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President Andrew Rehfeld
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Dear Andrew,

Almost one year ago, you named us as chairs of the HUC-JIR Teshuvah Working Group, giving us the mandate to recommend a path for HUC-JIR to gather testimonies and create listening opportunities, build rituals of healing and repair, and determine a process for issuing new documents and certificates of ordination and graduation - all in the name of teshuvah and accountability.

From March to June 2022 we worked to convene a working group that would be representative of various roles, identities, years of graduation, programs, campuses, backgrounds and experiences - and we connected with other movement leaders working on teshuvah for their institutions to begin to discuss how we might collaborate through the teshuvah process. Through all stages of our work, we worked to center the voices and needs of victim-survivors / persistors, while also thinking about allies, bystanders, enablers, and perpetrators.

Our working group first met in June 2022, and has always been guided by the following principles:

- Allow for variability and understand that not everyone's needs will be met
- Respond to what survivors need, and limit ourselves to our three charges
- Assume a stance of accountability and not liability
- Learn, apologize, and witness in order to transform the institution

From June to November 2022 the Working Group engaged in learning with experts in the field, reflected on that learning and its deep relevance to our mission and work, and gathered more feedback from alumni and other stakeholders. Following these months of learning, we split into three sub-committees to focus our work on identifying and designing recommendations that were informed by our work to date:

- Shomea / Listening: What opportunities for witnessing and documenting stories will effectively allow victim-survivors and other stakeholders to be heard and seen by the College-Institute?
- Avodah / Ritual: What moments of ritual are victim-survivors, and other stakeholder groups (e.g. allies, bystanders and enablers) expressing need for? How can an institution mark moments of accountability and teshuvah?
- D'var Acher / Other Recommendations: What other acts of accountability do survivors need or are we hearing that the College-Institute should do?

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There was a desire to deliver a first round of recommendations by the end of January to early February 2023. We were pleased to share the recommendations with you in person earlier this month, and today share them formally with you and the HUC-JIR administration. This work has been diligent and intentional. We are so grateful to the members of the Teshuvah Working Group who continue to give of their time, energy, and spiritual strength to learn and build together. Their courage, dedication, sensitivity, and perseverance has been a source of inspiration for us. We continue to work with them as we address remaining questions and consider additional recommendations.

We believe this first set of recommendations will move HUC-JIR further on the path to teshuvah, and, coupled with the work on policy, REDI, and safe and respectful workplaces, will build a culture of accountability. We look forward to exploring these next stages with you.

Respectfully,

Rabbi Laura Novak Winer ('94, '95) and Rachel Margolis, RJE ('07)

Co-Chairs, Teshuvah Working Group

On Behalf of the Teshuvah Working Group

Rabbi Dr. Rachel Adler ('12)
Rabbi Josh Bennett ('94)
Rabbi Meir Bargeron ('20)
Rabbi Jessy Gross Dressin ('12)
Rabbi Laura Geller ('76)
Cantor Tamar Havelio ('96)
Rabbi Sari Laufer ('06)
Rabbi Zach Shapiro ('97)
Rabbi Dr. Kari Tuling ('04, '13)

CC:

Rabbi Andrew Goodman ('08)
Rabbi Rachel Maimin ('13)
Jessica Silver
Rabbi Andrea Weiss, PhD ('93)

Teshuvah Working Group Recommendations February 2023

Shomea - Listening

As a means of healing for people harmed in the past, and also of documenting stories as a means of creating a historical record/narrative, we recommend designing and implementing four different pathways for sharing, hearing, and collecting stories of harm that have occurred in the past.

1. We recommend a series of Listening Circles led by a trained facilitator. Our recommendation is that this person help design the circles (number, structure, cohorts/groupings) and also lead them, and that there be listeners present at each circle who are representatives of HUC-JIR (e.g current and past members of the administration such as deans, provosts, presidents; members of the board of governors, past and current faculty, or other proxies)
2. We recommend a series of Writing Circles, also designed and led by a trained facilitator, in which participants respond to prompts through writing, and have options to share their writing in the moment and/or with the College.
3. We recommend creating a series of writing prompts to be shared more widely, also for folks to write and share (anonymously or named) for documenting, to be read by the Administration of the College.
4. We recommend a call also to collect pieces that have already been written, or stories that have already been shared, for the purpose of archiving in an appropriate place and manner.

Collected writings may take a variety of forms including poetry, prose, short story fiction, essays on relevant themes, testimonials for the purposes of documenting a past event, etc.

Avodah - Ritual

We recommend the creation and implementation of a series of rituals based on the Jewish calendar, both individual and communal, synchronous and asynchronous. These rituals will be designed and implemented in order to meet the needs of those who have been harmed, those who were enablers, bystanders, allies, and community members. In order for this to have significant impact, we recommend that participation in this be strongly encouraged/required for staff, faculty, students, and board members of HUC-JIR. They will each have a different purpose and theme, beginning with lament and walking, piece by piece, toward wholeness and healing. Rituals will be designed and implemented with themes that parallel the Jewish calendrical cycle, and would begin in Spring 2023, running through Spring/Summer 2024.

For Example:

Shavnot 5783/2023 - Accepting of Ethical Mantle and Launch of Ritual Cycle of Teshuvah

- Messaging by HUC Administration at Ordination and Graduation
- External reporting and commitments to action plan

Elul 5783/2023 - Lament

- Communal: Zoom event of lament
- Personal: Ritual for “coming clean” (i.e. a mikveh ritual)

Chanukah/Kislev 5784/2023 - Rededication to best practices

- Communal: Communal Learning about best practices (e.g. SRE, Sacred Spaces, Ta’amod)
On-site rituals of rededication/renaming of spaces
- Personal: Ritual of coming out of the darkness into the light

Passover/Nisan 5784/2024 - Coming out of a narrow place/Redemption

- Communal: Founders’ Day (Speakers to be invited connecting Founders’ Day with dark history and aspirations for future)
- Personal: Seder Supplement that is shared more broadly with the Jewish world
Mikveh ritual for healing

Counting the Omer Season 5784/2024

Affirmation of Ordination and Reconfirmation of Degrees

- Communal: Invitation to participate in ceremony
- Personal: Ritual related to new smicha/certificate/diploma

Founders’ Day

We recommend that there be an annual acknowledgment of dark places of HUC history on Founders’ Day.

D'var Acher - Other Recommendations

1. We recommend that HUC-JIR contracts [Jewish Sacred Spaces](#) (or another organization that Jewish Sacred Spaces recommends as expert in the field) as experts in working with organizations to create a safe respectful workspace where there has been a history of abuses.
2. We recommend HUC-JIR contracts with an ombudsperson to be a point of reporting for those who would bring forth claims to the administration. We believe that this role can help to guide best practices in reporting and whose purpose is to ensure the safety and security of those bringing forth claims are not penalized, punished or exposed to possible stigma during the process.
3. We recommend that HUC-JIR establish and implement a recurring and regularized (annual at least) platform for educating all constituencies at HUC-JIR about sexual harassment and other forms of abuse and that acknowledges that our understanding of abuse is constantly changing and that policy needs to change along with it. Institutionalizing this platform will contribute to making cultural change at HUC-JIR. This is in an effort to ensure that 'looking back' in order to 'look forward', with the frame of power, will be an ongoing part of the commitments of the College.