaire seeking feedback on the almost-final draft of this report. The responses were emphatic and presented a sense of urgency to strengthen HUC-JIR. A selection of responses can be found in Appendix D on page 26.

⁴Formative training most frequently mentioned included: CPE (1:1 mentorship and small group cohort); Tisch Fellowship (small group cohort, travel/investigation, cultivating culture of experimentation and asking big questions), mentorship (faculty, staff, other); in-person observation of inspirational rabbis, cantors; cohorts; managing practicum/recital.

V. Dynamics That Inform Clergy Environment

The sections below summarize consistent themes regarding the changing landscape for clergy, the skills rabbis and cantors need to meet this new reality, personal reflections around spiritual leadership, an assessment of what rabbis, cantors, executive directors and lay leaders view as the most critical leadership and spirituality dispositions and skills for clergy, and the value of mentorship in leadership and spiritual development. Together, they help frame a curricular direction for HUC-JIR to consider. Additionally, many clergy and lay leaders noted the job of a congregational rabbi has become almost too big, too varied, with unrealistic expectations for one person to successfully achieve. Respondents' perspectives about the nature of this change identified three primary areas that define the current landscape for HUC-JIR ordines.

A) *The Shifting Landscape that Clergy Encounter*

The narrative that the world has changed for rabbis and cantors feels universal.

- **Clergy are operating in higher stakes, anxiety infused, more socially toxic environments.**

- Challenges abound: climate change, political divisiveness, identity politics, prominence of social media, Israel/Palestine conflict, power-hungry lay leaders, financial crisis, (im)migration upheaval, mental health issues.

- **While some congregations are thriving or maintaining, many congregations are struggling and almost all synagogues will need to evolve to survive.**

- Liberal Jews, like members of other liberal religious communities, are less likely to join congregations. Smaller congregations are closing, larger congregations have seen their numbers drop. The financial model is uncertain and proven alternatives have not been established.
- Some Early Childhood Centers which were an entry to congregations are now struggling due to the introduction of public nursery school and pre-kindergarten programs.
- Despite uncertainty about what synagogues will look like in the future, respondents remain confident that congregations have the potential to play a critical role in defining and strengthening the American Jewish community (even if they are smaller in number) within a larger constellation of Jewish organizations.

- **There are a plethora of Jewish options, and congregations cannot count on a steady flow of new congregants.**

- There are a myriad of online and other resources for high quality Jewish engagement, adult learning, Jewish mindfulness, social justice, b'nei mitzvah experiences, etc., that cost less and are often more personalized than any one congregation is able to offer.
- Rabbis and cantors spend a lot of their time selling and pitching Judaism and focusing on innovative models of engagement and retention.

- **Clergy are called on to be symbolic exemplars in a new way.**

- Now, more than ever, it is critical for clergy to develop a strong ethical and moral center to navigate personal and organization pitfalls and thrive. The Me Too movement and recent Reform movement ethics investigations, social media, and contemporary social expectations demand that clergy model integrated personal and professional ethics under a higher level of scrutiny. Clergy can model holding self and others to account with regard to the use and abuse of power.

B) *The Expanding Modern Clergy Skill Set*

In order to adapt to this shifting landscape, respondents laid out a vision for the future that includes a broader set of skills for clergy than they needed in the past.

- **Dynamic, visionary, spiritually rooted and wise rabbis and cantors are more important than ever.**
 - As Jews exercise more choice over their affiliations, and as they stress-test the ability of institutions to withstand greater diversity, rabbis and cantors need interpersonal and leadership skills to meet people where they are. Spiritual grounding and Jewish depth will distinguish clergy from other skillful helping professionals.
- **Robust Jewish and Hebrew knowledge are critical pillars upon which Reform clergy must build their formation.**
 - As people look for Judaism's relevance to modern challenges, rabbis' and cantors' authority as clergy must also be deeply rooted in Jewish texts across the narrative arc of the Jewish people.
- **Clergy leadership outside of traditional pulpit/congregational roles is especially important to today.**
 - Non-congregational engagement opportunities are proliferating for Jews of all ages. Camps, Hillels, as well as legacy and start-up Jewish organizations are seeking Reform rabbis and cantors who are knowledgeable in Judaic content, and are dynamic, visionary, and spiritually grounded leaders.
 - Many clergy opt out of the congregational ecosystem in order to reduce stress and achieve greater work/life balance.
 - The financial pressures facing many synagogues have led to a reduction in pulpit positions and require clergy to become involved in more operational matters than ever before.

C) **Clergy Skills Application**

Respondents were asked to reflect on where they perceive skill challenges, where they see a need for growth, and to consider whether HUC-JIR is well situated to address this gap.

- **We heard time and time again, that the greatest challenges clergy face come from applying spiritual leadership, not from absence of Jewish knowledge. (Simultaneously, most noted with humility that, while they have solid Torah training, they are committed to continue their text learning throughout their lives).**
 - Clergy were clear that a great majority of their professional struggles arise from challenges related to working in partnership with colleagues and lay leaders, articulating and co-creating a vision, and supporting civil discourse in a time of division. Applying spiritual leadership might involve evaluating gaps in their own leadership or institution, knowing how to manage their time, identifying and developing leaders, and collaboratively setting and implementing a vision, all from a place of self-awareness and spiritual grounding.
- **Clergy must access the depth of wisdom embedded in Jewish textual and broader tradition AND they must be exemplary teachers, translators, and meaning makers.**
 - Information about Jewish tradition is readily available online. What clergy provide is a connection with individuals and communities as they speak to the moment, deepen the sense of belonging, and build relationships by providing stimulating questions and not just articulating answers. Through the trust clergy build in relationships, they earn the invitation to collaborate on life transformation.
- **HUC-JIR is well positioned to be a vibrant hub of leadership development and spiritual formation desperately needed by Reform and American liberal Jewish communities.**
 - The quality of the faculty, the congregational infrastructure and the reach of the Reform movement, with strong partnership with the CCAR, URJ, and other movement partners positions HUC-JIR with the potential and capacity to reimagine what leadership looks like for American Judaism.

VI. Voices From The Field

A Closer Look: Personal Reflections on Spiritual Leadership

Rabbis, cantors, executive directors, and lay leaders were collectively invited to share their reflections on spiritual leadership in action. These narrative reflections are snapshots of spiritually rooted and embodied leadership. They provide a window into what is possible when rabbis and cantors are able to manifest the texts of Judaism along with a developed spiritual awareness and the leadership skills to actualize their goals and ambitions.

When asked to describe a time when they have been at their best, spiritual leaders most commonly described a strong connection between Torah learning and their ability to access their full spiritual leadership. For many, the underpinnings of knowledge and wisdom allowed them to be present and pastoral. These selected reflections describe a few of the tangible ways in which clergy draw upon their spiritual strength to serve communities. (An expanded selection of thoughtful and powerful reflections from participants are included in Appendix C.)

“I’m thinking about Oct. 7th, the pre-school parents were terrified. I had to work hard to listen to the deeper questions and concerns that they had. They ultimately were not merely worried about security, although that was part of it, but it was more than about fences and barriers. I kept asking myself, what is the spiritual reality that is present right now, how do I hear what they are communicating on that level, and how do I meet them there.”

Spiritual leadership skills: masterful listener, manage own agitated state, hold bigger picture, communicate to the deeper (unarticulated) spiritual needs.

“There was a tragic car accident of a young mother who had converted to Judaism about a year before. We had a mix of mourners, some Jewish and some not Jewish. She had a young child. Through my CPE training I was able to recognize my own feelings, differentiate between subjective (not my tragedy) to objective (how I can be a pastoral presence). I leaned on my colleagues and my cohort from school. I felt like I was prepared with a depth of theological answers. In some ways I am still reeling. What felt essential was being able to communicate to non-Jewish families while balancing everyone’s grief, and my own.”

Spiritual leadership skills: Ability to articulate personal theology, speak to grief through a Jewish lens effectively to Jewish and other mourners, ability to differentiate own suffering with those around them.

“Congregants come to meet with me in moments of confusion and crisis. They just want someone to listen, they are not really seeking answers. It took me a while to be comfortable just listening, and not feeling like I needed to provide an answer or wanting to get out of the conversation right away. My job is to be with them, look them in the eye, and let them know I am present.”

Spiritual leadership skills: Pastoral authority, personal practice and awareness, ability to hold others’ pain beyond personal knowing, to be present and not feel called to fix.

(from a past-President at a URJ congregation) *“We had a large mass tragedy. I was president at the time. We had a congregant who had been president before me who killed himself and his entire family. His kids were in the religious school. It impacted the entire congregation. At the memorial service there were 500 people. The rabbi from the bima, the way he incorporated our purpose, the unknown, the tragedy, and pulled it all together, it was spiritually uplifting in a way it had never been before. From that point on there was a sense of the cohesiveness of the rabbi with the entire congregation.”*

Spiritual leadership skills: The ability to apply ancient texts in moments of grief, loss and horror elevates Judaism’s relevance and allows clergy to build relationships and community.

VII. Conclusions

The vision of an integrated curriculum of Torah study and other skills goes back to our foundational sources.

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר, אם אין תורה, אין דרך ארץ. אם אין דרך ארץ, אין תורה. אם אין חכמה, אין יראתה. אם אין יראתה, אין חכמה. אם אין בינה, אין דעת. אם אין דעת, אין בינה. אם אין קמח, אין תורה. אם אין תורה, אין קמח

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said: If there is no Torah [study] there is no proper conduct; if there is no proper conduct there is no Torah [study]. If there is no wisdom there is no fear of God; if there is no fear of God there is no wisdom. If there is no knowledge there is no understanding; if there is no understanding there is no knowledge. If there is no flour (sustenance) there is no Torah; if there is no Torah there is no flour. (Mishnah, Pirke Avot 3:17)

This project yielded three primary takeaways.

- I. **Urgency of integration:** It is evident that Torah learning, the habits of ongoing spiritual practice and reflection, and leadership skills should be interconnected. HUC-JIR, especially since the 2001 rabbinical school revision overseen by then Provost Norman Cohen, has emphasized the integration of these three elements in curricular planning. The rabbis, cantors, and thought and movement leaders we spoke with call for Judaic knowledge, professional development, and religious life to be even more fully integrated within the HUC-JIR ecosystem.
- II. **Importance of cultivating a commitment to practice, with cohesive outcomes and objectives.** The conversations revealed a set of core leadership and spiritual formation skills for which all stakeholders support requiring competency, but not necessarily mastery. Spiritual depth and effective leadership skills are not achieved after a course of study, but are ongoing practices. These core competencies can be grouped as follows:

Core Spiritual Competencies:

- Demonstrates pastoral authority
- Listens carefully
- Apologizes skillfully, and teaches from doing so
- Articulates personal theology, and teaches from it
- Talks comfortably about experiencing God in their life
- Has a deep sense of spiritual authenticity and integrity around their own spiritual practices
- Commits to trying and testing various Jewish practices and articulates reasons for attraction or ambivalence
- Demonstrates ability to be present to others' pain and resists the urge to fix
- Applies Jewish wisdom in ways that invite greater reflection and spaciousness
- Embraces that humans are messy and the world is messy and does not strive for or expect perfection
- Models a life of spiritual practices, such as Shabbat, kashrut, study, meditation, and personal prayer

Core Leadership Competencies:

Personal:

- **Dedicated to leadership learning:** seeing their leadership as an evolving practice
- **Purpose driven:** being clear on personal purpose and how to apply to any situation as well as identify and support others and institutions to live into their purpose
- **High emotional intelligence:** demonstrating active listening, giving/receiving feedback, and having hard conversations
- **Relationally driven:** leading relational meetings and knowing how to cultivate relational culture

- **Reflective and evaluation driven:** employing evaluation and reflection as part and parcel of effective leadership and organizations
- **Morally and ethically oriented:** having clarity on personal moral foundations and how to apply them to the most challenging situations

Communal:

- **Skillful at facilitation and visioning:** participating in and designing visioning processes, running meetings, setting agendas, and delegating responsibilities
- **Collaborates in leadership:** co-creating and collaborating with others, understanding various work styles and gaining comfort in working with others
- **Scouts talent:** identifying and developing leaders
- **Power conscious:** encountering, discussing and exercising power, their own and institutional power
- **Flexible and Creative:** encouraging new ideas and possibilities in relationships with staff and lay leaders as well as programmatic endeavors
- **Mindfully facilitates civil discourse:** engaging the most challenging issues of the day (not to be topical experts, but to be comfortable with conflict)
- **Entrepreneurial:** seeing where there are gaps and opportunities, identify and organize partners, and test and implement new ideas
- **Employs change frameworks:** applying time-tested and emergent change frameworks
- **Aware of systemic oppression and cultural competence:** employing varied perspectives around gender, race, class, LGBTQ+ so they can show up competently and lead with sensitivity

III. **HUC-JIR's Potential as a Learning Laboratory & the Importance of an Accountable Community:**

Respondents shared their insights about the ways that HUC-JIR might function as a learning laboratory for students, and how the institution could better support spiritual and leadership development. Finally, these extensive conversations point not just to the need, but also to the value and appropriateness of HUC-JIR serving as the curricular pathway for rabbinical and cantorial students to acquire these essential skills. Spiritual and leadership development, as applied in fieldwork and enhanced through professional development courses, are interwoven with the Jewish knowledge that serves as the foundation of HUC-JIR's clergy programs. For Judaic and other foundational academic teaching to be valuable, it must be applied. Effective application requires subtle leadership skills. Skillful leadership requires motivation from personal experience of deeper connection. And deeper connection emerges from authentic access to Jewish wisdom.

Our current clergy programs lend themselves to HUC-JIR serving as a laboratory and communal microcosm for students. Finally, the marketplace for clergy ordination programs is expanding while simultaneously many HUC-JIR ordinees are choosing to seek employment outside the congregational ecosystem; providing ordinees with the most robust, highly developed set of skills to go out into that world best serves HUC-JIR students as well as the Jewish people. Essential benefits of a learning laboratory culture:

- Experiential learning complements and amplifies classroom learning.
- Being in a learning community provides learners with a safe and valuable space to support each other, learn together, and be skillful and practiced at giving and receiving feedback.
- Normalizing learning as ongoing, and not emphasizing the goal of mastery, can be liberating and invite greater evaluation and improvement over time.
- Training in holding varying points of view, and in leading diverse communities, particularly in multi-generational settings, is invaluable.
- Collaborative leadership experiences such as recitals and practicums are examples of how to integrate clergy skills with leadership skills.
- HUC-JIR is well positioned to proactively serve as a bridge to other critical training/learning opportunities for students, and to provide financial support needed to focus on school work and supervised fieldwork, and this limits additional outside commitments.

While prioritizing rigorous academic learning, HUC-JIR also recognizes that spiritual formation and leadership capacity are essential components of the education of future rabbis and cantors. Toward this end HUC-JIR is committed to striving to train clergy who will:

- a) authentically act as interpreters and transmitters of Jewish text and tradition;
- b) possess a deep sense of spiritual fortitude and pastoral authority with the capacity to listen deeply and have a grounded presence;
- c) be rooted in their purpose by exhibiting the leadership dexterity to relate, envision, innovate, collaborate and co-create, and continuously recreate.

Applied Jewish Wisdom

HUC-JIR will build on its history of rigorous textual study of Jewish wisdom across disciplines to build a vibrant HUC-JIR community that serves as a learning laboratory. Jewish wisdom in the classroom will be woven into the application of spiritual formation and leadership development, prayer, internships, interpersonal and classroom dynamics, creating learning cohorts, recitals, senior sermons, and summer immersive experiences. In turn, all of these experiences will be brought into the classroom, helping transform the knowledge into learned wisdom. The essential learning modalities will blend Torah learning in the classroom into nourishing cohort learning, immersive training, mentorship, intentional space for practice, exploration, and reflection.

As an exploration of possible frameworks we used the frequently employed knowing, being, doing tripartite structure.

Knowing: Rooted in Jewish text, tradition, history and practices. There are unadulterated moments of “Textual Wow” and we strive to find opportunities for applied wisdom — bringing Torah into students’ spiritual lives and sacred work. Conversant/fluent in Jewish knowledge wisdom and where to find it. Able to engage, activate, and apply in multiple situations toward asking better questions.

Being: Have a heightened level of inner awareness, a well-oiled spiritual practice, a sense of their pastoral authority, and authenticity as a Jewish leader. They lead with an expanded consciousness, rooted in evolving personal theology, a deep spiritual well, ability to be present and listen deeply.

Doing: Able to effectively synthesize Jewish wisdom and one’s own spiritual power to effectively lead and pastor, connect, create, innovate, and transform individuals, institutions, and our tradition.

HUC-JIR seeks to continue to grow into a spiritual leadership laboratory and dynamic learning community. We are practicing all the time, and there are myriad opportunities to actively lead in community similar to how we will be in congregations and institutions upon ordination. To actualize this vision, a key question is: How do we transform HUC into a leadership laboratory — a learning space for trying, wrestling, reflecting, growing — where the learning is also revealed through the doing?

Appendix A: One-to-One Conversations

HUC-JIR

Cantor Jill Abramson
Rabbi Adam Allenberg
Dr. Gordon Dale
Rabbi Josh Garroway, PhD
Cantor Sarah Grabiner
Rabbi Lisa Grant, PhD
Dr. Alyssa Gray
Rabbi Reuven Greenvald
Rabbi Rachel Gross-Prinz
Dr. Leah Hochman
Rabbi Shirley Idelson, PhD
Rabbi Rachel Maiman
Rabbi Jan Offel
Rabbi Joe Skloot, PhD
Rabbi Ruth Sohn
Dr. Miriam Heller Stern
Rabbi Dvora Weisberg, PhD
Rabbi Nancy H. Wiener, DMin

Reform Movement Leaders

Amy Asin — Vice President and Director of Strengthening Congregations, URJ
Joy Friedman — Director of Organizing, RAC
Rabbi Hara Person — CEO, CCAR
Rabbi Rick Jacobs — President, URJ
Rabbi Esther Lederman — Director of Congregational Innovation, URJ

Rabbinic Leaders

Rabbi Nicole Auerbach — URJ
Rabbi Leah Citrin — HUC Alumni Council Rabbi
Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi — Independent
Rabbi Elyse Frishman
Rabbi Yael Splansky — Holy Blossom, Toronto
Rabbi Miriam Terlinchamp — Judaism Unbound

Leadership Formation Thought Leaders

Rabbi Elka Abrahamson — CEO, Wexner Foundation
Megan Black, DMin — Interfaith Organizer
Rabbi Lindsey Danziger — RAC/URJ
Dr. Marshall Ganz — Harvard Kennedy School
Simon Greer — ED, Fund for New Leadership
Graie Hagans — Vision Praxis Director, Bend the Arc
Dove Kent — former ED, JFREJ
Aliza Kline — CEO, One Table
Meir Lakein — Co-ED, Join for Justice
Or Mars — Wexner Foundation
Lisa Solomon — Stanford Design School

Spiritual Formation Thought Leaders

Rabbi Larry Hoffman, PhD — HUC-JIR
Rabbi David Jaffe/Yehudah Webster — Kirva
Rabbi Sara Luria — Beloved
Rabbi David Teutsch, PhD — former president of RRC
Rabbi Sheila Weinberg — Institute for Jewish Spirituality

Seminary Thought Leaders

Dr. Arelis Benitez — Director of Field Education, Vanderbilt Divinity School
Rabbi Ayelet Cohen — Dean, JTS
Rev. Carrie Doehring, PhD — Associate Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling, Iliff School of Theology
Anh Tran — Harvard Divinity School
Rev. Cameron Trimble — CEO, Convergence

HUC-JIR Leadership:

Responses to the Draft Report

Cantor Jill Abramson
Dr. Gordon Dale
Dr. Alyssa Gray
Rabbi Sam Joseph, PhD
Lesley Littman, EdD
President Andrew Rehfeld, PhD
Provost Rabbi Andrea Weiss, PhD
Rabbi Laura Novak Winer, EdD

Support for Respondent Survey

Dr. Bruce Phillips — HUC-JIC

Appendix B: Group Conversation

11.2.23 Rabbi Variety Pack

Rabbi Sarah Bassin, Director of Clergy and Congregations for HIAS, Washington, DC
Rabbi Jessy Dressin, Rabbi/Senior Director of Jewish Education, Repair the World, Baltimore, MD
Rabbi Michael Holzman, Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation, Reston, VA
Rabbi Judy Schindler, Sklut Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of the Stan Greenspon Center for Peace and Social Justice, Queens University of Charlotte, Charlotte, NC

11.7.23 Smaller Congregations

Rabbi Tom Alpert, Temple Etz Chaim, Franklin, MA
Rabbi Erica Asch, Temple Beth El, Augusta, ME
Rabbi Michael Birnholz, Temple Beth Shalom, Vero Beach, FL
Rabbi Andy Gordon, Bolton Street Synagogue, Baltimore, MD
Rabbi Ali Kobey, Rabbi and Education Director, Congregation Or Chadash, Damascus, MD
Rabbi Craig Lewis, Mizpah Congregation, Chattanooga, TN
Rabbi Sarah Smiley, Unified Jewish Congregation of Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge, LA
Rabbi Lisa Vinikoor, Beth Israel Congregation, Bath, ME

11.7.23 Larger Congregations

Rabbi Peter Berg, The Temple, Atlanta, GA
Rabbi Ken Chasen, Leo Baeck Temple, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Jill Perlman, Temple Isaiah, Lafayette, CA
Rabbi David Stern, Temple Emanu-El, Dallas, TX
Rabbi Rachel Timoner, Congregation Beth Elohim, Brooklyn, NY

11.7.23 Cantors

Cantor Richard Cohn, Senior Advisor, Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, HUC-JIR, NYC
Cantor Rachel Rhodes, Temple Sinai, Washington, DC
Cantor Rollin Simmons, Congregation Emanu El, Houston, TX
Cantor Alicia Stillman, Temple Israel, Boston, MA
Cantor Meredith Stone, Congregation Emanu-El of Westchester, Rye, NY

11.9.23 Rabbis 1-5 years out

Rabbi Liora Alban, Temple Emanuel, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Avi Fine, De Hirsch Sinai, Seattle, WA

Rabbi Scott Goldberg, Temple Leo Baeck Temple, Los Angeles
Rabbi Hilly Haber, Central Synagogue, NYC
Rabbi Jill Rubin, Temple Shaaray Tefila, NYC

11.17.23 Past Presidents of URJ Congregations

Diane Adler, Temple Sinai, Houston, TX
Amy Asin, URJ
Gary Perolman, Temple Isaiah, Fulton, MD
Heidi Segal, Temple Israel of Hollywood, Los Angeles, CA
Laurie Sobelman, Leo Baeck Temple, Los Angeles, CA
Barri Waltcher, Temple Shaaray Tefila, NYC
Michael Waxman, Temple Emanuel of Tempe, Tempe, AZ

11.20.23 Executive Directors

Anita Aronoff, Temple Israel, New Rochelle, NYC
Jack Feldman, Temple Sinai, Atlanta
Gordon Gladstone, Kol Shofar, Marin CA
Danny Glassman, Temple Jeremiah, Northfield, IL
Michael Kancher, Congregation of RJ, Orlando, FL
David Lamden, Temple Shalom, Dallas, Texas
Amy Schwach, Temple Shaaray Tefila, NYC (President of NATA)
Steve Winer, Congregation B'nai Shalom - Westborough, MA

11.30.23 HUC-JIR NY/LA students

Elana Ackerman Hirsch, RAB—LA
Yael Farber, RAB—LA
Sierra Fox, DFSSM—NY
Leslie Goldberg, DFSSM—NY
Hannah Pomerantz, RAB—LA
Morgan Tobey, RAB—NY

11.7.23 Rabbi-Education Graduates

Rabbi Joe Eiduson, Rabbi-Educator, Congregation B'nai Shalom, Westborough, MA
Rabbi Josh Gischner, Temple Shalom, Chevy Chase, MD
Rabbi Josh Knobel, Director of Center for Youth Engagement, Steven Wise Temple, Los Angeles, CA
Rabbi Eve Rudin, Director of Education, Youth and Families, Larchmont Temple, Larchmont, NY
Rabbi Carrie Vogel, Director of Undergraduate Initiatives, American Jewish University, Los Angeles, CA

Appendix C: Personal Reflections

ON SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

Holding complexity with spiritual depth toward hope/inspiration

“Basically everyone feels like it is the apocalypse, the calm center to hold people through that, the bleak inability to see the future, the ability to find hope and believe in hope, in terms of what we need right now, we need an inner conviction of a future we can see together, that is spiritual.” (R)

“The survival of Jewish people and our continuity is our task. We are working with people who are not obligated, they are not practicing because they are commanded but because it is meaningful and they are finding community. Our task is to stand on the shoulder of the generations before us and pass the baton. It is feeling very existential. We are called to transform the world, and we can have impact in real ways in all our communities and our country.” (H)

Spiritual conviction

“There is strong authenticity and conviction, and a certain amount of fearlessness. When I see that modeled, I feel like Judaism is relevant and I feel challenged, and given a gift of perspective. It is powerful for how I’m looking at the world.” (B)

“Most important to me is not just a rabbi who says it, but goes out and does it. A rabbi who will shlep out stuff from congregants’ homes after a flood. Not just saying but doing. It elevated the spiritual element of it and made me feel more connected.” (D)

False dichotomy that spiritual work has to come at the expense of academic rigor

“That is the magic of IJS, you don’t have to sacrifice the intellect to do the spiritual work.” (K)

ON HUC-JIR’S POTENTIAL AS A LEARNING LABORATORY & THE IMPORTANCE OF AN ACCOUNTABLE COMMUNITY

Classroom vs. experience, textbook vs. lifebook/modelbook

“Is it less about what happens in the classroom and how they are exposed, how they have their souls agitated by these folks, we could give back some classroom time, not the best way to acquire them. These models, they remind you of why you want to be a rabbi.” (K)

Power of being in community/cohort over time

“I’m incredibly close with my cohort, it has been an enormous source of strength during highs and lows. A group of us created an annual retreat for ourselves. We get together, we cook, we eat and pray, and bring in a scholar. This group has literally saved my life on several occasions. This career can be great and they helped me realize it.” (M)

See learning as ongoing, not seeking mastery

“When I stopped putting pressure on myself to master everything I became a lot better at what I did.”

Training to hold varying points of view, reading different generations:

“The disconnect between the generations — they are in a different place, politically and spiritually. On Israel, there is a generational disconnect.” (P)

“The issue is not that they are not in a different place, but many of them are coming from college campuses where there is an utter intolerance for other ideas. How can they learn in HUC how to tolerate other ideas — reactionary, fascist, they will not survive if they cannot tolerate other perspectives, it is a problem much bigger than HUC. (R)

1000% (training for leading in diverse communities are critical), if HUC can be a place where community is not homogeneity — but a place where different people with different perspectives can sit at the same table — that would be so huge.” (D)

Leading at HUC, opportunities to grow/test

“For my recital, I really loved the collaboration and being in the chapel and you could be at a higher level than when you go into the real world and they are like, “what are you talking about.” Folks are willing to be in your choir and go out on a limb with you.”

“Love that recital and practicum. Many students don’t transpose what they learn to the complex organizational dynamics with task forces and committee structures they find in congregation (but they should). And many cantors are more segregated from this work. We don’t have a laboratory and the senior seminar barely addresses it.” (R)

Barriers to maximizing learning:

For cantors: “Less tutoring for \$\$\$, more internships. Are there opportunities to foster really great internships and try to shift off work of tutoring BM students. By year three I’d rather be at an internship with more ages and doing pastoral education.” (R)

Applied learning:

“I think learning to celebrate Judaism’s relevance is a huge piece of what HUC can help us do. How Judaism can add real meaning to our lives today, in the here and now, and teaching us how to do it. The relational piece is so important. When people feel like they can approach their rabbi and actually have a hard conversation or share a vulnerability vs. an old school model of male rabbi who is supposed to have all the answers and is less approachable, HUC can do more to model this.” (J)

“HUC is teaching us to be authors of the Jewish story, a story that is thousands of years old, and inviting congregants to be co-authors with us.” (S)

HUC does not have to be all things to all people:

“HUC doesn’t have to be all the things, how folks can create things outside the school. What HUC did for me was create access to other opportunities. DOES NOT HAVE to be all things to all people. But it needs to proactively act as a bridge to other critical training/learning.” (J)

ON MENTORSHIP AS A SOURCE OF LEARNING AND MODELING

Mentorship was frequently cited as an invaluable resource for spiritual and leadership growth.

Powerful mentoring and modeling:

“From my CPE supervisor I learned how to come to terms with praying with patience. I have carried that forward. His modeling was so important. He let me fall and struggle. He explored my internal conversation, asking “what good will my prayer do?” This all happened over time, and I felt deeply mentored.” (J)

“Keep thinking about mentorship. Throughout my entire rabbinate I’ve carved a beautiful pathway, but it has been the people who invested in me who got me to where I am right now.”(J)

“What HUC didn’t enlighten me to was to be a mentor or be mentored. I did not understand how to be an assistant rabbi. I wish it had prepared me and prepared my assistant to be assistants. To learn how to be mentored by my senior rabbi it would have been helpful knowledge. I’ve had to invent that for myself. HUC did not prepare me to be mentored by my members — what is the mentorship we receive? In my own rabbinate, you encounter people with their own life stories, reflect with them, and then I see how they shaped me.” (M)

“When I came into HUC my relationship with conflict and conflict communication was not good — I would have described myself as conflict averse. One of my greatest strengths now is to hold and work my way through conflict. Reuven Firestone modeled it for me, how he showed up in interfaith spaces, his presence.” (S)

"I wish HUC had taught me the capacity for how to be a mentee. The formal relationships you are assigned in HUC were an unmitigated disaster." (S)

Students encouraged to take ownership of their own formation:

"For my thesis I worked with an advisor who said, "you're going to get out of it what you put into it" with the text and the relationship with the advisor. I took that to heart, and I (intentionally) developed a meaningful relationship with my thesis advisor and that was a huge part of my learning." (S)

ON THE LEADERSHIP SKILLS MOST CRITICAL TO SUCCESS

Presence

"My presence is the most important thing I bring to my rabbinate. That is not something you can learn in a book or a class." (L)

Listening

"Not just listening but hearing what they are saying. Try to hear the underlying message. When the rabbi gave his Israel sermon (a month after the attack), he said I may be angering people in the room, but this is what I think. He couched it in such a way that he gave space for other people. There were people in the room who weren't comfortable. One of those people said after, 'I may not agree, but it is a different time now'" (L)

Reflection as a practice

"It is not the experiences but the reflection on the experiences where the learning happens." (L)

Leadership capacity

"I know I'm a leader in my way. There are so many organizational skills. When sent to work at a congregation I was suddenly told how to organize all these things. Would be interesting to do a strength assessment at the beginning. I have now used Strengthsfinder [leadership style assessment tool] and loved it. I have now used it with congregations, cantor friends, and women's groups. Not all of us have natural organizational skills. It helps people learn what you are naturally good at and then have self awareness." (M)

"You can't just do more and more and more. Whatever more you bring in you have to let go of things. Along with that, brought two pieces: a) we want rabbis to balance a lot of things, on the congregation and community level and individually and in their family life, we know everything is co-dependent. If your family life is falling apart, it is hard to lead a congregation. Finding that balance and communicating that is really important."

"Didn't see anything about continuing education requirements — like there are for lawyers and doctors — not a bad thing — especially if looked at as an opportunity to gain this continuous knowledge and learning. Such a training could be helpful to remind them about rooting into their leadership." (G)

Appendix D: Consequences

Selections from responses captured in January–March 2024 to the question, “What do you believe are the consequences for spiritual leaders who do not have a high level of leadership and spiritual formation training?” that was part of an invitation to provide feedback on the almost final draft.

- “I think the consequence is that we will end up with rabbis who treat their practice as a job and not a mission. I believe knowing that you have a call — that might manifest in multiple ways throughout your professional life — is essential to the success of a rabbi/cantor/Jewish professional. Without it, or at least, without deep rooting in a sense of spiritual grounding, we have overpriced administrators who treat humans like tasks to be checked off. The same, I think, is true for poor leadership development. If we want to lead future leaders and instill personal agency and spiritual legitimacy in the people we serve, we must also embody those principles. Without it, we perpetuate sick systems, we cause pain in our lay leadership, and we harm the other clergy that are part of our shared work.”
- “I think we are already seeing the consequences. Burnt out clergy, congregations who can’t find clergy, synagogues closing and not being relevant to Judaism today, a bored laity who aren’t engaged, a fractured Jewish community.”
- “The idea is that the more they themselves are developed, the more authentic they will be while they are with others. If not, they are ‘playing’ at leadership — and we see this in immature leaders who are acting the role.”
- “I think there can be a resulting lack of trust within the congregation’s leadership and a lack of connection with congregants. People want to be seen and then engaged — this takes training and self awareness which you identify.”
- “High levels of leadership training are crucial for the success of the Rabbi and the synagogue. As a lifelong Reform synagogue member and leader, I feel that there is so much more diversity among congregants as to their needs. A Rabbi needs to be able to sort this all out in ways that make everyone feel heard, but also to maintain the integrity of the institution and what it stands for. A strong leader knows the importance of a healthy partnership with the congregational leaders as well. Their Rabbinate cannot be ego driven.”
- “Burn-out perhaps is number one. An understanding of complex social dynamics within a workplace and congregational organism is a must. Knowing how to lead and inspire a dynamic staff team is a must. Without a strong base of “why am I doing this,” confronting the challenges of daily Temple life can be overwhelming and lead to burn-out and even early retirement. I have seen many recent examples of female cantors in their mid-career choosing to leave synagogue life because it’s too darn hard on us.”
- “The consequences, unfortunately, do not usually fall upon the spiritual leader. It is their staff who typically feel the greatest brunt of these deficiencies — lack of vision, defensiveness over power which leads to micromanagement, fear of retribution, anxiety, among staff who feel they have to walk on eggshells, lack of recognition for hard work, etc. The impact is on the pipeline who want to remain Jewish professionals working under someone who is lacking.”
- “These leaders end up abusing their power and viewing the role of the rabbi as unidirectionally serving a community, meaning that there is no attempt to create a shared vision between the power-conscious leader [the rabbi] and the community so that they are working together toward a vision of Jewish community.”
- “We see so many examples of ineffective leaders, rabbis who do not treat their staff well, rabbis who do not know how to properly offer feedback or supervise.”
- “In a good scenario, on-the-job learning (what many or most of us did) with a supportive clergy partner will lead to growth and development of leadership skills. After all, “newbies” in any field do not usually come into a job fully developed; some trial and error is normal. In a less than great scenario, however, one may not be able to recover from mistakes made, nor have mentorship or support out in the field and may struggle to succeed in congregational/professional life.”

- “Their lack of awareness of their own spiritual center makes them less responsive to the world around them and the individuals who comprise their community.”
- “Being over their heads and potentially harmed/harmful in the extremely complex, divided, emotionally raw environment they’re entering.”
- “The burnout rate is high. The only Torah I can rely on is the Torah that emerges from my personal encounter with the tradition. Without that, it is easy for a spiritual leader to seek ego-gratification and spiritual sustenance from external sources — the loving praise of the congregation, the whims of a Board, followers online. Those are thin reeds upon which to lean.”
- “Well, we’re seeing that now, no?”

