



Inside Rabbinic Life

**David Glanzberg-Krainin
& Sam Berrin Shonkoff**

The Rabbinate? 1

Discussion Guide 4

A Roundtable:

Rabbis in the Field 5

Kenneth Brander

Continuing Education 8

Rachel Cowan

Cultivating the Soul 9

Hayim Herring

Passion Yes, Charisma No. . . 10

Mel Gottlieb

Addressing Life's Difficult
Moments 11

Aaron Brusso

The Face of God's Text . . . 12

Julie Schonfeld

Leadership & Creativity. . . 12

Benjamin J. Samuels

Staying Fit and Fresh 13

Joshua Lesser

On the Margins 14

David B. Thomas

Wearing Down My Soul,
and Renewing It. 15

A Roundtable:

Nourishing the Soul 16

Joseph Reimer

Book Review 19

Scott Perlo

NiSh'ma 20

Susan Berrin

Staying Afloat & Moving
Forward. 23

Diane Levy

Sh'ma Ethics 24

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Does the rabbinate draw the “best and brightest” to serve and inspire the Jewish people? As one of the most influential perches in the Jewish community, the rabbinate should be a coveted leadership position. But a “calling” to serve is often tempered by congregational horror stories — the family fishbowl, *shul* politics, personal burnout, an ungrateful and demanding lay leadership. And recently — especially today when our communities are reeling from fiscal constraints — an overlay of executive demands has been added to the rabbi’s “job description.”

Over the past few years an array of programs have emerged that focus on rabbinic life beyond the seminary years. They encourage rabbis toward self-care, nourish rabbis intellectually and spiritually, develop their executive leadership roles, offer mentorship and suggest ways to pattern lifelong learning through a burgeoning field of continuing education programs, offered through a variety of modalities including retreats, online learning, and local and national workshops. As the contemporary rabbinate changes — and for that matter, as communities change and engage rabbis in new ways — will seminaries and rabbinical organizations be agile enough to retool their training programs? Can rabbis sustain a passion for *Torah lish'ma*? Will they develop and maintain a thirst for creatively expressing and engaging text, an ongoing authentic relationship with the Creator? Will congregations value and validate the need for continuing education? And how might meta-collaborations within and across our Jewish communities alter the rabbinic landscape? —SB

The Rabbinate?

DAVID GLANZBERG-KRAININ & SAM BERRIN SHONKOFF

Dear Rabbi Glanzberg-Krainin,

For years I have felt compelled to be a rabbi. This path incorporates my deepest interests and fascinations: teaching, literature and philosophy, meaningful moments in people’s lives, seeking the sacred. No matter how far my heart and mind wander Jewishly, I repeatedly encounter my sense that I would love being a rabbi. Wherever I am in my journey, I revisit this conviction in new ways.

I fear, however, that ordination could ironically compromise this very journey. Though almost-applying to rabbinical school has colored my past two autumns, I have annually decided to soak up another year as a layperson. I want to keep questioning, exploring, and experimenting; I don’t want my journey to end.

I am hesitant to forfeit the freedom and spontaneity of this journey. Connecting religion and career must introduce some concrete boundaries into one’s spiritual life. While I value discipline and commitment, I also enjoy the variety in my practice — the liberty to seek God in many different ways. Some mornings I yearn to lay *tefillin*; other mornings, silent meditation. Some Shabbatot I gravitate toward *minyanim*; others, the woods. I do not want to apologize to colleagues or congregants for this inconsistency. How is it for you to have your religious life on display? Do you ever feel spiritually stifled as a rabbi?

I am also reluctant to curb my explorations of the uncharted territories that define a journey. Do you feel that you have time to continue to learn and to draw from teachers? Also, are the laypeople around you hungry for Jewish knowledge? Do you feel intellectually challenged in your workplace? I sometimes wonder if a career in academic Jewish studies would be more stimulating. Did you ever consider academia over the rabbinate? How did you decide?

There appears to be a dearth of rabbis with more questions than answers. So many seem better at talking than listening, at responding than wondering. Is there something about rabbinic life that conditions people to be this way? I do not want to acquire that sort of “confidence.” How have you remained an open, curious, and wrestling Jew? Have you ever been tempted to feign certainty or to rationalize in order to feel more certain?

Thank you for your time,

Sam

Dear Sam,

Thanks for writing so openly about your search and struggles; I am very moved by your questions. Before trying to respond, let me first point out something that I found very striking about what you wrote: “No matter how far my heart and mind wander Jewishly, I repeatedly encounter my sense that I would love being a rabbi.” That’s a powerful statement to make, and I advise you to pay it close attention. Perhaps your question is not, Do I want to be a rabbi but, rather, how can I be a rabbi in a way that will keep me alive spiritually.

I am particularly struck by your fear that your religious journey will end upon ordination. In my experience, you can’t keep the journey from ending unless, has v’shalom, you die. You are always on a journey somewhere, regardless of your career path. The questions you ask have to do with where and how your journey could unfold in a way that nurtures you and makes you feel alive while allowing you to give your gifts to the world.

It is true that, to use your words, “connecting religion and career” does, in fact, limit freedom and spontaneity. There is no question that the life of a congregational rabbi imposes real boundaries on one’s ability to follow the “religious impulses of the moment.” Yet it seems to me that a religious life lived within the context of a community of any kind imposes boundaries on one’s ability to live religiously in the moment. As I read your questions, I want to ask: What role does the desire to serve play in your decision-making process? In my experience, the rabbis who are most fulfilled by their work are both passionate about Jewish life and desirous of serving God and the Jewish people. In the non-Orthodox world, one of the few places where you can both receive an intense Jewish education and live within a seriously committed Jewish community has always been rab-

binical school. But once you leave the womb of that training program, rabbis who don’t feel a deep desire to serve ha’Kodesh barukh Hu and am Yisrael are often the ones who are most deeply pained by the reality of life among am’cha.

And it is true that if you become a congregational rabbi, your religious life will be on display. Jack Bloom calls the rabbi a symbolic exemplar for the congregation. And yes, that does mean that there are times when you may be incredibly distant in your connection with God while you’re leading a Shabbat morning prayer service. I imagine that this is not dissimilar from the way a therapist feels about a client whose issues become tedious. Most therapists are not going to say to their patient: “Listen, I just can’t bear to hear you drone on for another hour.” Yes, there will be times when you are going through the motions and not really feeling it. But that boredom, and those boundaries, can also be incorporated into your religious life. “How,” you might ask God on a regular basis, “can I serve You best in these circumstances?”

Your congregants are going to be more and less fluent in the language of Jewish life. There are times when you will feel called upon to speak to your congregants on a level that might feel rather pedestrian; at other times, you will be called upon to translate at a very sophisticated level. If you are fervent about what you are doing and respectful of the different places where people are on their own journeys, you will find a community that wants to learn from your most passionate of places.

Finally, Sam, it is true that some of my colleagues exude a confidence that might at times verge on pomposity. This phenomenon might be a defense against the vulnerability that comes from functioning as a symbol of something to which one feels unworthy. It is true that members of your community will look to you for answers; it is true that saying to your members that you don’t have the answer, or that you struggle with the same issue, is indeed a risk. The culture of the community that one serves has a lot to do with how safe it is to admit one’s own confusion. But a conscious, self-aware individual does not need to become a pompous rabbi — although rabbis sometimes fit that description. It is possible to be both passionate and humble in your work despite the symbolic role that you end up playing in people’s lives.

Kol tuv, David

After earning a BA in Religious Studies from Brown University in 2007, **Sam Berrin Shonkoff** studied at the Hebrew University and the Conservative Yeshiva. He is currently the Jewish Student Life Coordinator at Stanford University Hillel and a Lisa Goldberg Memorial Writer’s Fellow for American Jewish World Service. His *divrei Torah* are posted at ajws.org/parshah.

Rabbi David Glanzberg-Krainin is senior rabbi at Beth Sholom Congregation in Elkins Park, Penn. He graduated Brown University in 1984, and received ordination from JTS in 1994. A Wexner Fellowship alum, he is a board member of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality and a trustee of the Lasko Family Foundations. He is married to Rabbi Deborah Glanzberg-Krainin, PhD, and and father of Eliana, Klielle, and Noam.

March 2009/Adar 5769
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Dear David,

I see a theme emerging in our correspondence: giving and receiving, self-awareness and awareness of others. I expressed my fear that being a rabbi might threaten my personal journey and you encouraged me to consider my desire to serve. As a Hillel professional, friend, romantic partner, and son, I have struggled with the delicate balance between giving and receiving.

I feel compelled to serve as a rabbi. When I have new insights, I almost reflexively fantasize about how I could share them. When I encounter inspiring texts, I want to read them aloud. My journals are sprinkled with dormant *divrei Torah*. I love listening to people. But the desire to serve can go awry.

It seems that one who constantly embraces the role of “symbolic exemplar” for a community could actually limit his or her capacity to inspire that community. A Zen roshi concerned with his monks must also let go sometimes and focus on his own meditation; if not, he’ll wither as a teacher. Is it not similar for rabbis? How have you sought this balance between giving and receiving in your career? How have you created space to explore your own soul so that you can help others explore theirs?

When I do not consistently “receive” richness from prayer and ritual, I wonder why I should inspire others to seek meaning in those places. I do not have perfect faith in the structures of Jewish religion. When you are, in your words, “going through the motions and not really feeling it,” how do you remain inspired to be a full-time proponent of Judaism? How do you know that God wants to be served in this way? Your statement that boredom can actually enrich one’s religious life intrigues me. I would love to hear more about this.

Thank you for your openness,

Sam

Dear Sam,

You are absolutely right to be cautious about the potential for rabbis to become so focused on serving others that they neglect to invest in their own religious growth and care. Rabbis who don’t make time for their own neshamot become burnt out and bitter. You happen to be considering the rabbinate at a time when the larger Jewish community is responding to this phenomenon with an explosion of continuing rabbinic education programs. I have participated in several that have been enriching.

I have also struggled with how to represent my

commitment to the Jewish enterprise during those times when my own inspiration is lacking. In fact, this is one of the questions that I have been exploring over the past five years through spiritual direction. I had been framing the question in the language of “passion”: To be sure that this is what God really wants me to do, shouldn’t I feel passionate about my rabbinic work all the time? My spiritual director suggested that instead of measuring the “passion” I felt, I could consider if my work allowed me to stay “compassionate” and “interested.” With this shift in my thinking, the occasional phenomenon of boredom became much less threatening. I am sure that the value of

Careers in the rabbinate are known to be taxing on family life. At the end of the day (literally and figuratively), I am more committed to being a husband and father than to being a rabbi. If love and holiness are different, love means more to me.

any relationship that you invest in over time — whether with a person or with your work — will be better calculated by your level of “compassion and interest” than it will be by your level of “passion.” Of course, I would agree that if you never have any passion for what you are doing, it’s probably a clear sign that this may not be the place God wants you to serve.

I think the scarier question you are asking is: What happens if the community that I am serving is not particularly interested in the Torah that I’m most passionate about? Will you have the courage to leave and to find a place where you can be truer to yourself? These are indeed complicated questions — especially when your parnasah is on the line.

Kol tuv, David

Dear David,

The issue of *parnasah* is so complicated. On the one hand, what a blessing it is for people to support themselves through meaningful work! And Jewish communities need leaders who can devote abundant time and energy to Jewish life. On the other hand, the fact that rabbis earn a salary for their engagement with Judaism raises sticky questions.

Active laypeople, precisely because they serve without remuneration, might have more profound influence than rabbis. About a rabbi who observes Shabbat, visits the sick, and prays everyday, one can always say, “Well, s/he gets



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paid for that!" Would engaged laypeople shed a truer light on the value of Jewish practice? And do laypeople draw more meaning from their religious life than rabbis do because they are *n'div libo*, voluntary-hearted? When do you feel that your status as a professional Jew mitigates your capacity to inspire others? How does your *par-nasah* challenge your ability to serve?

I wonder whether I, as a Torah-thirsty, non-Orthodox Jew, should go the route of the rabbinate or if I should serve as a committed layperson at the grass roots. What qualities, beyond the desire to serve, qualify someone to be an attentive rabbi rather than a devoted layperson?

I want to conclude with a more personal question. Careers in the rabbinate are known to be taxing on family life. At the end of the day (literally and figuratively), I am more committed to being a husband and father than to being a rabbi. If love and holiness are different, love means more to me. How have you struggled with this aspect of your work-life balance? Is it possible to do both wholly?

I regret to end this final letter. My questions are inexhaustible. Thank you,

Sam

Dear Sam,

In this exchange of letters we've been discussing two things at the same time: your own particular journey and the nature of the congregational rabbinate. There is a deep integrity to the journey that you write about as you reflect on your life: your love of Torah; your passion for truth and honesty; your desire to be a loving spouse and a nurturing father. And there is a genuine concern you express about the ways in which the congregational rabbinate might actually limit or compromise the very essence of what now most motivates you in life. I would be lying if I told you that you have nothing to worry about. Your queries about the congregational rabbinate are not so much questions as they are an acknowledgment of the occupational hazards of this profession. It is possible to go through the motions; to get sucked into the symbolic role that you play; to stop asking the difficult questions; to lose your own compassion because you are consumed with the petty and the trivial. There are disillusioned congregational rabbis preaching from pulpits around the country; and there are many deeply fulfilled laypeople inspiring their havurot and their congregations with their unadulterated passion for Jewish life. The pit-

falls of professional Jewish life are real, and you are wise to understand them before you make a commitment to the rabbinate.

Sam, these wonderful questions that you pose might indeed be what help you avoid becoming one of those glib and disillusioned rabbis, because in asking these questions, you already have a sense about what to be wary. Rest assured, there are rabbis who inspire their congregants to grow as human beings and as Jews; rabbis who are authentic in their own struggles with the tradition and with God; rabbis whose families are healthy and intact and loving. There are good rabbis who love what they do; and there are rabbis who are simply counting the days until retirement.

I can't tell you which kind of rabbi you'll be if you decide to send in those rabbinical school applications. But I can tell you that my own rabbinate has been a journey: one in which I have struggled imperfectly to find the proper balance between a commitment to my family and obligations to my congregation; and one in which I have tried to keep my own Jewish life alive during the times when I was only going through the motions. Along the way, I can affirm two principles: my own questions have never gone away, and I continue to feel it is a tremendous privilege to serve as a rabbi. Sam, my berakha for you is that you always keep your questions right in front of you. I have every confidence that you will find profound and important ways to serve God no matter where your journey takes you.

Wishing you all the best,

David

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Discussion Guide

Bringing together myriad voices and experiences provides Sh'ma readers with an opportunity in a few very full pages to explore a topic of Jewish interest from a variety of perspectives. To facilitate a fuller discussion of these ideas, we offer the following questions:

1. How can synagogues help their rabbis stay fresh and spiritually fit?
2. Should some form of accredited continuing education be required of rabbis?
3. How might rabbis use artistic expressions as portals for community engagement?

Rabbis in the Field: A Roundtable

To explore a vision for helping rabbis stay nimble and attuned to the demands of their communities, Sh'ma convened a conversation with the heads of several rabbinical schools. We invited two additional seminary deans to e-mail responses to the questions, which we integrated into this roundtable. We then solicited reactions from rabbis in the field to the conversation. Their responses follow on page 8.

Susan Berrin: How do you envision that your rabbinic alumni continue to learn, once they've been out of the seminary for several years? How will your graduates continue to grow as rabbis?

Aaron Alexander: Within the progressive movements, very few of us grew up with *Torah lish'ma* (learning for its own sake) as an inherent value. Our real learning of Torah began in the seminary, which doesn't feel *lish'ma*, because of grades. Creating an environment in rabbinical school that cultivates a love of learning Torah for its own sake is extremely important. Our experiment with removing grades didn't work all that well. While some students managed fine with pass-fail reporting, other students seemed to need grades as a motivation to perform.

Dan Ehrenkrantz: We don't have grades and we've not had that problem. We do wonder, though, how to accentuate what is truly outstanding work.

Renni Altman: Our students can choose grades if they want; otherwise we operate on a pass-fail system. Fundamentally, the rabbi needs to have an ongoing relationship with scholarship and learning, which we create through the alumni association — initially through conventions and now much more so through technology and online courses, many of which incorporate *chevruta* study. Many of our alumni don't have a community of other rabbis with whom they can learn, so online courses create learning opportunities that can work for a whole range of rabbis in different situations.

Sharon Cohen Anisfeld: Once students graduate there is, ironically, much that conspires to make ongoing study a real challenge. That's why it's critical to start thinking about post-graduate continuing rabbinic education in the first year of rabbinical school. I would highlight three ways in which we seek to nurture a life-long commitment to learning. First, we help students develop the skills to engage competently and creatively with classical sources in the original. This is essential if they are to become independent learners by the time they are out in the field. Second, studying in a *beit midrash b'chevruta* grounds the learning process in

friendship and community, and creates an atmosphere in which one is accountable as a student not only to one's teachers but to one's self and peers. Finally, as faculty we model a commitment to lifelong Torah study with our own *chevrutot*; this reinforces a sense of seriousness about the shared enterprise of learning.

Ehrenkrantz: The learning curve for rabbis during the first few years in the field is tremendously high — they serve essentially like a post-medical school residency. It's not until the fourth year or so that a rabbi begins to establish patterns of continuing education and learning. A focus on *chevruta* study during rabbinical school helps rabbis to replicate that method in the field. Ensuring a fixed time for ongoing learning as part of rabbinic life and inculcating that into the daily routine is critical. Missing from the rabbinate is a formal system of continuing education — a requirement that rabbis in the field need to fulfill in order to remain members in good standing of their rabbinical associations. Physicians who don't keep up with their learning lose their license to practice. The rabbinate needs some level of professionalization akin to that model.

Daniel Nevins: There are and should be multiple forms of continuing education. All rabbis must have a *chevruta*, which is a life-long obligation for all Jews, and certainly for rabbis. In addition, many of our alumni should be able to pursue specialized education such as advanced degrees in Jewish studies, or certificates in discrete skills such as clinical pastoral education (CPE) or nonprofit management, and ritual skills like kashrut supervision, *sofrut*, or writing *gittin*. Next fall, JTS will offer onsite CPE for ordained clergy, and I'm developing an advanced halakhah certificate program for our current seniors and ordained rabbis.

Dov Linzer: The Orthodox community already values *Torah lish'ma*. But because so much of the learning at our yeshiva is goal-oriented — learning all of the relevant *halakhot* — we're not cultivating *Torah lish'ma* as much as we should. When we required students to learn a hundred pages of *gemarah* independent of the yeshiva, it became just another requirement. So

ON THE CALL:

Aaron Alexander, assistant dean for the Ziegler School at the American Jewish University, divides his learning into three areas. First, he learns to teach; second, he learns to learn, *Torah lish'ma*; and finally, he learns through mentorship.

Renni Altman has redefined her rabbinate recently from being a congregational rabbi, to serving as associate dean and director of the rabbinical program at HUC-JIR in New York; she continues to learn through her exchanges with the faculty and her rabbinic colleagues.

Dan Ehrenkrantz, president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, continues to learn through reading books, magazines, and summaries of business books. Through his studies he seeks ways to connect with and understand the challenges facing the college's alumni.

Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva and dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School, tries to continue learning purely for the sake of learning, specifically Torah unconnected to his professional life; he also seeks opportunities to teach subjects that he's not yet fully explored, which creates a great impetus to learn in new areas. Close contact with alumni keeps him alert to the wider world.

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now we're not testing the students on the learning but asking them to keep a journal — summarizing what they've learned. This method, hopefully, will cultivate a love of learning every single day beyond the context of school. We encourage our rabbis to fix times for Torah, maybe learn a *daf yomi*. And while our rabbis pursue Torah learning — needing to provide halakhic answers and teach text courses — that learning does not necessarily nurture the soul, expand the rabbi's horizons, or maintain one's sense of religious purpose. For these essential experiences, we need rabbinic retreats and other opportunities to share with colleagues and to pull ourselves back from the entrenched role of rabbi.

Setting boundaries is critical to counseling or teaching and also to time management.

Altman: And as part of professional development, our rabbis must continue to hone more practical skills needed for their rabbinate.

Alexander: The advance of technology has significantly opened opportunities for studying *Torah lish'ma*. Rabbis with extremely busy schedules can now still find ways to learn — podcasting has become a tremendous resource in Judaism where anybody can download a lecture or *shiur* and listen in the car or while working out. We post an enormous amount of material online and through e-mail. We need to think creatively about how to do this most effectively.

Cohen Anisfeld: While technology is and will continue to be a tremendous asset for rabbis, online resources should not be a substitute for learning that is grounded in personal relationships. *Chevruta* study reflects a deep Jewish intuition about the connection between friendship and learning. It is at least as much about “not knowing” together — taking the risk of asking real questions — as it is about gaining knowledge and information. This is particularly vital for rabbis, who often feel immense pressure to pretend they know more than they do. *Chevruta* is great practice for saying, “I don't know” or “I don't understand this” with someone we trust.

Ehrenkrantz: I'd love to hear feedback on my suggestion to formalize some continuing education units. While some rabbis are really good about carving out time and keeping up with their studies, for others it's a real challenge. If we simply say, *as rabbis you should definitely learn a lot, and here are resources; now go use*

them, the rabbinate may not grow as a profession in the way it should.

Nevins: Mandating such a program is unrealistic and unhelpful. And I'm skeptical about credit for credit's sake. We know that merely attending conferences does not necessarily lead to the attainment of substantial new skills. But the movements could create standard formats for CRE credits and then issue benchmarks for outstanding rabbis to attain each year. Once this vocabulary is introduced it will become easier to sustain expectations that rabbis stay current in their training.

I would like to challenge rabbis to dedicate each decade of their career to a discrete skill set. For example, the first decade could be devoted to cultivating pastoral skills; the second to refreshing and expanding primary-text skills; the third to engagement in issues of peoplehood and public policy. I like the idea of career stages and shifting our focus periodically in order to break out of habitude.

Linzer: I wonder how many doctors or lawyers take those credits just to fulfill requirements and whether much growth actually occurs as a result of those demands.

Alexander: I'd like to see rabbis leave the seminary with a list of ways to further their education with a mentor who will urge them to continue to learn and grow.

Cohen Anisfeld: Rabbinic mentors help rabbis continue to work toward goals they set as students. Mentorship also underscores that the learning process does not end with ordination.

Altman: A mentoring program offers new rabbis a spiritual guide to replenish the well — especially in terms of self-care — during the early years.

Linzer: We've been struggling with mentorship because it requires preexisting relationships and also because it takes time to develop those relationships — it's not just for help in a crisis. One place to start is during a retreat, with time to share why we're rabbis and reflect on our own spiritual development — where the talks are not just about content but are inspirational.

Alexander: We've been talking about rabbis mentoring rabbis but some of our most knowledgeable, committed, and passionate members of the community are our lay leaders. I wonder what it would look like to have rabbis being mentored by their board members and laypeople.

Altman: Though this could be a helpful exchange of ideas, it might not be a good mentorship relationship. Being mentored by a member

WRITING IN LATER:

Sharon Cohen Anisfeld is dean of the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College, where she learns through exchanges with colleagues, students, friends, and family members, as well as through her own reading and writing. She is also grateful to study *b'chevruta* with two friends on a regular basis.

Daniel Nevins recently became dean of the rabbinical school at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. He continues to learn by pursuing areas in which he is less knowledgeable.

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of one's board can be fraught with difficulties. And our rabbis need mentors with years of experience in the rabbinate. We all see how often rabbis become burned out, not attending to self-care whether it comes from study, prayer, personal development, spiritual development, retreats, whatever. We can get so caught up in our professional obligations that we neglect ourselves and our families.

Berrin: *A rabbi serves as teacher and spiritual leader. Charisma can draw people to a rabbi; it can be used well, or abused. How do you address the role charisma plays in the rabbinate?*

Linzer: Our pastoral counseling program teaches our students the skills of creating boundaries — making sure they know where they end and where the other person begins. Setting boundaries is critical to counseling or teaching and also to time management — how to be “on” and how to take time “off.” We help rabbis create calendars with clear designations of time for one's own learning, and time off with family or friends.

Alexander: Charisma is a double-edged sword. When one of my friends becomes observant because of one deeply inspiring rabbi, I am thrilled to find somebody has been introduced and drawn to Torah. At the same time, I am also worried that the charismatic leader and the newcomer are unaware that the learning is grounded in 3,000 years of tradition — that anything we teach as rabbis is being taught in God's name; we teach in the name of Torah and not in our own name. This can become a very fine line, especially for charismatic leaders.

Ehrenkrantz: The community does itself a disservice by defining and understanding charisma so narrowly. When Moses is told that he is going to die, his attention goes to appointing a successor. God tells him that he should commission Joshua, an “*ish asher ruah bo*” a man in whom there is *ruah*, spirit. What do we want in our leaders? We want somebody who has *ruah bo*, who has spirit, and that may translate to charisma. But who doesn't have *ruah bo*, who does not have spirit within them? Only a dead body. So, every person has *ruah*; the question is how to see the *ruah* that a person has, to translate that spirit, which may look different than the way charisma is generally understood. In terms of rabbinic training, we concentrate a great deal on self-assessment, being able to see oneself accurately, and to be self-reflective — what we call “use of self.” Rabbis should bring

absolutely everything that they have to offer to the situations in which they find themselves. What they have to offer is a tool. If somebody is very nice looking and people respond to them because they are nice looking, that's great. But just because people respond to a nice looking rabbi doesn't make that rabbi a better person. It's only a tool.

Altman: Conversations about charisma underscore the responsibility inherent in assuming a position of leadership. The danger arises when charisma is a self-serving reinforcement of a rabbi's own ego needs.

Ehrenkrantz: Our students are required to take a mini-course in appropriate boundaries; nobody graduates without it.

It would be ideal for rabbis to work in concert... for congregational bodies to be thoughtful about how to give rabbis the tools they need to succeed in a changing world.

Cohen Anisfeld: We help each of our students cultivate a leadership style that is personally authentic, self-reflective, and responsive and responsible to others. While we address many of these issues in our counseling courses and seminars, no less important are the informal ways in which we teach students about the ethics of leadership. For example, how do we model appropriate boundaries, humility, and a healthy capacity for reflection and personal growth? How do we create an environment within our own school community that leaves space and time for spiritual renewal? How do we honor different voices, different talents, and different styles of leadership among our students and faculty?

Linzer: For some magnetic rabbis we need to worry about lack of substance — charisma has to be harnessed, and it has to be coupled with substance and attention to detail, to text, and to other people. It's not a substitute for the real knowledge and skills that a rabbi must have to be an effective rabbi.

Berrin: *What are some of the more profound challenges for rabbis in the field today and how might continuing education address some of these challenges?*

Alexander: For the Conservative movement, our most profound challenge is to find ways to inspire people to bring into their lives something from within the tradition. As rabbis, we're strug-



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- Tzitzitum: Contractions in Jewish Life

gling to find ways to help people connect, and we all ought to be learning best practices from each other.

Nevins: The ground is shifting constantly — populations are moving, families are morphing, denominational labels are blurring, obscure rituals are being reclaimed, and bedrock practices are being questioned. In this environment a rabbi must be able to identify core values and help shape his or her environment rather than be resigned to reactive behavior. Rabbis are entrusted with communal memory and stability, yet we also are challenged to help the Jewish people adapt its covenantal mission to current circumstances. Our ultimate job is to make Judaism matter for our people and the world.

Ehrenkrantz: The demand and expertise required of rabbis can be an overwhelming challenge. It would be ideal for rabbis to meet with one another, to work in concert, and for institutions — rabbinical schools, rabbinical associations, and congregational bodies — to be very thoughtful about how to give rabbis the tools they need to succeed in a changing world.

Altman: Among the most profound challenges for an individual rabbi is the issue of self-care, of being whole, of finding that elusive balance between personal and professional life — of ongoing spiritual growth and personal nourishment. Professionally, the rabbinate demands an ever-expanding skill set. Today, rabbis are expected to be both visionary — think in terms of the big picture — and aware of all aspects of congregational life. We want leaders to reach out to Jews beyond the walls of the congregation, to the periphery of the congregation. We need to help our alumni develop those ever-expanding skills.

Cohen Anisfeld: We need to be able to respond to the question that so many Jews today are asking in one form or another: “Why be

Jewish? Why does all of this matter?” Though this may once have been the question of the wicked child at the Passover seder — “*Ma ha’avodah hazot lachem?*” (What is the meaning of this worship to you?) — we can no longer see those asking such questions as wicked; we can no longer afford to relegate them to the margins of our communities. In fact, this creates a wonderful opportunity for us rabbis to be more honest and reflective about why we ourselves do what we do, why it all matters. Judaism will thrive if it speaks to the most significant and elemental moments and mysteries of people’s lives — to the questions, fears, joys, sorrows, and longings that make us human.

Linzer: The challenge we all face is to connect people to our Jewish heritage. Rabbis must recognize that this is a central responsibility and obligation, and our rabbinical schools must commit time to teach rabbis how to reach out and to help synagogues realize this is the work of rabbis. We’ve heard some synagogues ask rabbis: *Why are you taking all of that time, you should be focusing on those within the synagogue? And, why are you bringing all these people into our synagogue, they are not our members?*

Rabbis must also address larger global responsibilities, and we can’t ignore the current financial crisis that is having a devastating effect on Jewish institutional life. This crisis presents an opportunity to help people focus on questions of meaning rather than materialism. Within the Orthodox community we’re very good at learning and observing, but we’re less focused on why we’re doing something and connecting our behavior and habits to a sense of meaning within the tradition. Modern Orthodoxy has never developed a religious ethos, a religious mentality that offers a perspective on the world, and provides a lens through which to interpret our experiences. 

Continuing Education

KENNETH BRANDER

The offerings of a continuing education program must be broad enough for the entire rabbinic community. We approach our rabbinate based on our own leadership styles, disposition, and community dynamics. And at different stages of our rabbinic tenure, our needs for support and professional development change.

As several of the rabbis in the foregoing Roundtable mentioned, mentoring programs for new pulpit rabbis can be an effective tool in the arsenal of continuing education programs. With the help of the Legacy Heritage Fund Rabbinic Enrichment Initiative, Yeshiva University has been experimenting with different models of preparing the mentors/mentees for rewarding

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March 2009/Adar 5769
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experiences. A few criteria have proven essential: First, expectations for the relationship must be defined in advance, as are measures and metrics to describe success. Second, a trained facilitator should prepare the mentor and mentee for a productive experience by creating an environment for trusting conversations and a pragmatic routine. Monitoring the ongoing conversations and relationships helps avert derailment if the mentoring process stalls. In addition to the obvious benefits that such synergy gives the young rabbi in his formative years, it also expands his collegial circle of friends. For example, young rabbis at conferences normally spend time with their friends from seminary. The latitudinal silos are broken when dozens of young rabbis meet their mentors at these conferences, and a wonderful byproduct of a successful mentoring program is vertical integration between young and more seasoned colleagues. Meeting with peers of similar age and experience can also, of course, be helpful, and serious spiritual retreats can serve rabbis with opportunities to grow in their intellectual pursuits and their *avodat Hashem*.

Secured Web sites can be designed to provide rabbis with “classes in a box” that help ease pressures to prepare material during stressful times. It can serve as a venue for rabbis to share materials for classes and research into specific

halakhic/philosophical issues — especially helpful to rabbis living in communities where Judaic libraries are unavailable.

Management skills, strategic planning, and board development, should be taught in venues where the professional and lay leader learn together. This promotes consensus between the *klei* (rabbi) and lay *kodesh* (president) about what needs to improve.

Continuing education should also include an entire array of programs for the rabbinic spouse. In the Orthodox community (and perhaps in other communities as well), the rebbetzin plays a significant communal role. While this voluntary role is defined by her interests, balancing a professional career, family responsibilities, her own contributions to the community, the plethora of events she must attend, and managing a rabbinic home is stressful. This is further complicated in a community where the rabbi is the neighbor of his congregants, the rabbi’s children attend the same schools as the youth of his congregation, and often the educators are his parishioners. It is essential to give the spouse the spiritual sustenance necessary to calibrate her soul, a safe space to discuss the challenges of a rebbetzin’s position, and the management skills to help balance these responsibilities. 

Cultivating the Soul

RACHEL COWAN

Finding ways to promote the spiritual formation, development, and nurturance of rabbis is a critical issue for rabbinic seminaries — as several people mentioned in the Roundtable. Seen as a continuum, rabbinic education can model a lifetime pattern of learning, growth, and sustenance. So attention to the soul matters a lot. As students develop skills in studying and analyzing texts, teaching, preaching, counseling, and leading services, they also need to understand the importance of cultivating their soul. Becoming a spiritual leader for a community is a daunting task and requires tools or practices for reflection, personal prayer, discerning truth, and listening to the inner truth. When students leave the seminary they plunge into very intense lives in congregations, Hillels, camps, and JCCs. They need what most of their rabbinic colleagues need: spiritual practices that strengthen their *middot*, their faith,

their courage, their equanimity, their sense of authenticity, their prayer-life, and their vision, so that they can inspire congregants and the larger community. These qualities keep their rabbinate fresh and alive, mitigating the burnout and the compassion fatigue that are dangerous professional traps.

From my experiences with the hundreds of rabbis who have taken part in the Rabbinic Leadership Program of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality (IJS), I know the need is urgent. Rabbis describe many challenges: while they skillfully lead services, many rarely pray. Though they love their work, they often feel exhausted and overwhelmed, drained of spirit, patience, and creativity. Torn between family and congregational responsibilities, with no time for themselves, they pay little heed to the call of their soul or the ache in their bodies.

They yearn for spiritual companionship and

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for time to rethink core theological ideas — so that they can reclaim the passion that drew them into the rabbinate. They want to deepen their work with more openheartedness, generosity, patience, and equanimity, and to be less judgmental of themselves and others. They want to develop authentic lives in community with others who support and understand them.

We are each evolving spiritual beings who require new learning, new skills, new meanings; we need opportunities to investigate and shed outworn theologies or Jewish ways of thinking that have become tired and old. This is the work of spiritual re-formation. It gives us time and tools to look anew at our theology as it evolves with life experience, to reconnect with prayer. Nurturing a safe community of companions helps us do this work. Providing opportunities for spiritual development in various venues of retreat will benefit many.

Unfortunately some highly regarded spiritual leaders have transgressed boundaries, hurting individuals, leaving communities flailing, and damaging the credibility of the spiritual enterprise. This is terrible and inexcusable. While these leaders are no different from other high-powered individuals who make similar transgressions, we expect our spiritual leaders to

adhere to a moral code, and we feel betrayed and outraged when they don't. While those rabbis might be taking advantage of the power their spiritual charisma gives them, they are not truly spiritual individuals. Without a spiritual practice of cultivating humility, clarity, truthfulness, and discernment, they do not see how the power of their ego has distorted their vision, clarity, and truthfulness. They have not been able to discern the *yetzer hara* from their overall neediness and vanity. When rabbis are lonely, burned out, and spiritually dead, no matter how vibrant they seem (transmitting spiritual energy is different than having inner knowledge), they are more likely to believe they are exempt from normative standards. In communities that demand accountability and transparency, where humility is cultivated and honored, where rabbis are given the tools and time to practice self-care, they can more often align their talents and strengths in service to the community and to God, rather than to their own ego.

And after all, the simplest teachings lie at the core of spiritual formation for rabbis: God wants our heart; the essence of the spiritual life is to work on ourselves; and we cannot teach authentically when our role is divided from our soul. We cannot give what we don't possess. 

Passion Yes, Charisma No

HAYIM HERRING

Of the issues discussed in the preceding roundtable, the relationship between charisma and leadership is of utmost significance. To the best of my knowledge, there are no courses in either rabbinical school or continuing education programs that are designed to teach rabbis to be charismatic. That is a good thing. It is not good, however, that few programs help rabbis think about the dimension of passion in their rabbinate. This gap in rabbinic education needs to be addressed. Charisma, no, passion, yes — rabbis need to be inoculated with passion before they leave their seminaries and then receive periodic booster shots in all of their continuing education programs once they are practicing in the field.

Here are some of the differences between passion and charisma:

- Passion is centered on a dream; charisma is anchored in the self.
- Passion inspires others to work together;

charisma can create divisions.

- Passion is about purpose; charisma is about drama.
- Passion endures and lifts people around it; charisma often creates a crash-and-burn syndrome, and takes others down with it.
- Passion helps to build community because those feeling it respond to a higher calling; charisma, however, diminishes community because people ultimately perceive that the ego behind the charismatic leader leaves little room for others.

Stressing passion over charisma is not a game of semantics. When congregants speak about charismatic rabbis, they are suggesting that rabbis need to inspire people with ideas, action, wisdom — with a vision of that which transcends the self. Passion is about uncovering core issues and drawing from that an authentic sense of purpose. It's what some colloquially refer to as

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March 2009/Adar 5769
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“finding one’s voice” and, I would add, then not losing it over the years.

Many rabbis begin their first years with a sense of calling — the passion that brought them into the rabbinate. But the distractions of petty politics and the narrow concerns of congregational life can unconsciously become the focal point that, over the years, mutes a sense of higher calling. The result is that rabbis become less inspiring because they learn to play it safe rather than to speak from their authentic selves. That’s when rabbis become dull. They may be able to fake charisma, but they can’t pretend passion.

This discussion on continuing education is critical and all conscientious professionals work to refine their skills and deepen their professional knowledge. Learning how to give a good sermon or teach an exciting class or offer a stirring eulogy is a craft, but we need rabbis who

are more than technicians. We need rabbis who maintain their passion for the challenges of a calling that is increasingly complex. And we need congregations who will support and reward rabbis for doing so.

The Torah was acutely aware of the dangers of charismatic leaders as well as the differences between leaders who were not only charismatic but also passionate. The biblical Korach was charismatic and caused a catastrophe. On the other hand is Moshe Rabeinu, Moses, the rabbi par excellence. The trait that characterizes his leadership more than any other is humility — and it is that humility that repeatedly averted disaster. Charisma, over time, seems to defeat humility and create out-of-control situations. Conversely, the compatible qualities of humility and passion are precisely those that have the power to create enduring dreams. 

Addressing Life’s Difficult Moments

MEL GOTTLIEB

For Jewish spiritual leaders, our current economic climate brings with it an added dimension as well as responsibility. Many members of our communities are facing serious financial issues and are, justifiably, quite anxious. Rabbis must be able to help those they serve in both good times and bad. While the volume of learning in rabbinical school is enormous, it’s also critical to expose students to the professional skills that focus, for example, on crisis intervention, the intersection between the laws of *bikkur cholim* and lifecycle, and clinical pastoral education. Rabbis who have received significant training in these areas are more likely to provide better counseling to those who seek help when addressing adversity. Rabbis with greater internal resources can help counter feelings of anxiety and anguish and give those who are in pain a greater sense of God’s presence — even in difficult times.

How can rabbis, who acquired these skills years earlier “freshen up” their resources while juggling the multitude of responsibilities that come with serving as a congregational or organizational rabbi? One solution may be to adopt something similar to the American Medical Association’s Continuing Medical Education (CME) plan for physicians. CME “consists of educational activities which serve to maintain, develop, or increase the knowledge, skills, and professional performance and relationships that

a physician uses to provide services for patients, the public, or the profession.” In short, CME courses help physicians maintain their level of competence as well as keep up-to-date on new or emerging areas in their field of specialization. Patients benefit from the improved quality of medical care.

The CME model could serve rabbis through either the individual movements or through multid denominational boards of rabbis around the country. Courses or tutorials related to spiritual counseling might include a series of expert lectures, an online program, audio or video tapes, or other forms of electronic media.

While the CME courses are required for physicians, it’s debatable whether or not a spiritual counseling program should be mandatory for practicing rabbis. Those with the honor of being Jewish spiritual leaders hopefully understand the importance of strengthening their skills in this area. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once said, a religious person is one “who holds God and man in one thought at one time, at all times, who suffers harm done to others, whose greatest passion is compassion, whose greatest strength is love and defiance of despair.” As religious people, rabbis must be able to use these traits to bring healing and help restore the spirit of those who are suffering. This is always an imperative and, in these difficult times, even more so. 

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The Face of God's Text

AARON BRUSSO

During my first year in the pulpit I received a call that a man from my congregation was dying. I ran home to put on a jacket and tie so that I could look like I just graduated rabbinical school rather than Hebrew school. I had studied talmudic passages on visiting the sick, and I had spent one summer in chaplaincy. I had read the codes on Jewish burial and mourning practice. As I drove to the hospital I felt fairly prepared to provide direction to this man's family by allowing the tradition to be mediated through me. I would walk them through the steps of a well-worn path and they would be comforted.

I entered the waiting room and saw the man's wife surrounded by family. I was not prepared to see her face — a well-worn path of wrinkles. Around the outer corners of her eyes were wrinkles from years of squinting and smiling, and lining her forehead were lines from years of worry and surprise. The wrinkles on her cheeks had become rivulets as tears took alternating paths down her face. I was as unprepared to observe this face as I was to encounter my first page of Talmud; I was subsumed by its wisdom.

She looked at me and her eyes quietly asked: "What could you possibly have to say to me?" Just as Rabbi Chananya ben Tradion had described, Hebrew letters flew into the air. My jacket and tie weren't really helping me at this point. But rabbinical school had given me something that was of enormous use and I drew upon it as I replied, "Nothing."

"I don't think I have much to say to you, but I know you have a lot to say to me."

Medical school teaches how to be a doctor

and engineering school teaches how to be an engineer. Rabbinical school, however, teaches how to be a learner. It takes a rabbi to the shore of the known and, as Abraham Joshua Heschel describes, makes one aware of the vast expanse of the unknown. It prepared me to be expert at learning from others.

I added a crucial new text to my rabbinic library, *Torat Ha'Adam*, the Torah of people. I soon found that not only did I bring textual learning to my congregants but they had a great deal to teach me as well. When I left rabbinical school I knew how to live a life in tune with God's will. It is tempting to assume that people who are not as knowledgeable of the rhythms and laws of such a life are also inured to the presence of God. But just as Moshe learned from his father-in-law, Yitro, I learned not to confuse being open to learning about God through the lived experience of a person with devaluing tradition. Upholding communal standards does not require that one pretend to know God best.

In Jonathan Rosen's book *Joy Comes in the Morning*, the phrase "ecclesiastical functionary" comes to describe a rabbi who, detached from the wellspring of Torah learning, mechanically and formulaically performs the rites of tradition. This no doubt is a danger in my profession. Another danger: to not see the face of God's ultimate text. It has only been while functioning in ecclesiastical settings that I have had the privilege to introduce God's written text to God's walking text and let the perspective of one reinvigorate the spirit of the other. God is not in this or that place but in the moment in which one says to the other "I know you have a lot to say to me."

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Leadership and Creativity

JULIE SCHONFELD

Rabbis take great satisfaction in fulfilling what is commanded of us; we also need to feel that, through our own agency, we are shaping, in a personal way, our compliance with the mandates of Torah. The world is saturated with giftedness. Our challenge — our blessing and sometimes struggle — is to be sufficiently open and present to receive and appreciate our individual gifts and those our peers share with us.

In my imagination, the Torah's depiction of Bezalel, the artisan charged with constructing

the *mishkan*, has always called out for midrashic interpretation. I see Bezalel as a model, not for the technical abilities emphasized by the Torah and the *mefarshim* but for his personal qualities, as an individual, and, if one might take the poetic license to call him such, as a rabbi. We are told, in Exodus 31:2 that God has singled out Bezalel by name and given him wisdom, discernment, and knowledge in every kind of craft. This extraordinarily high level of skill and training will allow him to receive offerings of every

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imaginable material and incorporate them into the *mishkan*, a unified structure that permits the Israelites, as a community, to worship God.

It is remarkable that Bezalel has the personal strength to be able to accept all of the gifts that the Israelites brought to him. As rabbis, we know the challenge of receiving highly charged “gifts”; the bearers seek to elevate to holiness these gifts by incorporating them into a larger communal structure. Why doesn’t Bezalel weary of this task? Why doesn’t the Torah show him struggling to maintain the quality of his work against the constant onslaught of objects saturated with people’s aspirations?

A partial answer lies in the fact that Bezalel does not labor alone; he is supported by Oholiab and others. But Bezalel’s ability to directly receive these gifts, however diverse and numerous, indicates his personal qualities of openness and equanimity in the context of the highly charged atmosphere of an engaged community. These are qualities that some rabbis possess in greater measure than others; they can all, though, be

cultivated through ongoing disciplines of self-awareness and self-reflection. Our service as rabbis can be labors that energize us or enervate us, depending on our clarity about our relationships with God, self, and other.

Tradition posits Moshe as the rabbinic model, not Bezalel. Yet the Torah does draw a direct parallel between the qualities of Bezalel, the artisan, and the qualities of the communal leader when, in *Devarim* (1:13), Moshe lists three qualities required of the heads of the tribes. They must be wise, discerning, and knowledgeable, precisely the same three Hebrew roots ascribed to Bezalel. The Torah teaches that to see ourselves as actively engaged in a creative process — with all the attendant uncertainty — makes us effective leaders. We might see leaders and artists as distinct, but the Torah sees leadership as a creative process and the creative process as a powerful vehicle for leadership. Like Bezalel, our rabbinate requires that we possess both gifts and skills, and be fully open to knowing and receiving them. 

Staying Fit and Fresh: A Spiritual Strategic Plan

BENJAMIN J. SAMUELS

The Talmud teaches that of the generation of the wilderness, only those less than 20 years old and over 60 would enter the Promised Land; all ages in-between would die in the desert (*BT Baba Batra* 121b). For a midlife, mid-career rabbi, these are not promising demographics! To reach the Promised Land, perhaps we must have the vision and vibrancy of youth and the wisdom and experience of age. The question at hand is how can those of us in the professional rabbinate during our in-between years, what some call our prime-time, maintain our DYR (dynamic young rabbi-hood) while tapping into our budding sagacity? How do we do this for the sake of our congregations whom we lovingly serve, and who may themselves demand it of us? And how do we accomplish this for our own spiritual, emotional, and intellectual welfare as midlife questions and crises bloom and congregational, communal, and familial obligations (usually in this order) override attention to self? Ignoring our personal spiritual needs puts at great peril our capacity to minister, teach, and worship, and will ultimately frustrate the noble aspirations with which we initially approached our career and calling.

Fifteen years ago, as a rabbinic intern, a beloved mentor told me that the first ten years of my rabbinate were to be my intellectual apprenticeship. At the time, I thought that this meant that were I to apply myself to learning during this period, I would arrive at the prime of my career full of knowledge, know-how, and wisdom. Having just turned 40, the alleged age of understanding (“*ben arba'im l'bina*,” *Avot* 5:21), and having celebrated my thirteenth year at the congregation I am privileged to serve, I feel less Solomonic than in tune with the observation of Kohelet: “All this I tried with wisdom, I said to myself, ‘I will grow wise,’ yet it is beyond me” (7:23). Thus, I struggle with issues of maturation and rejuvenation, and offer here a few examples of one rabbi’s effort to stay fresh and fit.

From time to time I compose, for my eyes only, a spiritual strategic plan — that is, a structured accounting of my sense of mission, personal and professional goals, and a road map to lead me to their fruition. Self-awareness and reflection are the first steps in self-care; following up resolve with concrete action, of course, makes for results.

For me, *ben arba'im l'bina* is not a terminus, but an invitation, and describes a primary

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March 2009/Adar 5769

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need of this age. While I have always been a person of the book, in midlife, I seek more profound understanding, and thus I'm more drawn to the biblical mandate, *b'khol derakhekha dei'ehu*, know God in all your ways (Proverbs 3:6). That and the tradition of *Torah u'Mada* inform my learning goals in both Torah and worldly wisdom. Preparing to teach, speak, or learn *b'chevrutot* establishes a helpful framework for personal learning, but to satisfy my

is just as important, but in some ways more elusive for the professional Jew. And yet, it is essential to an effective rabbinate to aspire to an *avodat Hashem* that inspires self and others. Strategies I find helpful include keeping a journal of thoughts evoked by my daily *tefillot*, visiting and davening in other shuls, and teaching the siddur. There is nothing like the innocent questioning of students to make a teacher revisit ideas taken for granted.

To preach with integrity requires that we practice our words. This alone requires the youthful dynamism and aged wisdom we seek to nurture and maintain.

wider interests I take advantage of numerous continuing education Web sites and resources such as YUTorah.org, Torahinmotion.org, and Recorded Book's Modern Scholar series. It is amazing how many *shiurim* and courses I can absorb even while driving during the week!

Spiritual freshness of a more devotional sort

Central to my emotional wellbeing are a range of essential personal activities that require time: exercise, living fully with my children and spouse, and friendships. It is also critical that I still find in the Torah and mitzvot, which are my "work," much meaning, purpose, and inspiration for my personal and family life. A good measure of personal authenticity is the robustness of my religious life at home, away from the sanctuary. To preach with integrity requires that we practice our words. This alone requires the youthful dynamism and aged wisdom we seek to nurture and maintain. 

On the Margins

JOSHUA LESSER

When a woman called about the synagogue and commented, "We heard wonderful things about your congregation but my husband is afraid that we might be the only ones without purple mohawks and tattoos," I responded, "As much as I hate to dispel that fantasy, we have no one who fits that bill, though you should be assured just as we would warmly welcome you, I'd also welcome that person." The life of a rabbi on the margins keeps life interesting. Being a rabbi who unabashedly welcomes Jews who have not felt comfortable in many settings, is a blessing with costs.

As I quickly head toward my tenth anniversary as a rabbi, I have begun to engage in a *heshbon hanefesh* of what this profession means. And I've become aware of its many layers and challenging questions. How do I need to transform to continue with vitality? Can I continue to uncover a changing rabbinic role? Where is my growing edge and where can I find my sanctuaries?

Working in the same pulpit since ordination, I wonder if this stability has helped me mature and how it might also make my rabbinate feel stale. I've always had a restless soul, so returning to my home city has been a great source of learning even as it has been painful. A product

of the Orthodox day school, I returned as the gay rabbi of the only Reconstructionist synagogue in the state. Part of the drain of this work has been the tension between wanting to bring visibility to a different and authentic model of Jewish leadership *and* the magnification of my uniqueness that has often presented me as one of a few strange exotic fish in a bowl of carp. This "bowl" extends beyond the Jewish community to the larger community in which I live. Not only did this heightened scrutiny put a strain on my first partnership, but it makes dating incredibly challenging. Nearing 40 years old without the family I imagined, has been a sad foil to the wonderful communal life that I helped cultivate in the synagogue I serve.

The "margin" often lessens the risk. For example, because my community embraces pluralism and balances innovation and tradition, I am able to institute new ideas with less resistance. This past year, the synagogue slated a Blues Tisha B'Av service with alternative ways to approach the *kinot* and a contemporary blues lament based on the *Book of Eicha*. We also chanted the traditional text and sat on the floor. Over 100 people observed Tisha B'Av, most for the first time; I saw how a new vision could

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March 2009/Adar 5769

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breathe life into tradition and into my rabbinate.

Reconnecting alienated Jews both energizes me and stokes my deepest fears about being authentic. When I am most fully open to the rabbinic opportunity before me, I feel humbled and more connected to God's presence. That vulnerability is, alternately, terrifying and liberating. Ultimately, it pushes me toward self-renewal — always working on what is next.

Pursuing new learning is what keeps my fears of inadequacy at bay. Whether it's ongoing text study or learning concrete outreach strategies, the parts of my rabbinate that nourish me are the endless possibilities for personal, intel-

lectual, and spiritual development. Recently my participation at the Institute of Jewish Spirituality (IJS) has been the most important source of finding vitality as a rabbi. IJS has helped me, as an activist and an extrovert, connect my spiritual core in new ways to meditation and Hasidic texts, which in turn have allowed a deeper sense of integrity to emerge despite the challenges of being a rabbi on the margins. Ironically, with this newly cultivated spiritual practice, I realize I could leave the rabbinate and remain whole and intact. It is this gift that allows me at this tenth anniversary to choose the rabbinate not out of fear, but from a place of renewed thought and deliberation. 🕯

Wearing Down My Soul, and Renewing It

DAVID B. THOMAS

“How do you know when a person knows enough to be a rabbi? When that rabbi knows he or she doesn't know enough.” With these words Rabbi David Hartman addressed a group of 27 North American rabbis of all denominations who had gathered in Jerusalem. My colleagues and I were in Israel for our second winter retreat of Hartman's Rabbinic Leadership Initiative, a three-year program of study that brings us together for a week each winter, a month in the summer, and weekly online sessions throughout the year.

By Hartman's criterion, I guess I was ready the day I was ordained. I got a wonderful education at HUC-JIR. Over five years I acquired a reasonable mastery of Hebrew, Tanakh, and rabbinic literature, as well as practical rabbinics, history, and theology. I developed a framework for understanding our tradition and some of the skills to teach it. In spite of it all, upon ordination, I knew enough to know that I would never know enough.

Today, after more than ten years in the rabbinate, that hasn't changed. When I came to Congregation Beth El, I had only three years experience in the rabbinate. But at age 45, I had life experience and audacity enough to suggest to the congregation that for my leadership to be effective, they would have to be as willing to invest in my learning and growth as I was in theirs. We understood that I would need time and resources to continue my learning in order to facilitate theirs. So in my initial contract, in addition to a weekly day off, we agreed I would devote a full day every week to my own Jewish learning.

During my first three years at Beth El I

learned with colleagues in Boston; I studied with my cantor, my staff, and with the local Chabad rabbi; I took classes at Harvard and at Hebrew College. But the problem is this: the job of a solo rabbi in a medium-sized congregation is simply not a five-day-a-week job. It is easy to encourage rabbis to study as long as they still complete all of their work. And even if study doesn't come at the expense of teaching, preaching, officiating at lifecycle events, and tending to the needs of one's community, it comes at the expense of the rabbi and the rabbi's family. It wasn't long before I was burning the candle at both ends.

In my second contract, we made a minor adjustment that made a huge difference. Now I devote a half day a week to my ongoing learning, and the congregation gives me two weeks (in addition to vacation) during the summer to study at the Hartman Institute.

Learning is neither about filling the gaps in one's education nor acquiring new knowledge or skills. It's about deepening engagement in *Torah lish'ma*.

Burnout is not the inevitable result of being too busy; it is the result of being busy with things that wear you down. The antidote to burnout is engaging in something that nurtures the soul; Torah learning with colleagues who care deeply about one another feeds and nurtures the rabbi's soul.

During our study at Hartman recently, we kvetched about our congregations, shared our deepest anxieties and greatest joys. But mostly, we immersed ourselves in the healing waters of Torah, emerging refreshed, renewed, and ready to return home Torah-transformed. 🕯

Rabbi David B. Thomas, a rabbinic fellow in the Shalom Hartman Institute's Rabbinic Leadership Initiative, is rabbi of Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley, in Sudbury, Mass. Prior to the rabbinate, he worked in broadcast journalism for fourteen years as a sound engineer.

March 2009/Adar 5769

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Nourishing the Soul: A Roundtable

Judy Elkin is a Jewish educator who was most recently director of DeLeT at Brandeis University.

She is a personal and professional Life-Coach, working specifically with Jewish professionals (www.judyelkin.com).

Merle Feld, a poet, educator, and playwright, is founding director of the Rabbinic Writing Institute and works with rabbinical students at several seminaries as a mentor helping them to use a practice of reflective writing in their spiritual development.

Andrea Hodos, a performance artist and Jewish educator, is the founder of Moving Torah. She has created performance pieces with students at HUC-JIR in LA and AJULA through her current project "On Dry Ground: Faith, Fear and Transformation at the Edge of the Sea."

Tobi Kahn is a painter and sculptor who creates, among many other artistic pieces, meditative spaces. A professor in the School of Visual Arts, he co-founded AvodaArts, with Carol Brennglass Spinner, as well as the Artists' Beit Midrash with Leon Morris at HUC in New York.

They spoke with **Liza Stern**, a congregational rabbi in Cambridge, Mass., who works with rabbis through STAR (Synagogues: Transformation and Renewal), helping them set their visions for their rabbinate and develop their skills.

Liza Stern: One of my favorite children's books, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, is a wonderful story about a kid named Harold who carries a purple crayon around, and wherever he goes he draws what he needs to have happen. If he wants to take a walk, he draws a path; if he's hungry, he draws an apple tree; if the apples are too high, he draws a ladder to get up to the apples. Rabbis often see themselves as "Harold" creating the reality into which we want Jews to step. That gets very tiring, and I hope that rabbis will share the crayons with other disciplines. Rabbis are beginning to understand that to keep ourselves alive and to keep drawing a new future, we need to be more collaborative and creative with other disciplines. How can the arts help rabbis?

Tobi Kahn: As visual thinkers, artists bring something unique to the Jewish community. Jews revere the power of our sacred words and savor Jewish music, but if we integrate the power of seeing into our lives, we will all be richer. Imagine if we resumed the visual practice of my grandfather, Joshua Schapiro. Every year, he covered all the seats in his shul with white fabric, hung a white *parokhet* before the ark, and created an environment of purified holiness. It was unforgettable, not only for the child I was who became an artist, but for every praying person in his community.

Merle Feld: There's a problem of bifurcated thinking about artists and *amcha*, the people. When I work with rabbis or congregations, I help people understand that the fundamental expression that lives deep inside us, which comes out in poetry, is in everyone. And while I do have students who want specifically to work on poetry or songwriting with me, what I do most often is help them listen deeply to what's going on inside, and write from those connections. The most important thing I do is to help rabbis find the courage to explore not who they are expected to be, but who they are, and to live and be a leader from that centered place.

Judy Elkin: Similarly, coaching among other things helps people visualize what it is they're wanting in their professional or personal lives. Some visualizations inspire artistic creativity as in the case of a client who wanted to bring back a sense of "flow" into her life as a rabbi. I asked her what "flow" looked like, how she would capture it with images. Instead of journal writing, she visualized the image — a tapestry of what she brings to her rabbinate. As a coach, I use a

variety of tools to help clients become clearer about what they need to do to be successful and who they need/want to be as professionals; then I help them create a plan and hold them accountable to reaching their goals.

Andrea Hodos: Though we're talking overtly about visual language, as a movement person I'd like to bring movement/kinesthetic language to the table. Artists can enhance one of the things that religion does well, and also what coaching does — that is, use metaphor to shape meaning in our lives. For me, dance and religion are frameworks through which to engage life. I work collaboratively using a series of big metaphors — for example, the image of the Israelites being "on dry ground and in the middle of the sea" as they cross out of Egypt. This metaphor helps people find faith to move forward through fear and difficulty. When rabbis give sermons, they are operating on a linguistic level that then touches the spirit and moves people. If we layered different versions of language on that intellectual plane, it might move more people even further.

Elkin: I agree. We can only do for others what we have experienced. Rabbis need to have personal metaphors that connect them to the bigger picture of their work. Through the coaching process, metaphors often suggest themselves, giving them particular significance and power. For example, a rabbi who sees herself as a light post that guides people on their journeys can tap into that image at other times to regain a certain focus and energy.

Feld: Rabbinical students have been trained to begin intellectually — that's the primary mode. They're generally not directed to ponder how they *feel* about a text. But if rabbis can't make that connection themselves, then their talk can be hollow. The place that the text vibrates in one's soul — where questions jump out from the week's *parsha*, where one's life and passion and pain, mingle — is the place from which to reach the congregation. There is a spectrum of ease with being self-revelatory in public, and each rabbi must find where he or she is on that spectrum. Ultimately, every midrash, every *tefillah*, was written by a person like me, or you, an actual human being who cried, who laughed, who was afraid. Not everything they wrote is captured in the *siddur*, not everything was good. This one text was good enough to be included in a chain of living transmission that touches the heart.

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Hodos: Rabbis worry that because some of the arts don't use words and people don't see themselves as artists, art may not work as a spiritual experience. But we need to find a way to integrate — emotion, arts, the intellect — as various paths to deeply spiritual experiences.

Kahn: We learn visually throughout the year but we're not sufficiently conscious of it. Our experience of Sukkot has much less to do with the *b'rakhot* we recite than it does with the decorations we make, the gleam of sky and stars above us, the slanted light that pierces corners of our temporary huts and falls in different places as we linger over the meal. Our experience of Pesach has much to do with the family seder plate and Elijah's cup, with the introduction of a new object to the table, with previous years' purple wine stains on the pages of the haggadah. What I'm suggesting is that we should name these subliminal experiences for the visual power they hold.

Hodos: In order for rabbis to provide these kinds of experiences to their congregants, they need to constantly experiment and stretch themselves. There is a collateral benefit when rabbis take risks — they're modeling for their congregants stepping out of their comfort zone.

Stern: I am not the dancer or artist. I sense that my people want me, as the rabbi, to hold the crayon and draw the path for them to follow. I've become the point person, the one with the title, to create experiences that are not in my comfort zone. So, how do we actually integrate the deep experiences that we've discussed, given the structure and resources and limits of the Jewish community — and the limits of our rabbis, who've studied rabbinics and not art or

music or dance?

Hodos: Art-making exists on a spectrum — with every person an artist. As artists, we're also teachers who work along that spectrum. If every congregation could have its own artist-in-residence, it would be amazing. But, as an alternative let's consider training more rabbis in using simple artistic techniques.

Feld: I see my students — rabbinical students and rabbis in the field — engaging their congregants in exactly the kinds of exercises and experiences that I've offered them. For example, one rabbi now asks congregants to "journal" an important piece of their weekly Talmud class; many of them now lead reflective writing sessions to help congregants prepare for High Holiday soul searching. That kind of movement between the tradition and the individual personal soul is an attempt at meaning making, for which one doesn't need to be a poet.

Elkin: The rabbinate is both a skill (what rabbis "do") and an art ("who they are and what they bring as human beings"), and rabbis must nourish both pieces of the equation. As a coach, I try to help rabbis regain the passion they first experienced as rabbinical students and imagine, in very vivid detail, the kind of rabbi they want to be for their congregants. While rabbis spend a lot of time listening to their congregants, they should also spend significant time listening to themselves, and continuing to learn who they are as rabbis and what they need.

Feld: We desperately need to develop the capacity to listen well. Listening is the exact opposite of riding a bike — every day you have to remember again how to do it — how to listen to yourself and to others.



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Donations to *Sh'ma* are tax deductible.

Sh'ma is available in **microfilm** from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Mich.,

and in **audio format** from the Jewish Braille Institute.

Address all **editorial correspondence** to *Sh'ma*, P.O. Box 9129, Newton, MA 02464. Telephone: 617-581-6810. Email: sberrin@JFLmedia.com.

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Sh'ma is **published** by JFL Media monthly except July and August. Application to mail at periodical-class postage rates pending at Newton, MA 02464.

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ISSN: 0049-0385 MARCH 2009. WITH ALL SPONSORSHIPS, *SH'MA* RESERVES COMPLETE EDITORIAL CONTROL OF CONTENT.

March 2009/Adar 5769

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Kahn: We talk so often about how to make Judaism come alive for young Jews, as if revitalizing the tradition can be separate from the imagination needed to make that happen. Artists specialize in imagination. They have an innate ability to picture a different way — one that wakes us up out of the boredom or repetition to return us to the original potency of an experience but in an idiom that speaks to us now. This is why artists cannot be marginal. They should be invited into the core of our communities as active participants in what we all care about — the creation and recreation of an American Judaism that is irresistible.

Feld: That's especially hard in a culture like ours where product is everything. Most rabbis have to work at letting go of the tension and stress of self-evaluation, of wondering if the writing is good enough.

Hodos: Everybody moves, but when people actually stop to think about somebody watching them move, they feel very exposed. We need to get away from the need for a polished finished product; get people to understand the power in showing one's work, in allowing oneself to be witnessed. And that process helps create community in a very Jewish way. Something in the sharing helps people see that their metaphors

and stories are interconnected. While we have to be gentle and careful about how we move from process to product, the journey is often worth it — both for individuals and communities.

Stern: We're all talking about the portals for engagement — which is a critical concern for rabbis. How do we get the soul of our people to resonate and engage with the tradition? So far, as rabbis we've been working with a limited palette. All of these forms of art or self-expression are ways to make that happen. Perhaps we don't have the courage or don't feel we have the permission to expand that palette, and don't perhaps even know what we don't know.

Hodos: *Frederick*, by Leo Lionni, is a children's book about mice preparing for the winter. While all are running around gathering nuts, Frederick just sits and gathers things in his mind. Though it looks like he's not doing anything, he's gathering sunbeams and flowers. Later in the winter, when all the nuts have disappeared, all the mice sit and listen to the poems and images Frederick has saved up for them. At this particular moment the world seems to be going into a deep winter. Art is often the first item struck from the budget; it's seen as extra. But there is much artists can do with minimal resources and yet be really powerful agents of transformation. 



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Creative Collaborations

The Necessary Revolution: How individuals and organizations are working together to create a sustainable world; Peter Senge, Bryan Smith, Nina Kruschwitz, Joe Laur, Sara Schley
(New York: Doubleday, 2008, \$29.95, 416 pp)

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH REIMER

Primarily about promoting sustainability, *Necessary Revolution* offers much more. Peter Senge and his co-authors use the platform of sustainability to offer a compelling guide for how any committed group can intelligently initiate significant social change. This call to action is both wildly idealistic and yet soberly pragmatic about the steps needed to galvanize lasting social change.

Of the many critical ideas this book offers, I will focus on two that have particular relevance for Jewish communal life: First, “creating” versus “problem solving” and second, “collaborating” versus “alliance building.”

Problem solving is about making what you don’t want, go away. Creating involves bringing something you care about into reality (p. 50).

Senge and colleagues believe in the power of vision and desire. The good has to be envisioned before it can be embodied. When we censor our vision because it seems unrealistic, we undermine our powers to create. So, we often focus on problems we can solve and end up fighting what we can stop: pollution, terrorism, hunger, etc.

What is surprising about this book on sustainability is that not one page is devoted to curbing pollution or regulating polluters. Those are the solutions of problem-solvers — those who see the world in terms of danger and containing dangers. Senge claims there is a price to be paid for that worldview. Rather than curbing behaviors we find threatening, “creating” would envision and pursue possibilities that attract more attention and capital investment.

Jewish communities seem to be drawn to problem solving. We focus on numerous problems to solve and enemies to combat; a crisis a moment. Reading this volume is an invitation to ask ourselves: Why do we continue to believe this worldview and does it serve our true needs? Why do we devote so little energy to envisioning the world we wish to create?

When we focus on creating, we realize that no one group can construct meaningful change. There is an urgent need to work across organizational boundaries. Our first impulse is to build alliances — to seek out other individuals or groups most like us to bring about change. Our

alliances become ideological and soon we fall into the traps of problem solving.

The alternative strategy is collaborating or developing partnerships among organizations that are not similar and do not initially share worldviews. Much of this book details surprising collaborations for sustainability. Who knew that Coca-Cola worked with World Wildlife Fund on water sustainability and together they have both significantly reduced the amount of water that Coke plants use and helped rural communities in India and China to better manage the water resources available to them? While such collaborations take time and skill to develop, they create significant social change. They allow smart people who would never work together— Coke executives and WWF activists — to devise new solutions that neither alone could imagine or implement.

Senge points to a little-noted development — that while the Bush administration dallied and our earth grew warmer, innovators assembled collaborations to build greener and less wasteful ways of doing business. The lesson for the Jewish community seems clear. Where there is vision for creating positive change, opportunities for collaboration abound. And yet we have not learned how to collaborate well, which is distinct from building alliances or merging organizations.

Here is an example from Jewish education. Jewish schools and summer camps share numerous goals and serve many of the same families. Yet schools and camps do not tend to see themselves as partners for building educational alliances. They do not know how to appraise their respective resources and envision the smart ways they could hinge their efforts, which would cut costs and maximize efficiency. They have yet to learn the lessons this book offers. Our current hard times might be the lever for many such Jewish organizations to look around and ask: How can we grow smarter about working across boundaries to accomplish shared goals? Finding partners is but a first step toward developing collaboration; but with skill, patience, and imagination, collaborative possibilities can become grounds for new social change.

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Joseph Reimer, a professor at Brandeis University, is director of the Institute for Informal Jewish Education and lead faculty for the Executive Leadership Institute of the Foundation for Jewish Camp.

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Rabbi Perlo comments that “the primary aspect of the *rav* is to be in awe of heaven.” Another primary purpose of a rabbi is to use our tradition to help others with the challenges in their lives. To this end, to live a life of “the intellectual ideal” as Rav Kook says, we must be open to seeing the gray areas of life. To divide things simply into good and evil or black and white is too simplistic. Life is most often lived in the gray.

Choosing which parts of our tradition can be of aid to someone means understanding both the messy and complicated areas of Torah and how those passages and lessons might help a person who is grappling with the messy and complicated issues of life. When we truly comprehend opposing ideas we grow as humans and as rabbis. Sympathizing with someone else’s situation or viewpoint deepens the connections we have with one another, even when we disagree. Ours is a tradition meant to be wrestled with; it is meant to be lived and applied to the gray in all of our lives.

—Rebecca W. Sirbu

I am suspicious of “either/or” questions and will often respond by asking, “are those my only two choices?” Rav Kook hints at such dichotomous alternatives in his phrase “the constriction of the ideal into ‘good and evil,’” and Scott Perlo comments that “to constrain life solely to fundamentals.... is to leave life strangely ... devoid of color.”

We often speak of “good and evil” as “black and white,” meaning we think we usually have two clear choices. If we think that morality isn’t all that simple, we will speak of “shades of gray.”

But what if the “in-between” of human thought is actually filled with (all) the colors of the spectrum, not just white, black, and gray?

Rav Kook implies that the intellectual ideal, in its purest form, can ascend into a multicolored world of intellectual ambiguity, nuance, and paradox.

What a magnificent world God has made: our rational faculties, at their best, mirror the colorful pluralism of the rainbow, humanity, and all creation. Thanks to Rav Kook, we are reminded that our intellectual world can be expanded through the multifaceted wonder we call Torah.

—Jonathan Stein

“The constriction of the ideal into ‘good and evil’ is a profound descent for one who would be ready to live a life of the intellectual ideal (*ha-ideal ha-sikhli*) in its utmost purity.”

Rav Kook, *Orot haKodesh*,
Rosh Dvar 17

Rav Kook teaches that to constrain life solely to fundamentals, even those as crucial as morality, is to leave life strangely bereft and devoid of color. The same is true with learning. Why should one learn only what one is supposed to? To do so is much too reminiscent of high school; ultimately it is soul crushing.

Learning should tug at the threads of the unconscious: to uncover precisely the facets of the soul that aren’t easily given to view. The result of this is to fill the foreground of our consciousness with inchoate ideas, intuitions not fully understood, unexpected associations — in short, to make a spiritual life that is rich, exciting, and very fulfilling.

In learning as well as life, Rav Kook warns that to concentrate solely on the rudiments of the canon, to the exclusion of Torah we find mysterious and intriguing and compelling, is no virtue; rather, a constraint on the expanse of our souls. We should study to let our minds dance.

I believe that the primary aspect of being a *rav* is to be in awe of heaven. If this is so, why be content with a learning that’s rooted firmly in the ground? Rather, reach Heavenward, and stand in wonder.

—Scott Perlo

contemporary Israel broadened and deepened the often constricted world of my rabbinate. Learning can’t simply be the means to a *drasha* or a lecture, but rather the nourishing of our “intellectual ideals in its utmost purity.”

—Rick Jacobs

Scott Perlo, ordained at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University, is Rabbi-in-Residence of the Professional Leaders Project.

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Staying Afloat & Moving Forward

It has been ten years since I took over the editorship of *Sh'ma*. Never has the task been dull or predictable, and I've been privileged to help generate in these pages riveting conversations about Jewish life, its prospects, its pitfalls, its beauty and failures. Each year, the magazine's advisory board and I chart a rich, varied medley of topics; our readership demands not only that individual issues be timely and thoughtful and offer a range of voices, but that the year as a whole provide a broad and expansive window into the Jewish world.

In recent years in addition to editing *Sh'ma* I've been asked to assume a number of additional roles — most notably raising funds to keep the magazine alive. While I initially recoiled from the thought of asking for money, I came to appreciate how much I treasure this monthly journal — the courage and deep insight of our writers, the assembly of voices—and how asking people to support the journal was not so different than asking people to share their stories and ideas and thinking. So a few years ago we put together a funding partnership — an unusual and lively consortium of institutions: rabbinical schools, Jewish Studies programs, and generous communal philanthropists — that mirrored our editorial mission to create conversations that crossed institutional boundaries. It is precisely the ideas emanating at this intersection that lie at the heart of what sets *Sh'ma* apart as a magazine of special vitality, and pertinence. This coalition and the intellectual capital it has helped generate has contributed to making *Sh'ma* — in my unbiased and humble assessment — stronger, deeper, and more relevant.

But in the wake of the recent economic downturn, several of our partner institutions have been forced to cut back on their support for *Sh'ma*. We anticipate losing half of the \$100,000 we annually raise through partnership donations. To compensate for *Sh'ma*'s funding shortfall, we are launching a “reader” campaign of many relatively small but crucial donations. We turn to you now, and ask for your help at this moment of crisis. We need 500 of our loyal readers to contribute \$100 per year for the next three years. This will close the financial gap now confronting *Sh'ma* and bring us through the next few lean years, allowing us to firm up plans for the future beyond this difficult period.

Our publishing costs have been trimmed down to the essential bones. And while we remain committed to a print publication — we know that many of our readers sit with *Sh'ma* on Shabbat afternoon reading it cover-to-cover — we are exploring the possibility of a digital edition that will reduce expenses. I hope we're never forced to close our doors, as some well-loved institutions and other publications have been forced to do in the wake of such dire financial times.

We have no funding “angels.” This is what I ask of you: **Send *Sh'ma* a donation of \$100, and a pledge to donate the same amount for the next three years.** Forward an electronic version of this letter (on shma.com where you can make your tax-deductible donation) to your friends and colleagues with a personal note, and ask that they, too, support our existence. Through our combined efforts we can reach 500 loyal readers and supporters, raising \$50,000.

In the coming year we hope to digitize our 38-year archive, creating a searchable database — a trove of scholarly and inspiring essays. Our Web site redesign will offer a number of new features, and as we adapt to the digital era, we will continue our almost 40-year commitment to opening conversations that are deeply thoughtful and broadly pluralistic. We continue to serve our readership with our “contemporary Talmud” page and practical ethics column — this year focusing on the issues of shelter and homelessness. The column — which focuses on lending practices, credit, and gentrification—appears monthly on our back page, and is posted on our Web site along with a series of poignant stunning paintings by L.A. artist Pat Berger.

Many of our readers find *Sh'ma* useful for course readings and for material upon which to build sermons and lead discussions — I encourage you to do so. And I trust you'll now help us out in this urgent request for support.

Thank you,
Susan Berrin
Susan Berrin, Editor



A Letter from the Editor

This year our Sigi Ziering column focuses on the ethics of homelessness. Each month an esteemed guest columnist wrestles with what Jewish texts and our interpretive tradition teach us about the parameters, and limits, of Jewish responsibility to those without shelter. The column is sponsored by Bruce Whizin and Marilyn Ziering in honor of Marilyn's husband, Sigi Ziering, of blessed memory. Visit shma.com to view the series of columns with responses, as well as a series of paintings by artist Pat Berger on the homeless of Los Angeles.

Diane K. Levy is a research associate in the Urban Institute's Metropolitan Housing & Communities Policy Center. She has lived in Washington, D.C., for nearly eleven years.

Housing: Change & Stability

DIANE LEVY

Eight years ago I bought a rowhouse in a working-class neighborhood where the majority of residents were African American. At closing, the seller commented that the neighborhood once had been Italian and Jewish. I thought to myself, *Well, a Jew is moving back*. I bought the home because it was affordable, near public transportation, and beautiful. In the years since, more working-class Latino families and middle-class whites and African Americans, singles and families, have bought homes in my neighborhood as housing prices in nearby areas skyrocketed.

Places change over time. What has occurred in my neighborhood can be labeled gentrification. Certainly the ethnic and racial makeup of the area is more diverse than it was in 2000, and the next Census likely will show an increase in the area's median income. What we usually mean by the term *gentrification* though is displacement of longer-term residents as higher-income people move in and house prices, for sale and rent, increase. No doubt displacement of one type or another has occurred in my neighborhood but much of the change appears to have happened through the sale of previously owner-occupied homes; house-by-house, sellers have been realizing profits — one of the key ways we can build wealth is through property ownership.

While homeowners might be displaced, renters are most at risk of losing their homes through gentrification-related changes — as rents rise or units are converted to condominiums by owners seeking to maximize profit. It is easy to think about displacement as the unfortunate outcome of strong markets — unpleasant for the people directly affected but part of the way things work. Besides, what can you do? Housing is a commodity.

But such a perspective lets us off the hook too easily. Housing is both a commodity and also an anchor, a *home*, something that can come to feel as our own *even if* we rent. Housing can affect our health and our ability to hold a job. It provides a base from which we live our lives and in which we hope to be safe. Stable housing provides benefits to individuals and families and also to communities. And for both individuals and communities a lack of stability can bring its own problems.

Stability, though, is not an absolute good in itself. Distressed areas can be stable in certain regards but unhealthy. While gentrification can displace, it also can bring needed investments and services that benefit most all who live in a changing area. The issue, it seems, is balance. How can change and stability be balanced? How can we create balance in a system in which private property dominates, and most owners, understandably, hope to realize a profit? How can the benefits of gentrification be realized without displacement of people, especially those with few options? What responsibility do we (property owners, government, nonprofits, private developers) have toward people, especially renters, who seek housing stability?

Answers I don't have, but here are some thoughts.

Let us work to renew a sense of community and shared responsibility to balance the focus on private property and individual gain. Let us demand that government leadership at all levels address affordable housing needs in a sustainable way. And let us shift toward a broad vision of housing that acknowledges it as more than a means of wealth creation, and let us view residents, including renters, as more than market bystanders or collateral.

March 2009/Adar 5769