

# RE-ENVISIONING THE RABBINATE:

## Looking Back, Looking Ahead

A conference for the men and women of the RA, celebrating  
the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ordination of women

Jewish Theological Seminary, NYC  
April 28-29 2015 | Iyar 9-10 5775

RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY



כנסת הרבנים





*The International Association  
of Conservative/Masorti Rabbis,  
established 1901*

April 1, 2015

Officers:

*President*  
Rabbi William G. Gershon

*Vice President*  
Rabbi Philip S. Scheim

*Treasurer*  
Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin

*Financial Secretary*  
Rabbi Stewart L. Vogel

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Rabbi Harold J. Kravitz

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*Associate Executive Director*  
Rabbi Elliot Salo Schoenberg

*Senior Consultant for Rabbinic  
and Institutional Leadership*  
Rabbi William H. Lebeau

*Associate Director  
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Rabbi Ashira Y. Konigsburg

*Consultant for Special Projects*  
Rabbi Carol Levithan

*Executive Vice Presidents Emeriti*  
Rabbi Joel H. Meyers  
Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, ז"ל

*Founding Editor*  
Rabbi Jules E. Harlow

Dear Colleagues,

We gather together to celebrate 30 years of women serving the Jewish People as Conservative Rabbis. For those of us who have been serving as Rabbis during most of this period so much has changed for the better. While there is still a long way to go, it is always worthwhile to celebrate the "She-heheyanu" milestones.

This Celebration is different because it is the first time we have asked our male colleagues to celebrate with us as well. We appreciate that the work of serving the Jewish people and keeping Conservative Judaism alive and thriving is something we can only do together.

We come together to learn and to listen, but also to be a part of the ongoing discussion of issues important to us as rabbis.

We wish to thank Rabbi Julie Schonfeld for her support and inspiration, and Rabbi William Gershon, our Rabbinical Assembly President. A special thanks to Rabbi Carol Levithan and Rabbi Ashira Konigsburg for all their help with planning this Celebration. We would also like to thank our committee for all of their help in planning our Conference.

Rabbi Ellen S. Wolintz-Fields  
Co-Chair

Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin  
Co-Chair

# Welcome!

## Officers

Rabbi William Gershon, president  
Rabbi Philip Scheim, vice president  
Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin, treasurer  
Rabbi Stewart Vogel, financial secretary  
Rabbi Harold J. Kravitz, secretary  
Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive vice president

## Conference Committee

Rabbi Debra Newman Kaiman, co-chair; Rabbi Ellen Wolintz-Fields, co-chair

### Committee:

Rabbis Joel Alter, Amy Eilberg, Nina Bieber Feinstein, Ilana Garber, Jan Caryl Kaufman, Marion Shulevitz, Gordon Tucker

### Ex officio:

Rabbis Julie Schonfeld, Carol Levithan, Ashira Y. Konigsburg

And a special thank you to Rabbi Francine Roston for volunteering to interview most of the women who began in the Fall of 1984 and those who were the first to join the RA in 1985 and 1988. Yasher koach!

## Honorees

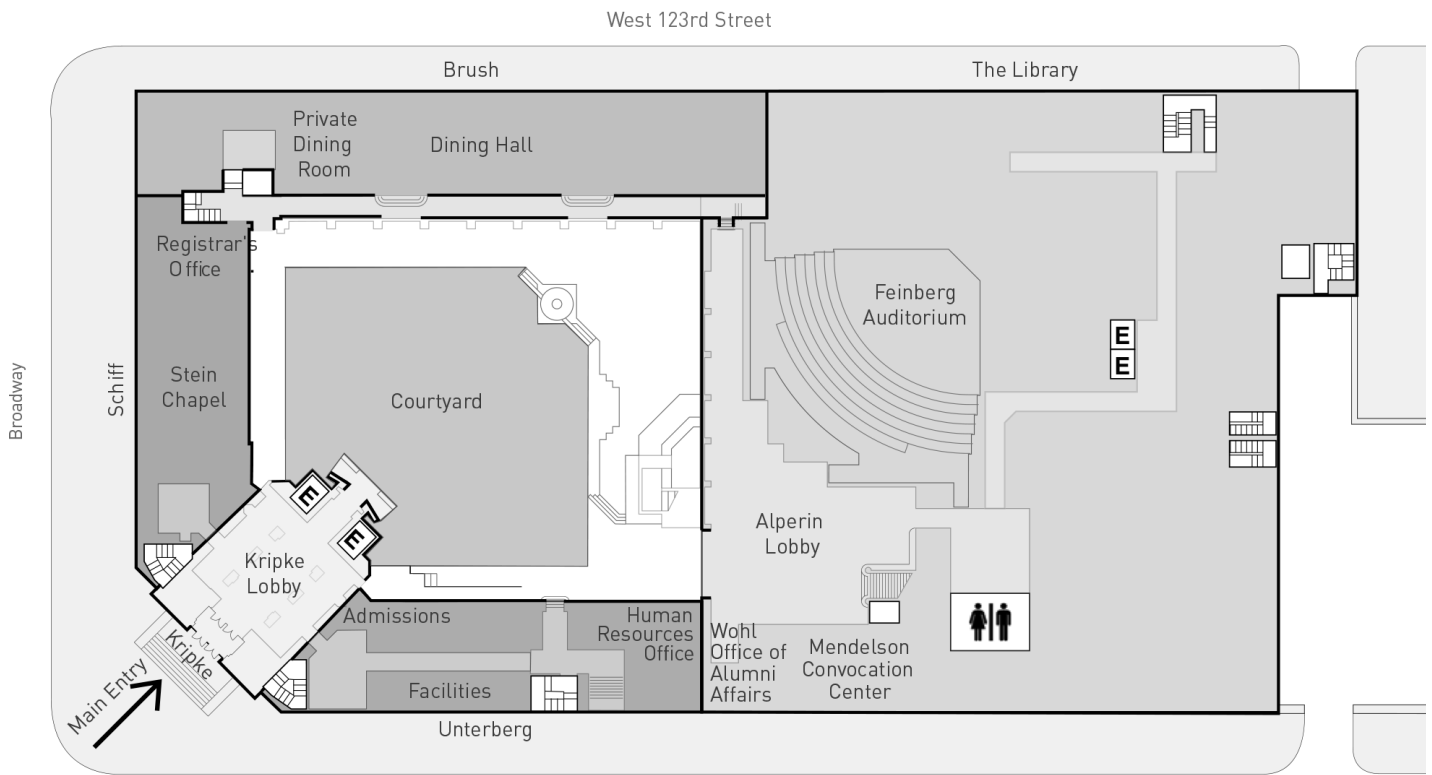
### RA Members who entered JTS in Fall 1984 and dates of ordination:

Rabbi Amy Eilberg - 1985	Rabbi Jodie Futornick - 1989
Rabbi Nina Bieber Feinstein - 1986	Rabbi Susan Grossman - 1989
Rabbi Toba August - 1988	Rabbi Elana Kanter - 1989
Rabbi Carolyn Braun - 1988	Rabbi Naomi Levy - 1989
Rabbi Debra Cantor - 1988	Rabbi Marion Shulevitz - 1989
Rabbi Lori Forman - 1988	Rabbi Liebe (Pamela) Hoffman - 1990
Rabbi Shelly Kniaz - 1988	Rabbi Rhonda Nebel - 1990
Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin - 1988	Rabbi Debra Orenstein - 1990
Rabbi Debra Reed Blank - 1989	Rabbi Jonina Skoff Pritzker - 1990

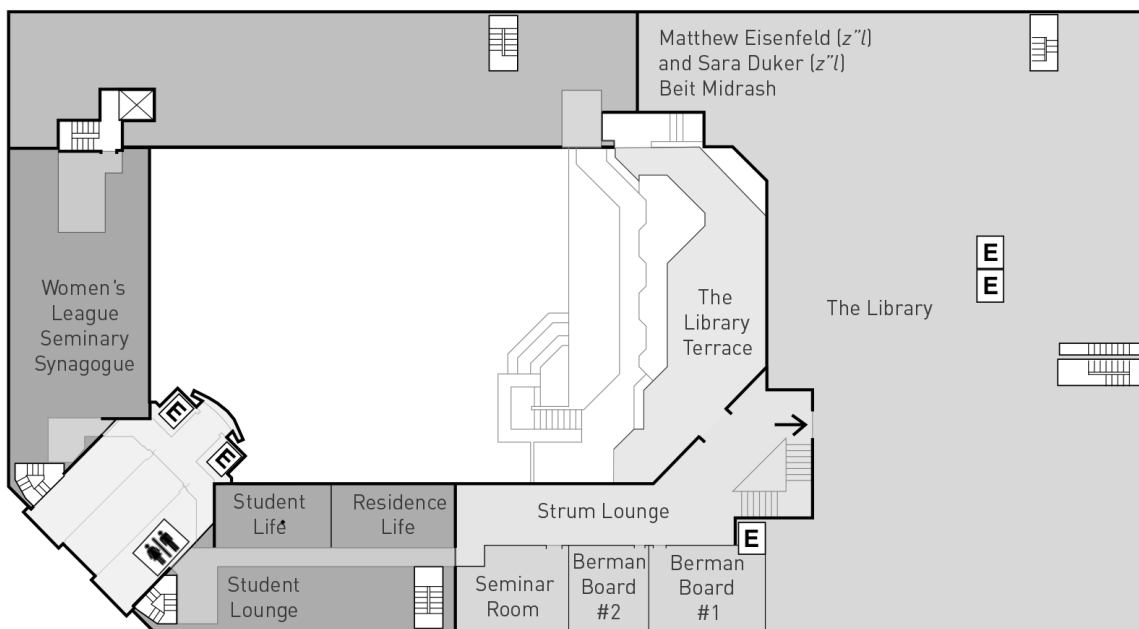
### Rabbis ordained at HUC or RRC and the year each joined the RA:

Rabbi Beverly Magidson - 1985	Rabbi Leslie Alexander - 1988
Rabbi Jan Caryl Kaufman - 1985	Rabbi Julie Gordon - 1988
Rabbi Avis Miller - 1988	

# Map of JTS



**FIRST FLOOR**



**SECOND FLOOR**

# The Basics

## Internet Access

JTS has wireless access in many public spaces. The network is called JTSPublic, user name is **guest** and password is **welcome2jtsa** (all lower case).

## Badges

Please wear your badge at all times. Your badge will also confirm your status as a member in good standing to participate in and vote at the business session.

### Badge Colors

Rabbinical Assembly members: White

Spouses: Blue

Guests and presenters: Yellow

50 Year Rabbis & Conference Committee Members: White with a ribbon attached

## Finding Your Way at JTS

A map of the building is included in this program. All events will be held on the first floor, in rooms along the second floor corridor leading to the library, in the second floor Women's League Sanctuary Synagogue or in Unterberg Auditorium in the basement.

## In Memoriam

Azkarah in memory of our colleagues and spouses will take place on Tuesday at Minhah, led by Rabbi Gerald Skolnik. El malei Rahamim will be led by Rabbi Jan Uhrbach.

## Ballots

If you haven't voted for members of the RA Executive Council and Nominations Committee, you may pick up a ballot and drop it in the box by the registration desk before the business meeting begins at 1 p.m.

## Session Recordings

Many of our sessions will be available on mp3 files on our website after the conference. We will be live streaming some sessions for those RA members who are not able to attend and a photographer will be taking candid and group photos.

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## Private Meetings with Rabbi William Lebeau and Rabbi Elliot Schoenberg

If you'd like to have a private meeting with either Rabbi Lebeau or Schoenberg, please be in touch to arrange a convenient time. Contact either by email: [eschoenberg@rabbinicalassembly.org](mailto:eschoenberg@rabbinicalassembly.org) and [wlebeau@rabbinicalassembly.org](mailto:wlebeau@rabbinicalassembly.org)

## Convocation

The JTS Convocation honoring our colleagues will follow the closing of this Conference on Wednesday, April 29th at 5 p.m. in Feinberg Auditorium. Tickets are required and subject to availability. Check for remaining tickets at the registration desk if you'd like to attend. The convocation will be live streamed at <http://learn.jtsa.edu/live>.

## Joint Campaign and Convocation Reception


Our colleague Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin will be honored at this reception in the Alperin Lobby on April 29th at 6:30 p.m. that also celebrates the Convocation honorees.

This year's campaign chairs are Rabbi Felipe Goodman and Rabbi Debra Cantor on behalf of The Jewish Theological Seminary, Masorti Israel, The Rabbinical Assembly, The Schechter Institutes of Jewish Studies, Seminario Rabinico Latinoamericano, and The Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies.

## Social Media

**We'll be blogging, posting and tweeting during the conference but please note that the breakout sessions and business meeting are for RA members exclusively and should not be broadcast on social media.**

Check out our blog: [rabbinicalassembly.org/news-events/blog](http://rabbinicalassembly.org/news-events/blog)

 Follow our tweets [@RabbiAssembly](https://twitter.com/RabbiAssembly) or post your own and tag us [#RA30years](https://twitter.com/RA30years)

 Also check out our page on Facebook: [facebook.com/RabbinicalAssembly](https://facebook.com/RabbinicalAssembly)

# Schedule: Tuesday, April 28

## 11 a.m. - Noon | Limmud with JTS Faculty

### **When One Rabbi Visits Another the Result is Halakhic Change:**

**A Close Reading of Five Very Short Talmudic Anecdotes** | *Mendelson Convocation Center*

Rabbi Dr. Judith Hauptman

### **Gender-Bending in 2 Kings 4:**

**How a Great Woman Instructs a Man of God** | *Berman Board Room I*

Rabbi Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky

The story of Elisha's encounter with the great woman of Shunem challenges the Tanakh's normative gender dynamic. Through a close reading of 2 Kings 4, we will consider how this story employs an unconventional gender dynamic in order to convey a deeply religious message, and how a woman teaches a man to behave like a prophet.

### **Finding God in Unlikely Places:**

**Six Poems No Rabbi Should Be Without** | *Berman Board Room II*

Dr. Anne Lerner

So-called secular Israeli poetry often supports our wrestling with God. We will analyze some recent poetry that speaks to contemporary issues.

### **Kaddish and Community: Reflecting on Gendered Perspectives** | *Seminar Room*

Dr. Shuly Schwartz

Reciting Kaddish has often catalyzed Jewish identity, but the way in which this occurred differed wildly by gender. As we examine select Kaddish narratives, we'll reflect on how this experience has evolved in America over the past century for both men and for women.

## Noon - 1 p.m.

**Buffet Lunch** | *Alperin Lobby*

## 1 - 2:15 p.m.

**RA Business Meeting** | *Unterberg Auditorium*

Rabbi William Gershon

Nominations Committee Report: Rabbi Gail Labovitz

Membership Report

## 2:15 - 2:45 p.m.

**Honoring 50 Year Rabbis** | *Unterberg Auditorium*

Rabbi William Gershon

## Tuesday, April 28 (cont.)

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2:45 - 3:15 p.m.

**Minhah and Azkarah** | *Unterberg Auditorium*

Minhah: Rabbi Amy Eilberg

Azkarah (in memory of our colleagues and spouses): Rabbi Gerald Skolnik

El Male Rahamim: Rabbi Jan Uhrbach.

3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

**Keynote Panel: 30 Years Later -**

**How has the ordination of women by JTS impacted the Conservative movement and the American Jewish community?** | *Feinberg Auditorium*

Welcome: Rabbi Debra Newman Kaiman

Introduction: Rabbi William Gershon

Moderator: Chancellor Arnold M. Eisen

Panelists: Alisa Robbins Doctoroff, Blu Greenberg & Francine Klagsbrun

5:00 - 5:30 p.m.

**Break and Reception** | *Alperin Lobby*

5:30 - 7:00 p.m.

**Keynote: A Mother-Daughter Dialogue**

**Women and Judaism - How far have we come, where are we now, what's ahead?** | *Feinberg Auditorium*

Opening Reflections and Remarks: Rabbi Julie Schonfeld

Speakers: Letty Cottin Pogrebin & Abigail Pogrebin

7:15 - 8:30 p.m.

**Tribute Dinner** | *Alperin Lobby*

Join us to honor the women who began as rabbinical students in 1984 and those who joined the RA in 1985 and 1988.

Welcome: Rabbi Ellen Wolintz-Fields, conference co-chair; Remarks: Rabbi Arnold Goodman; Dvar Torah:

Rabbi Jan Caryl Kaufman; Presentations: Rabbi Gilah Dror; Kavanah & Birkat Hamazon: Rabbi Marion Shulevitz

8:30 p.m.

**Ma'ariv** | *Alperin Lobby*

Rabbi Nina Bieber Feinstein

# Schedule: Wednesday, April 29

7:00 - 7:30 a.m.

**Shaharit** | *Women's League Seminary Synagogue*  
Rabbi Claudia Kreiman

7:45 - 8:45 a.m.

**Breakfast** | *Alperin Lobby*

7:45 - 10:00 a.m.

**Executive Council Meeting** | *Mendelson Convocation Center*

9:00 - 10:00 a.m. | **Limmud**

**“This Betrothal I Do Not Want”**: Finding Women’s Voices in the Bavli | *Stein Chapel*  
Rabbi Jane Kanarek

A series of brief narratives in masekhet kiddushin portray women rejecting betrothal proposals. As we try and imagine these women and their stories, we will also try and re-understand how the Bavli may understand female autonomy.

**Mutuality in Jewish Marriage - Possible in Jewish Law?** | *Berman Board Room I*  
Rabbi Gail Labowitz

Classically, Jewish marriage has been a unilateral process: a man designates a woman as his wife and only he can release her through the get. Dual ring ceremonies give the appearance of mutuality, but do not change this fundamental legal imbalance. Is there a mechanism within the boundaries of halakha to create kiddushin that is mutually binding and could be undone if necessary by either party? Join us to learn some possibilities!

**Spirals within Spirals:**  
**Understanding Where Gender and Religion Might Go Next in a Digital World**  
*Berman Board Room II*  
Rabbi Karen Reiss Medwed

Drawing on sugyot from the Bavli, we will explore ways in which the rabbis validate the notion of multiple voices in one codified topic, often moving across topic “threads” in a manner similar to what we experience in this Digital Age. Since educational research has shown that a “multivocal” approach supports women’s leadership we will consider how we can capitalize on the style of these rabbinic conversations to reframe our understanding of “women’s voices”; “women’s silence” and “leadership and the hierarchy of authority”.

# Wednesday, April 29 (cont.)

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9:00 - 10:00 a.m. | Limmud (cont.)

**Last Wills and Testaments** | *Seminar Room*

Dr. Stefanie Siegmund

Reading together (in translation) several notarized wills dictated by Italian and Spanish Jewish women (1300-1600), we discuss the way that Jewish values are internalized by less rabbinically educated members of Jewish society. Bring your knowledge of values with you, and leave with some thoughts about directing the will-writing of your own adult learners and congregants.

**Learning from the Other** | *Women's League Seminary Synagogue*

Rabbi Iscah Waldman

Using aggadot from the Bavli we will explore wisdom the rabbis learn from those at the margins of the rabbinic community to see if a pattern develops. Is learning from "the Other" only a way to define oneself or do the rabbis really believe wisdom comes from unexpected places?

10:15 - 11:45 a.m. | Breakout sessions

**Gender & the Rabbinate:**

**How has the ordination of women changed the role of the rabbi?** | *Stein Chapel*

Rabbi James Rosen & Rabbi Ilana Garber; Rabbi Craig Scheff & Rabbi Paula Mack Drill  
Facilitator: Rabbi Ellen Wolintz-Fields

**Successful Models for Promoting Change in Communities** | *Berman Board Room I*

Rabbi Analia Bortz & Rabbi Gesa Ederberg  
Facilitator: Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin

**Visioning & Goal Setting: What haven't we done yet? Where are the new opportunities?**

**How do we get where we want to go?** | *Berman Board Room II*

Facilitators: Rabbi Menachem Creditor & Rabbi Cheryl Peretz

**Taking Our Torah Beyond the Pulpit** | *Women's League Seminary Synagogue*

Rabbi Debra Cantor, Rabbi Lori Forman-Jacobi, Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow  
Facilitator: Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin

# Wednesday, April 29 (cont.)

Noon - 1 p.m.

Lunch | *Alperin Lobby*

1:15 - 2:45 p.m.

**The Ordination of Women as a Model for the Process of Halahkic Change in the Conservative Movement** | *Women's League Seminary Synagogue*

Rabbi Gordon Tucker & Rabbi Pamela Barmash

Introduction to session: Rabbi Philip Scheim

2:45 p.m.

**Minhah** | *Women's League Seminary Synagogue*

Rabbi Cecelia Beyer

3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

**Conference Closing** | *Women's League Seminary Synagogue*

Opening Remarks: Rabbi Steven Wernick

Kavanah: Rabbi Stewart Vogel

5:00 p.m.

**JTS Convocation Honoring Rabbis** | *Feinberg Auditorium*

[Admission by ticket only. Check with registration desk for remaining tickets]

6:30 p.m.

**Joint Campaign and Convocation Reception** | *Alperin Lobby*

Honoring Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin

Chairs: Rabbis Felipe Goodman & Debra Cantor

On behalf of The Jewish Theological Seminary, Masorti Israel, The Rabbinical Assembly, The Schechter Institutes of Jewish Studies, Seminario Rabinico Latinoamericano, and The Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

# RA Leadership

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## Officers

Rabbi William Gershon, president  
Rabbi Philip Scheim, vice president  
Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin, treasurer  
Rabbi Stewart Vogel, financial secretary  
Rabbi Harold Kravitz, secretary  
Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive vice president

## Executive Council

### **Term Expires 2015**

Rabbi Lauren Eichler Berkun, Rabbi Harold Berman, Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove, Rabbi Felipe Goodman, Rabbi Harold Kravitz, Rabbi Joshua Heller

### **Term Expires 2016**

Rabbi Martin S. Cohen, Rabbi Paula Mack Drill, Rabbi Susan Grossman, Rabbi Sheryl Katzman, Rabbi Joel Rembaum, Rabbi Macelo Rittner

### **Term Expires 2017**

Rabbi Morris Allen, Rabbi Michael Friedland, Rabbi Andrea Merow, Rabbi Peretz Rodman, Rabbi Michael Uram, Rabbi Ellen Wolintz-Fields

### **Regional Representatives (term ends 2015)**

Rabbi Leslie Alexander (Northern California); Rabbi Amy Bardack (New England); Rabbi Mauricio Balter (Israel); Rabbi Jeff Pivo (Chicago); Rabbi Marcelo Polakoff (Latin America); Rabbi Daniel Selsberg (Canada)

### **Organizational Representatives (term ends 2015)**

Rabbi Julia Andelman, (JTS), Rabbi Daniel Nevins (JTS), Rabbi Steven Wernick (USCJ)

### **Past Presidents**

Rabbis Kassel Abelson, Minneapolis, MN (1986-1988); Alvin K. Berkun, Pittsburgh, PA (2006-2008); Gilah Dror, Hampton, VA (2010-2012); Arnold M. Goodman, Jerusalem, Israel (1982-1984); Reuven Hammer, Jerusalem, Israel (2002-2004); Vernon H. Kurtz, Highland Park, IL (2000-2002); Perry Raphael Rank, Syosset, NY (2004-2006); Alan Silverstein, Caldwell, NJ (1994-1996); Gerald Skolnik, Forest Hills, NY (2012-2014); Jeffrey A. Wohlberg, Washington, DC (2008-2010); Gerald L. Zelizer, Metuchen, NJ (1992-1994)

## Staff

Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive vice president  
Rabbi Elliot Salo Schoenberg, associate executive director and international director of placement  
Rabbi William H. Lebeau, senior consultant for rabbinic and institutional leadership  
Rabbi Carol Levithan, consultant for special projects  
Rabbi Ashira Y. Konigsburg, associate director of rabbinic services  
Rabbi Arnold B. Marans, comptroller  
Nadhia Ojeda, business manager  
Hoa Browne, executive assistant to Rabbi Elliot Schoenberg  
Emily Hendel, executive assistant to Rabbi Julie Schonfeld  
Max Arad, communications associate

# Conference Presenters - Keynotes

## Alisa Robbins Doctoroff

Alisa Doctoroff is President of the Board of UJA-Federation of New York. She previously served as Chair of the Board, as well as chair of the Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal after years of involvement with its work, particularly in Israel and with young people. Alisa is a past president of the Abraham Joshua Heschel School, was instrumental in founding its high school division, and chaired the initiative for its recent expansion. She is active on the boards of a wide spectrum of foundations and organizations that promote engagement with Jewish life and identity through education, culture and religious life, including the Jim Joseph Foundation, Moving Traditions, Meehan Hadar, and the Jewish Theological Seminary. Alisa graduated from Harvard College and received an M.B.A at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business. She also holds an M.A. in Jewish Studies from the Jewish Theological Seminary. She lives in Manhattan with her husband, Dan, and they have three children.

## Arnold M. Eisen

One of the world's foremost authorities on American Judaism, Arnold M. Eisen is the seventh chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary. Since taking office in 2007, Chancellor Eisen has transformed the education of religious, pedagogical, professional, and lay leaders for Conservative Judaism and the vital religious center of North American Jewry, enhancing JTS's notable reputation and global reach. He has expanded the digitization and online accessibility of historic and contemporary JTS and JTS Library resources, and launched learn.jtsa.edu and popular JTS social media sites as a means of extending conversation about Judaism among the generations. Chancellor Eisen's initiatives include dual-track degrees for rabbis and cantors; programs in early childhood, experiential, adult, and Israel education; an ambitious Arts Initiative; increased interdisciplinary teaching; the fully accredited and interreligious Center for Pastoral Education; the Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue; and the Mitzvah Initiative.

Before coming to JTS, Chancellor Eisen served in the department of Religious Studies at Stanford University, the department of Jewish Philosophy at Tel Aviv University, and the department of Religion at Columbia University. The chancellor's many publications include *Rethinking Modern Judaism: Ritual, Commandment, Community* and *Taking Hold of Torah: Jewish Commitment and Community in America*, a personal essay. He is a lifelong and devoted member of the Conservative Movement.

## Blu Greenberg

Author and lecturer Blu Greenberg has published widely on contemporary issues of feminism, Orthodoxy, and the Jewish family, as well as on other subjects of scholarly interest. Amidst a myriad of public roles, she chaired the first and second International Conferences on Feminism and Orthodoxy in 1997 and 1998 and is founding president of JOFA, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance. She is author of *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition*; *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household*; *Black Bread*, *Poems after the Holocaust*; and *King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, co-authored with Rev. Linda Tarry. Blu Greenberg is a member of the Jewish Women's Archive Honorary Committee for the Celebration of 350 Years of Jewish Women in America.

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## Francine Klagsbrun

Francine Klagsbrun, a columnist for *The Jewish Week*, is the author of more than a dozen books, most recently, *The Fourth Commandment: Remember the Sabbath Day*. Among her other works are *Voices of Wisdom: Jewish Ideals and Ethics for Everyday Living* and *Married People: Staying Together in the Age of Divorce*. She was the editor of *The First Ms. Reader* and of the bestselling “Free To Be ... You and Me,” created with Marlo Thomas and the Ms. Foundation. She is currently writing an in-depth biography of Golda Meir to be published by Schocken Books. She holds a BA degree from Brooklyn College; an MA from the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU; and a BHL and Honorary DHL from the Jewish Theological Seminary. Among her many awards are the Distinguished Alumna Award from Brooklyn College, the Outstanding Alumna Award from JTS and the Centennial Award from the Rabbinical Assembly.

She is a Trustee of the Jewish Museum, a Board member of the Jewish Book Council, and on the editorial boards of *Lilith*, *Hadassah Magazine*, and *Nashim*. She was founding chair of the Board of Overseers of the JTS Library and a founder of Congregation Or Zarua. Ms. Klagsbrun was a member of the Commission for the Study of Women in the Rabbinic of the Jewish Theological Seminary and at the forefront of the struggle to have women ordained as rabbis in the Conservative Movement.

## Abigail Pogrebin

Abigail Pogrebin is the author of *Stars of David: Prominent Jews Talk about Being Jewish*, which recently became an Off-Broadway musical, and the memoir, *One and the Same*, which delves into the truth about growing up as an identical twin. A Yale graduate, Abigail was a producer for Charlie Rose and Bill Moyers at PBS, then for Ed Bradley and Mike Wallace at 60 Minutes. She has also been published in many magazines, and presently writes a column for *The Forward* about every single Jewish holiday in our calendar, called “18 Holidays; One Wondering Jew.” She has her own interview series at The JCC in Manhattan called “What Everyone’s Talking About,” and her guests have included Malcolm Gladwell, Nora Ephron, Nicholas Kristof and Mario Batali. Abby lives in Manhattan with her husband and two teenage children.

## Letty Cottin Pogrebin

Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a founding editor of *Ms.* magazine, is an award-winning writer and lecturer, and the author of eleven books, most recently the novel, *Single Jewish Male Seeking Soul Mate*, which will be published in May. Among her other titles are the guidebook, *How to be a Friend to a Friend Who is Sick*, the novel *Three Daughters*, and two acclaimed memoirs, *Getting Over Getting Older*, and *Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America*. Letty won an Emmy for her work as the Editorial Consultant on *Free to Be, You and Me*, Marlo Thomas’ ground-breaking children’s book, record, and television special. Her articles have been published in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Huffington Post*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Time* magazine, *The Nation*, *Ms.* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, among other publications. Her column has appeared in *Moment* magazine since 1991 and for ten years, she contributed “The Working Woman” column to *The Ladies Home Journal*. Letty served two terms as President of The Authors Guild and as President of Americans for Peace Now. She is a co-founder of a dozen or more activist organizations including the National Women’s Political Caucus, the Ms. Foundation for Women, two Black-Jewish dialogue groups, and several Palestinian-Jewish dialogues. She currently serves on the boards of the Brandeis University Women and Gender Studies program, and the Harvard Divinity School Women in Religion program. Letty lives in New York with her husband Bert, an attorney. They have three grown children and six grandchildren.

# Conference Presenters - Limmud

## **Rabbi Dr. Judith Hauptman**

E. Billi Irvy Professor of Talmud and Rabbinic Culture, JTS

## **Rabbi Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky**

Associate Professor of Bible, JTS

## **Rabbi Dr. Jane Kanarek**

Assistant Professor of Rabbinics and Associate Dean of Academic Development and Advising, Hebrew College Rabbinical School

## **Rabbi Dr. Gail Labowitz**

Associate Professor of Rabbinics, American Jewish University

## **Dr. Anne Lapidus Lerner**

Emerita member of the Department of Jewish Literature, JTS

## **Rabbi Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed**

Assistant Teaching Professor, Graduate School of Education, Northeastern University

## **Dr. Shuly Rubin Schwartz**

Irving Lehrman Research Associate Professor of American Jewish History, Dean of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies, JTS

## **Dr. Stefanie B. Siegmund**

Associate Professor of History, Chair of Jewish Gender and Women's Studies Program, JTS

## **Rabbi Iscah Waldman**

PhD candidate, NYU; Day School Educator (Golda Och Academy)

# Conference Facilitators - Breakout Sessions

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## **The Ordination of Women as a Model for the Process of Halakhic Change in the Conservative Movement**

Rabbi Gordon Tucker, Temple Israel Center, White Plains, New York; Rabbi Pamela Barmash, Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible and Biblical Hebrew, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri

## **Gender & the Rabbinate: How has the ordination of women changed the role of the rabbi?**

Rabbi James Rosen & Rabbi Ilana Garber, Beth El Temple, West Hartford, Connecticut; Rabbi Craig Scheff & Rabbi Paula Mack Drill, Orangetown Jewish Center, New York

Facilitator: Rabbi Ellen Wolintz-Fields, Congregation B'nai Israel, Toms River, New Jersey

## **Successful Models for Promoting Change in Communities**

Rabbi Analia Bortz, Congregation Or Hadash, Sandy Springs, Georgia; Rabbi Gesa Ederberg, Synagoge Oranienburger Strasse, Berlin, Germany

Facilitator: Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin, Am Israel Congregation, Northfield, Illinois

## **Visioning & Goal Setting: What haven't we done yet? Where are the new opportunities? How do we get where we want to go?**

Rabbi Menachem Creditor, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, California; Rabbi Cheryl Peretz, Associate Dean, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, Lecturer in Practical Rabbinics

## **Taking Our Torah Beyond the Pulpit**

Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow, Director, Religious and Chaplaincy Services, Hebrew Senior Life, Boston, Massachusetts; Rabbi Lori Forman-Jacobi, Director, Jewish Journey Project, New York City; Rabbi Debra Cantor, Congregation B'nai Tikvoh-Sholom, Bloomfield, Connecticut

Facilitator: Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, Directory of Baltimore Orchard Project; Sustainability Advisor to the Central Maryland Ecumenical Leaders Group, Baltimore, Maryland

# Timeline for Women's Ordination at JTS

*Many thanks to our colleagues Rabbis Gordon Tucker, Simkha Weintraub, Larry Troster, Rachel Kahn-Troster and to Elaine Kahn for this overview of the process that led to May 1985 and Amy Eilberg's ordination.*

**1971** – Ezrat Nashim—a small New York group to study the status of women in Judaism—is founded.

**1972** – Ezrat Nashim informally presents “Jewish Women Call for Change”, a list of policy imperatives on equalizing men's and women's ritual and halakhic roles to those attending the Rabbinical Assembly convention.

**1973**

**February** - JTS denies a woman the right to enter rabbinical school.

**November** - United Synagogue passes a resolution in favor of allowing women to be admitted to the JTS rabbinical school.

**1974**

**May** - Rabbinical Assembly President Judah Nadich first raises the issue of allowing women into the RA as a pressure tactic on JTS to let women into rabbinical school there.

**June** - The CJLS votes that women cannot be rabbis and cantors.

**1975** – April - The RA tables motion in favor of admitting rabbis into the JTS rabbinical school regardless of gender.

**1976** – March - The RA tables a motion similar to the one tabled in 1975.

**1977** – A resolution at the RA Convention calling for the ordination of women is withdrawn in favor of one calling on the Chancellor of JTS to appoint an interdisciplinary commission to study the matter of ordaining women as rabbis, the report to be submitted to the RA by the 1979 convention. The RA removes references to gender from its constitution.

**1977-1978** – The 14 member interdisciplinary commission holds discussions, hears testimony and conducts several open town meetings or “hearings” in various regions of the country.

**1978** – The Commission delivers its report to the R.A. Convention in Los Angeles: an 11 member majority recommends the ordination of women and 3 members file a dissenting opinion recommending against the move. The Convention votes to accept the report but defers to the Faculty of JTS for the purpose of acting on it.

## Timeline for Women's Ordination at JTS (cont.)

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**1979**

**January** - JTS Chancellor Gerson Cohen presents the report to the Rabbinical Assembly. In his speech, he comes out strongly in favor of ordination in public for the first time. The vote of the JTS faculty on the question of admitting women is postponed from May until the following academic year.

**Fall** - Based on the threat of a boycott of the vote by the Talmud faculty, the Seminary votes to table the question of ordaining women for the time being.

The Group for the Rabbinical Ordination of Women (G.R.O.W.) founded on New Year's Eve with the express mission of keeping the issue alive within the Conservative movement by giving rabbis, students, faculty, and others a communal voice on the issue.

**1980**

**March** - G.R.O.W. holds a rally on the steps of JTS to support efforts to have women admitted to the rabbinical school.

**May** - G.R.O.W. runs an information table and lobbies at the annual Rabbinical Assembly Convention at which the RA responds to JTS's actions by passing a resolution in favor of the ordination of women as rabbis.

**1983**

**April** - At the RA Convention applications for membership from two women ordained at H.U.C. fall just a few votes short of the  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the plenum required for approving members.

**October 24** - The faculty of JTS votes again on a motion to admit women to the Rabbinical School and it passes.

**1984** - September - The first Rabbinical School class comprising both men and women enters.

**1985** - May -- Amy Eilberg becomes the first woman ordained by JTS.

### YOUNG WOMEN CHALLENGING THEIR 2ND-CLASS STATUS IN JUDAISM

*The New York Times* headline from June 12, 1972 appeared on p. 43 over an article by Enid Nemy and recounts the efforts of the members of Ezrat Nashim to achieve "full participation in religious observances, be permitted and encouraged to attend rabbinical and cantorial schools and perform these functions in synagogues, take part in decision-making bodies and assume leadership roles in synagogues and the community."

# Stories from the First Generation

## Reflections on the Interviews with the First Generation

### Rabbi Francine Green Roston, JTS '98, (second generation!)

Carol Levithan and I wrote to the women being honored today and asked for an opportunity to interview them about their rabbinate. Here are 21 vignettes that reflect on the rabbinate each woman has carved out for herself to serve the Jewish people. Through our interviews I came to realize that the story of this first generation of women in the Conservative rabbinate is largely untold. Our story, the story of women's ordination, is a story that unfolded at JTS but also at the Reform and Reconstructionist seminaries. Our story is a story of women "waiting in the wings of the graduate school" in JTS and waiting in Israel and waiting in college and waiting in the job market ... waiting and waiting.

While we are often quick to point out that the rabbinic journey is shared by men and women alike, the unique experience for these women is recorded in each of these stories. When each woman first felt a calling to consider the Conservative rabbinate, she was told it was unattainable. Yet many of the stories tell of sponsors—male rabbis in positions of authority who advocated for them and advised them along the path to the rabbinate. Notably Rabbis Neil Gillman and Gordon Tucker and Dr. David Leiber encouraged these women to enter the Conservative rabbinate—even if it meant attending another seminary and then "coming home" to the Rabbinical Assembly.

Carol and I both found this experience remarkably inspiring. In these vignettes you will find examples of passion, perseverance, resilience and creativity. Every colleague can take inspiration from the daring paths these women walked and the vibrant rabbinic careers they created. While one stayed in the same congregation her entire career, others have had various positions in congregations and day schools, Federations and chaplaincy.

Many in this generation enjoyed a celebrity status when they were admitted to JTS rabbinical school and ordained by JTS. Many found professional doors open for them as a result of their status. In pulpit positions women met greater resistance than in non-pulpit work and in the congregational market, the second job search was more difficult than the first for most women. Across the board this generation shared the experience that most women still encounter: while a "woman rabbi" might be a foreign concept and cause discomfort, once a woman is serving as a rabbi, teaching Torah and offering comfort, she becomes "the rabbi."

The isolation of the rabbinate and the stresses of modern life tend to keep us in our own worlds. We don't often have the opportunity to share our stories and offer models and supports for each other. In these stories of the first generation, we hope you will find your story and your inspiration. No matter your gender, if you share the calling to be a rabbi, you share the need for teachers and role models. We think you will find some here.

We would like to thank all the women who participated in our interviews and edited our accounts. I would like to thank Carol for her partnership and Julie Schonfeld for her support of the project.

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## Rabbi Leslie Alexander, HUC '83, RA '88

In 1986 Rabbi Leslie Alexander's candidacy for the assistant rabbi position at Adat Ari El was presented to the board of directors without any reference to her gender. After the strong recommendation of her predecessor, Rabbi Danny Gordis and Senior Rabbi Moshe Rothblum, the board voted to offer her the position. Only then were they told that Rabbi Alexander was a woman! She was hired nonetheless and worked for 10 years as the assistant rabbi with a very supportive board and senior rabbi.

Leslie grew up in the Conservative rabbinate. Her father Rabbi Ted Alexander was a beloved, successful congregational rabbi in the San Francisco area. Both of Leslie's parents were always supportive of her dreams and encouraged her to pursue whatever interested her. Following college Leslie decided to pursue her dream to become a rabbi. Because the Conservative movement was not ordaining women, Dr. David Lieber z"l encouraged Leslie to go to the Reconstructionist Rabbinical School and then apply to the RA. Leslie followed his advice but after one year she knew that it was not the right school for her Conservative neshamah. She decided to enroll at the University of Judaism and wait for the movement to allow women to become rabbis. In 1980 after Leslie received her Masters and the issue of admitting women to JTS as rabbinical students had been tabled, she watched all of her male classmates move on to rabbinic studies in New York and decided to apply to Hebrew Union College. In the interview Leslie was asked if she was applying because she could not attend JTS. She answered truthfully and they accepted her. Leslie was ordained by HUC-JIR in 1983 and accepted as a member of the Rabbinical Assembly in 1988.

Rabbi Leslie Alexander grew up watching her father excel and enjoy his work in the pulpit and her greatest joy is also in pulpit work. Her career has included congregational and Federation work because of the necessities of the market and geographical limitations. Leslie recounts that her work in Federation impacted her rabbinate in a profound way. From her interactions with a larger Jewish community Leslie learned to be more tolerant of people's varying degrees of observance. She reflects: "I thought that the unaffiliated were uninterested" and through her work in community chaplaincy, establishing a community mikvah and PJ Library, Leslie experienced "the *zechut* of learning how much yearning there is in Jewish souls."

Currently, Leslie is the Director of Community Engagement and Learning at Congregation Beth David in Saratoga, California working with Rabbi Philip Ohriner who had approached Leslie looking for a partner and mentor. As Leslie looks to retirement she enjoys the blessings of the congregational setting and rabbinic cordiality. For her the rabbinate is about building relationships with individual Jews, giving them a sense of value, caring for them and teaching them that "what they feel on the inside they can experience on the outside."

When Leslie decided to be a rabbi her father gave her advice that she passes on to the next generation of rabbis. Rabbis Ted and Leslie Alexander teach that you should always be yourself while being a rabbi. "Don't ever forget that this is your life, too.... You chose the rabbinate because there was some aspect of Judaism and serving the Jewish community about which you were passionate...and, in order to stay in love with it, we can't sell ourselves away in the process."

## Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

### Rabbi Debra Reed Blank, JTS '89

While Debra Reed Blank prefers not to use the title rabbi, she is a teacher par excellence and has helped educate generations of thoughtful Jewish leaders. For Debra the title of “rabbi” brought with it a great deal of expectations about her behavior and assumptions regarding her beliefs that limited her freedom and identity. Debra’s career has been in academia as a teacher and administrator, first at the JTS and currently at Hebrew College where her students seek her out for academic advice as well as spiritual counseling. Debra considers her role in the training of future rabbis, cantors, educators and lay leaders to be her most significant contribution to the Jewish community. She found it very rewarding and inspiring to participate in curricula revisions for JTS and Hebrew College’s cantorial and rabbinical schools.

First and foremost Debra has sought to study and teach Judaism. While Debra grew up in a secular family, she enjoyed the college experience of attending Hillel Friday nights, Saturday communist potlucks and Sunday night Hare Krishna gatherings. After a trip to Israel in her first year of university, Debra stopped studying Classics and philosophy and began studying Hebrew and Judaism. After finishing her BA, she went to Israel for a few years, considered making *aliyah* and then made her way back to the States to enter a PhD program at HUC in Jewish history with Michael Meyer. After leaving that program, Debra went to Columbia for a degree in Library Science and worked as a Judaica librarian at YIVO and HUC. While she enjoyed her work she did not feel fulfilled as a librarian. In 1984 she married and entered rabbinical school in the first class with eighteen other women.

When discussing who supported her along the way, her husband comes first. Without Arnie she doesn’t think she would have been able to attend rabbinical school; he has encouraged her every step of the way. Debra is still appreciative of the vote of confidence expressed by the people who wrote her recommendations for rabbinical school—Michael Meyer and Edith Degani. In 1988, Shaye Cohen, then the dean of the JTS graduate school, encouraged her to design a PhD program in liturgy that had not existed and Menahem Schmelzer supported her candidacy for the PhD. Dr. Schmelzer and Jack Wertheimer encouraged her to teach at JTS and helped get the funding so she could be hired full-time after she completed her PhD.

As Debra reflects on her career, she notes that she started with “the assumption of altruism.” Only later in her career did she learn she could not assume that anyone would help her. She advises young colleagues to remember this and to be persistent and self-advocating when they need help. Debra has learned that you cannot predict or plan exactly how your life will turn out and that flexibility is key to avoiding disappointment. At the heart of her work, Debra cares about teaching Judaism and helping others learn to ask good questions of the sources. She continues to teach and advise cantorial students at Hebrew College and will always enjoy what became her life’s passion—studying and teaching our ancient religion’s liturgy and rituals with modern perspective.

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## Rabbi Carolyn Braun, JTS '88

Rabbi Carolyn Braun didn't think that she was ever going to be a pulpit rabbi. She had worked in various settings before she was ordained, including Hillel, hospital and prison chaplaincy. Carolyn easily saw herself in a chaplaincy role as a rabbi but when the interview season started, she did what everyone was "supposed to do" and she applied to congregational positions. While she was turned down from some and turned some others down, her first position was as a college chaplain for Mount Holyoke College.

After six years, the college's chaplaincy budget was being cut so Carolyn went into the congregational market again. She applied to four or five congregations, interviewed at two and then took herself out of the market because the experience of being the first woman applicant in a synagogue that was not prepared was too painful. There were only about 25 women in the Conservative rabbinate and the barriers felt overwhelming in the job market.

Interestingly, Carolyn had a good friend who lived in Portland, Maine and told her about their congregation that was searching for a new rabbi. The congregation initially rejected Rabbi's Braun's candidacy telling her in the rejection letter that they didn't think it was a good position for a single woman. After some time passed and they didn't find a suitable candidate, the head of the search process called Rabbi Braun to plead with her to apply, again. In December of 1994 Carolyn became the sixth rabbi of Temple Beth El and she has served as the congregation's spiritual leader for more than 20 years.

While Carolyn's twenty years in her congregation were not without their challenges, she views her rabbinic work as a series of positive little moments that sustain her. "The reason I have survived in this environment and I really like it is because there are so many parts to it. Even when there are difficulties, there are also small victories like creative partnerships with other professionals beyond the synagogue, or 4th graders who explain *mishna*, *baraita* and *tosefta* to their parents, who look at them lovingly and quizzically!"

Carolyn strives to be a role model for others and teach people in her words and actions about the joy of Jewish living. Living a life of integrity and caring for others are overwhelming values in her rabbinate .... and laughing, as much as possible! Carolyn has also built up a life that goes beyond the synagogue as a member of an auditioned chorus and a power-lifter. "Some of my best rabbinic work is done in the woods walking my dog with others."

Carolyn advises other rabbis to develop self-awareness and reach out for help when you need it. Some of her greatest supports are other women rabbis with whom she shares stories and strength. Like so many Conservative rabbis, Carolyn refers to Rabbi Bill Lebeau as a great support: "He is like the trainer in the boxing rink. You walk back to your corner bloody, sore, disgusting; he takes you, washes you off, bandages you, gives you a drink of water...and pushes you back into the rink."

As important as colleagues and caregivers are, Carolyn also cultivates her relationship with God to keep her mission clear. "It's really about God, it's not about me...it's not about us...it's not about running a synagogue, it's not about numbers, it's not about being popular." Recently the mission that inspires Carolyn's rabbinate is: *do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.*

## Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

### Rabbi Debra Cantor, JTS '88

Although it's been 27 years, Rabbi Debora Cantor remembers the phone call as if it were yesterday. A member of the search committee from Kane Street Synagogue in Brooklyn, NY, called asking Debra for more references regarding her candidacy. "Oh," she replied, "were you not able to reach the other people?" "Oh no," he answered, "we spoke with all 12 of them." "12?! And not one of them had anything good to say?!" "Oh no, they all said great things. We were just wondering if there were other people we could call." And very quickly Debra answered "Well, I'm really not in touch with my kindergarten teacher any longer!"

While Debra was nervous about landing her first position in the rabbinate, she explains that the congregation was nervous about hiring their first woman rabbi—the first female JTS rabbinic graduate in the Tri-State area! Debra was hired and what she found most fascinating was that for all the trepidation and doubts expressed, people wrestled more with the *concept* of a woman rabbi than with the reality. Once people experienced Debra's preaching, teaching and counseling, they honored her as their rabbi because they experienced her as their rabbi.

When Debra was growing up there were no women rabbis, so she dreamed of marrying a rabbi. "I could be a rebbetzin! I would know a lot and I could do mitzvahs as my job." When Debra was in college, the liberal movements began ordaining women and it occurred to her that she, too, could become a rabbi. During her rabbinic studies Debra started to consider the pulpit rabbinate. She was very active in outreach and education but had not considered the pulpit until a homiletics course. At the start of the course she wasn't interested in the pulpit and her professor was not supportive of women's ordination. By the end of the course, he encouraged her to consider the congregational rabbinate.

Debra was the rabbi at Kane Street Synagogue for eight years and when she re-entered the job market, she was surprised at the lack of growth opportunities in the market. While she hadn't expected a level playing field, she had expected that her record of success would pave the way. Over time Debra came to understand that when you are part of a pioneer generation, many of the opportunities that you open up are for future generations, not for your own benefit. Along with many of her peers, Debra takes pride and joy in reflecting on the doorways that have been opened by her generation.

At the heart of Debra's rabbinate is her passion for learning and teaching Torah. As a congregational rabbi, executive director of Ramah New England, educational consultant and adjunct professor, she touches individual lives with her joyful approach to Jewish life and learning. Debra describes her ideal teaching experience as when "people come away, they feel challenged, they feel something has touched them personally, they have laughed a lot and they want more!"

While reflecting on the nature of the rabbinate and Jewish community today, Debra notes that it is difficult for people to envision the nature of their work twenty, or even ten years from now. Nonetheless, she advises that "if we can relax about what the structures are going to be and just think of what is the Torah at the heart of our rabbinate . . . we can just have faith that we will find places to do the work that we *want* to do and *need* to do."

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## Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, JTS '88

Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin's first job after rabbinic ordination was working as Assistant to the Chief Operating Officer of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Rabbi Michael Greenbaum. Nina remembers sitting through a discussion regarding the cafeteria's functions that would decide whether the JTS cafeteria would use disposable or reusable plates and utensils. At the time, Nina thought to herself, "Really?! This is why I went to rabbinical school?!" Looking back, Nina sees that discussion as possessing a more sacred dimension than she realized and one that engaged an arc of concern for the vibrancy of our one and only human habitat—the earth—that over the past decade has inspired her rabbinate.

Nina came to believe that the greatest questions in which she could involve herself – guided by renewed insights into Judaism's teachings—involve how to build societies that will ensure the survival and thriving of human civilization: "Humans have become a geophysical force. Through our appetites, powers and hubris we are altering the very operating system of our planet. We must capture the teachings of Judaism and place them in service of the fundamental questions of society today."

Nina characterizes her rabbinate as community-based and without walls. She seeks to take Judaism to the streets and into people's lives beyond the synagogue. Currently she is the Sustainability Advisor for the Central Maryland Ecumenical Council and founder of the Baltimore Orchard Project which plants orchards in urban areas, creating a more resilient food system, empowering citizens to be environmental stewards and helping them to reimagine urban life.

At the beginning of her career Nina learned about organizational life through her work with Michael Greenbaum and taught Torah to future rabbis as an associate dean of the rabbinical school and instructor of Jewish Theology at JTS. Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, z"l launched Nina in her writing and editorial career when he offered her a job in the hallway of JTS. He made Nina the managing editor of *Conservative Judaism* magazine, secretary of the Law Committee of the RA, and one of the editors of the RA's Haggadah. Nina was the editor of *Sh'ma Journal* for five years.

In her positions as Director of Jewish Life and Learning at the Baltimore JCC, founder and director of Baltimore Jewish Environmental Network and interim director of COEJL, Nina was able to integrate her organizational experience with her passion for the environment and economic justice. She takes her message to congregations and clergy throughout the area and helps others see the immediacy of environmental problems and the answers Jewish teaching provides.

When reflecting on her role as a pioneer in the rabbinic world, Nina does not remember any experiences of obstacles. "I have found being a woman rabbi and pioneer a benefit...Because I chose a nontraditional rabbinic path, I didn't encounter the obstacles that other colleagues have experienced...those who didn't recognize my ordination didn't bother me. They didn't have any power over me," Nina recounted.

Without hesitation Nina considers her greatest contribution to the Jewish people to be her children. "I loved being a mother of young children and having a flexible schedule to be with my kids. I loved multi-tasking and the cross-pollination that comes with holding several simultaneous jobs. It made me more creative." Nina's most significant role model was her mother Shoshana Cardin who Nina describes as "a fearless, intuitive leader and organizational juggernaut. I didn't understand that everyone didn't have a mother like Shoshana Cardin! She was the woman pioneer blazing the trail in the Jewish world nationally and internationally."

Nina's advice for the next generation of rabbis is to "find the intersection of your passion and your skills, and the needs of the world...if you can build a professional life around that intersection, you will find a purpose to getting up every morning. No matter how far the goal appears, you can still get up and pursue it." Nina acknowledges that sometimes the funding or the organization doesn't exist that meets your mission. Her advice is to go out, build the structure and find funders who share your passion. She believes they are out there and the more we can cultivate these "Jewish venture capitalists", the more creativity and meaning we can bring to the 21st century rabbinate!

## Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

### Rabbi Amy Eilberg, JTS '85

Rabbi Amy Eilberg created a unique rabbinate that is characterized by the sacred act of listening. Listening to others and teaching others how to listen are Amy's core strengths. By listening to God and discerning what sacred work she was being called to do at each moment of her life, Amy has carved her own path in the rabbinate as the first woman ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1985.

The greatest obstacle in Amy's career was the barrier to women in the Conservative rabbinate. Amy graduated from Brandeis University in 1976 and began her studies in Talmud and Bible at JTS. As Amy and her peers pursued their studies, they watched the debate on women's ordination and wondered—will they? Or won't they? Throughout her studies Rabbi Wolfe Kelman z"l was a mentor, cheerleader and supporter. Rabbis Seymour Siegel z"l and Gershon Cohen z"l were also very encouraging and most especially Gordon Tucker was a support and leader in the fight for women's ordination.

Amy's rabbinate has encompassed three different periods: Pastoral Care & Jewish Healing, Spiritual Direction & Sacred Listening, and her current work in Peace & Reconciliation. Her first position after ordination was as the Jewish chaplain at Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis, IN. Following that position, Amy worked as Assistant Rabbi with Rabbi Gerald Wolpe z"l at Har Zion Temple in Penn Valley, PA. Amy left her position after one year because she missed being a specialist in chaplaincy and it didn't help that her toddler daughter's first full sentence was "bye bye ima shul"!

Amy worked in multiple settings engaged in hospital chaplaincy, Jewish hospice care and she gradually set up a private practice in Pastoral Counselling. As Amy's focus shifted to spiritual direction, she was invited to join the faculty of the new Jewish Spiritual Direction training program Morei Derech which she co-directed from 2002-2006. In 2004, Amy's life went through a number of transitions. She moved to Minnesota, her daughter left for college, and during a visit to her stepson at the Jewish-Palestinian dialogue center at Neve Shalom, she experienced an epiphany experience that directed her toward peace work. In 2007 Amy began her current position as Special Consultant for Interfaith Dialogue at the Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning in St. Paul, MN. Through her work in the Twin Cities Amy creates relationships among centralized groups of synagogues, churches and Islamic centers. She promotes learning, dialogue and collaborative programming across the Twin Cities.

As a volunteer, Amy devotes time and energy to intra-Jewish dialogue and she is the co-chair of the Civility Initiative of the JCPA. "Part of my call to peacemaking had to do with the anguish I felt as I saw, first in one synagogue and then in many, many more, the way in which the fabric of relationships was being torn apart by the discussions around Israel." In April, 2014, Amy's first book, *From Enemy to Friend: Jewish Wisdom and the Pursuit of Peace*, was published. In the book Amy offers Jewish teaching as "a guide to reconciliation and peace building in our lives, our communities and the world."

As the first woman ordained by JTS, a great deal of attention was focused on Amy and she was honored to be a participant in a groundbreaking period of Jewish life along with her female colleagues and peers. Her advice to the next generation of rabbis relates to the nature of spiritual leadership and the importance of vision and discernment in a rabbinic career. We should "think both faithfully and boldly, not tolerating injustice, pushing ourselves when appropriate, knowing when to demand equality...Our rabbinate is *melechet ha-kodesh*, so our decisions about the course of our work need to be made in prayer...as a reverent process to understand how our own gifts and desires match up with the work that is available to do. This is how we pay deep attention to our choices about our sacred work—it's more about a sense of call and sacred service than about career in the secular sense." Amy's career path has been unique and she encourages us all to find our own unique path in this sacred profession.

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## Rabbi Nina Bieber Feinstein, JTS '86

Someday, we will explain to our daughters and granddaughters that there was a time when women were excluded from the rabbinate, only because they were women. They will have trouble believing us. They will be astonished that there was once a species of Conservative Judaism so close-minded and discriminatory as to reject spiritually deep, learned, committed individuals solely on the basis of gender. We will tell them our story so they will appreciate the courage and resolution of those women and men who demanded a Conservative Judaism that lived up to its promises.

My journey to the rabbinate began at the age of 15. When I asked a beloved rabbi and teacher in my community what he thought of my ambition to become a Conservative rabbi, he answered “not in your lifetime.” He was not trying to be cruel; he was trying to save me from the difficulties I would face as a woman trying to break into the powerful male enclave that existed at JTS. I graduated with honors from Brandeis University in 1977 and enrolled at JTS for a Masters degree in Talmud, which I reasoned was the closest approximation to rabbinical school. I understood that my declared intention to enter the rabbinate would meet resistance, but I could not have anticipated how all pervasive it would become.

I decided to begin my Masters program at Neve Schechter, the JTS campus in Jerusalem. I contacted the administration and arranged for housing in the dorm. I had this arrangement in writing. When I arrived to claim my room, I was told that it had been given away to a female Israeli soldier – not a student, but simply a boarder in the dorm. Every other student got their room, but there was none for me, even though I had a signed contract from the school administration. Similarly, every other student received a stipend from the Jewish Agency, but there was none for me, even though my enrollment was the same as theirs. This was only the beginning of my struggle with an all-male environment bent on breaking my spirit. Professors tried to embarrass me in class. There was a Talmud professor, for example, who asked that I read aloud sexually explicit passages in our texts. There were professors who told me that my opinions were wrong only to confirm the same opinion when expressed by a male student. There were professors who gave me lower grades even though my exam papers were shown to be superior to male students. Administrators gave me little guidance, no support, and no sympathy. Many male students refused to study in *hevrutah* with me.

As I arrived at JTS in New York in 1978, the Conservative Movement began actively discussing the possibility of women rabbis. The psychological pressure intensified. Fellow students and professors constantly told me, “Women don’t have a Talmud *keop*.” It was asserted that women could not handle the professional and psychological demands of the rabbinate and that congregants could not abide a woman in a position of religious authority. To this day I can remember a teacher who wrote a paper suggesting that allowing women into the rabbinate would banish men from synagogues. He spoke openly about the neurotic maladies of women who desired to fill traditionally male roles and worried aloud that men would not be able to escape their sexual fantasies as they gazed upon a woman on the bima. Male students, without embarrassment, repeated these claims in daily conversations.

Halakhic questions about women were discussed *ad nauseum*. If women were to become rabbis, what could they do halakhically? Could they witness a *ketubah*, lead men in prayer, count in a *minyan*? What restrictions would be imposed by a woman’s menstrual period? Every conceivable halakhic objection was raised by those opposed to women’s ordination. When I had to write papers for class, I researched issues of women and halakha. I wanted to be armed and ready to refute these “halakhic” arguments. I made it a point to engage every student interested in the debate. They could tell me their views, and I would tell them mine. It was an exhausting exercise, but necessary, to try to get others to think about a new kind of future. I reminded the men that they would likely be fathers one day, and maybe have daughters of their own. What would they tell their daughters when they asked why they couldn’t read from the Torah? For the most part the students wanted pulpits. What were they planning to do when women expressed an interest in leading public ritual? And if they refused to allow it, how were they going to engage that half of their congregations?

The most telling argument was the presence of a group of seven strong and committed women, excellent students all, who had publicly declared their intention to become Conservative rabbis -- Deborah Cantor, Julie Gordon, Carol Glass, Stephanie Dickstein, Sharon Fliss Laufer, Nina Beth Cardin, and myself. This group stood up to the psychological pressures, the verbal

## Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

assaults, the petty remarks, and demanded a vote on the issue. When Chancellor Cohen convened a commission to study the issue, we attended the hearings, presented arguments, papers, teshuvot, demonstrating the power of the coming generation of women rabbis. We were supported by a group of male rabbinical students – GROW, the Group for the Rabbinic Ordination of Women, organized by Simcha Weintraub.

Being a female student at JTS left me with a profound sense of powerlessness. My future was not in my hands. I could count no one a true ally. I discovered that even the professors who seemed to support the ordination of women, were more loyal to the Seminary and to their teachers, than to our cause. When the vote on women's ordination came before the faculty in 1979, we were betrayed. We were betrayed by administrators and professors who were concerned about offending the sensibilities of certain senior members of the Seminary faculty. The matter was tabled. Women's ordination would have to wait indefinitely.

Out of that vote came a dramatic transformation. I had met Dr. Gerson Cohen during my years at Brandeis and told him then that I wanted to be a rabbi. He was very discouraging at that time. But over my years at the Seminary, he told me that my perseverance had made a difference for him, and he had changed his mind. His decision was intellectual, and soon, very emotional and very personal for him. Chancellor Cohen became our greatest champion. The Chancellor was concerned that the faculty's decision to delay would mean that JTS would lose the seven women who were waiting so bravely. So he created a stop-gap program as a way to allow the women to continue coursework toward ordination at JTS and prepare for their eventual careers in the rabbinate, until such time as faculty politics would allow another vote. The Shluchay D'rabbanan program was his way of circumscribing the faculty's intransigence. There are many who misunderstood and disparaged this program. They misread Chancellor Cohen's intentions completely. The Chancellor fully believed he would get his vote to ordain women. But he worried about a generation of women who be lost to JTS, to Conservative Judaism, and most tragically, to the rabbinate, without some way to enroll them at JTS. That was the program's intention. And in my case, it worked.

Chancellor Cohen personally invited me to enter this program. Given his enormous efforts to see women ordained at JTS, I felt I could not refuse him. In the end, I was the only one of the seven who entered the program. Of the others, two gave up their ambitions to become rabbis and instead became leading Jewish educators; two left JTS and became rabbis at other schools; and two waited the five years until JTS admitted women, and were subsequently ordained. The Chancellor's program allowed me to finish the entire rabbinical school curriculum including the professional skills classes. As an expression of his gratitude, Chancellor Cohen invited me to deliver the invocation at the 1981 ceremony laying the cornerstone for the Seminary's new library. This was the first public prayer offered by a woman in the history of JTS.

By 1982, my husband and I had been at JTS for five years, and we decided to begin our lives elsewhere. We moved to Dallas, Texas, where my husband Ed became the founding director of the Solomon Schechter day school and the assistant rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel. In 1984, our first child was born. That Spring, the faculty voted again, this time, approving the ordination of women. As the woman with the most academic standing, I was the first admitted to the JTS Rabbinical School. Because the Rabbinical School curriculum had changed in the intervening years, the Seminary administration required that I complete yet another set of courses. Not wishing to abandon my young family, nor the community my husband and I were building in Dallas, I completed the courses over two years by distance learning, independent study and summer school. I was ordained in May, 1986. When my name was announced, and I rose to accept my ordination, my two-year old son screamed out "Ima!" I believe, this was the first time this had happened in the century-long history of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

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## Rabbi Lori Forman-Jacobi, JTS '88

Rabbi Lori Forman-Jacobi joined the first class of the Rabbinical School leaving her home in California to come to New York for the first time. While she adjusted to the differences between Conservative Judaism on the West and East coasts, the small group of women who were the first generation of Conservative students formed an invaluable resource for her during her student years and later as a professional. “We were passionate, questioning, and idealistic at a moment of history that changed the Conservative movement forever,” she says.

Lori’s focus in her rabbinate has always been on innovative ways of engaging and educating adults, children and families. She has worked in various settings across the New York metropolitan area, some that were newly created for her. While Lori has learned that change is difficult and requires patience and perseverance, she celebrates the change that has occurred in the rabbinate since 1984. “We’ve rocked the Jewish world,” Lori reflects. “We’ve succeeded in normalizing women in pulpit and non-pulpit positions, in education and chaplaincy. Thirty years is actually a very short time for such wide-spread change to have taken place.”

Following ordination in 1988, Lori worked as the Director of the West Side Community Religious School and part-time rabbi for the Croton Jewish Center. Later she worked for the National Ramah Commission and the American Jewish Committee’s Inter-Religious Affairs Department. Lori’s next position was innovative in its scope; she created a unique position at UJA-Federation of NY as the Rabbi-In-Residence where she worked from 1995-2003 during which she taught lay leaders, staff and donors of UJA Federation of NY and its beneficiaries. In 2003 Lori and her family moved to New Jersey which led her to a new position as Associate Principal of the Bergen County High School of Jewish Studies, a community Hebrew high school. She then transitioned back to work in Manhattan in 2010 and spent two years as Principal of the Ivry Prozdor High School at JTS.

Currently, Lori is the Director of the Jewish Journey Project in Manhattan (JJP), a bold initiative of JCC Manhattan. JJP has five congregational partners and offers children and their families a new model of supplementary Jewish education that is characterized by the four pillars of flexibility, innovation, collaboration and community. Students choose courses along five pathways and earn badges along the way. Lori summarizes JJP’s mission by explaining, “No child has the same Jewish journey and the learning experiences we provide should be tailored to each child’s individual interests and his/her family’s needs.”

Lori has worked in a number of innovative, newly-created positions and has learned how to craft a vision, develop trust with the leadership, and persevere through the ups and downs organizational life. Overall, she has loved teaching and creating new programs that reach into the community. Lori’s advice to the next generation of rabbinic leaders is to “get up every morning and do what is in front of you, while continuing to nourish your own vision. We shouldn’t think that “any work given to [us] is too small.” As Dr. John Ruskay, immediate past executive vice president & CEO of UJA-Federation once told her: “You are one of the many tugboats to turn around this big ship.” She adds, “Cultivate your vision and work to fulfill the mission of your organization; and sometimes, you must “keep doing what you are doing, even if it doesn’t exactly fit your vision!”

Lori is the co-author of two books, *Sacred Intentions: Daily Inspiration to Strengthen the Spirit* and *Restful Reflections: Nighttime Inspiration to Calm the Soul*, with Rabbi Kerry Olitzky.

Rabbi Lori Forman-Jacobi has worked in many different educational contexts – congregational, communal, and national Jewish organizations. No matter where she works, at the heart of her rabbinate is the innovative and inspiring work of educating children and adults so that Judaism inspires them and gives purpose and meaning to their lives.

## Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

### Rabbi Jodie Futornick, JTS '89

It's a measure of how far we've come in the world of communication that Jodie Futornick learned the JTS faculty had voted to accept women as rabbinical students from her mother who had **telephoned** JTS to find out how the vote had gone! Jodie got the news as she was reading "Oliver Twist" in her Princeton dorm room in preparation for her Senior Thesis in English Literature. She had thought about becoming a rabbi throughout high school and college but only if she could do it within the Conservative movement. She recalls, "When the vote passed, and the opportunity became available at the first possible moment I could take advantage of it, I saw it as a *siman* from above that I needed to apply."

Unlike some of the other women who entered in September 1984, Jodie did not have a day school background, but she remembers that men and women from varied backgrounds were encouraged to apply. The students were at very different levels when they enrolled. She says, "Amy Eilberg was both a freshman and a senior!" Jodie recalls the "balagan" at JTS registration in 1984 in the basement of Unterberg auditorium with reporters beleaguering the entering women with questions. Her five years at JTS went relatively smoothly, but at the end, it was clear that JTS "was way more prepared to have the women as students than congregations were to have them as rabbis." During their student years, most of the best internships in the New York area were only available to male candidates, making it more difficult for women to build student rabbi resumes. The spring, summer and fall of 1989, the year Jodie was ordained, were extremely painful. When she sought counsel from a well-respected member of the faculty, he told her, "You are paying the price for being a pioneer". She reflects, "I felt vulnerable and betrayed by a movement which had provided me with an excellent education but had done little to prepare me for the realities of a pulpit job search."

"My relationship with the Conservative Movement was very ambivalent for a long time. On a light note, I adopted two kittens (alayhen hashalom) when I first moved to Florida and named them "Emet" and "Emunah," after the statement of CJ principles published in 1988. On the other hand, I struggled with the reality that the congregations most likely to accept, no, really, to 'try' a female rabbi were least prone to support an observant, Seminary graduate lifestyle. For me, the most tangible implication was my decision to start driving to shul on Shabbat, which I had not done all through college and Seminary. I remember a very pivotal moment when I felt I had to choose between my rabbinic calling to a pulpit and my standards of observance."

In November 1989 Jodie was hired by a part time pulpit on the west coast of Florida. After 8 months she moved on to a full-time solo pulpit in Greenville, South Carolina for 6 years and then to a congregation in the Chicago suburbs for 8 years. Jodie had felt strongly for a number of those years that she was much more of a chaplain at heart than a congregational rabbi. "My deepest calling was to spend time journeying with my congregants through happy times and sad, and to help each individual to feel good about themselves and their place in the community. I reached a point where I felt like the parts of the rabbinate I did not do as well were taking away from the time I wanted to spend just being with the people."

The move to chaplaincy in 2004 was literally a "leap of faith" because she didn't know what the job market would be. But she went "from pulpit rabbi to happy rabbi", guided by a strong sense that God was directing her and relieved that she was leaving the pulpit environment where she never quite felt at home. Jodie acknowledges that a lot of rabbinic work involves "a personality match" and she does not see herself as "a natural pulpit presence". During her time in the pulpit, Jodie did several units of Clinical Pastoral Education, spending one day at week in the hospital to improve her professional skills. After leaving the pulpit, she did two years of CPE residency. . It was very important to Jodie to become a Board Certified Chaplain at the earliest possible moment, as a concrete mark of her career transition. She achieved this goal in 2007.

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Enthralled with being “staff chaplain” or “interfaith chaplain,” Jodie took a full time position in 2006 at Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital in Barrington, IL where she has been ever since. In 2011, she completed a Master’s degree in Bioethics at Loyola University of Chicago, and she prides herself on being a “Jewish chaplain in a Protestant hospital with a degree from a Catholic university.” She is now enrolled in a doctoral program in Bioethics, also at Loyola, and she hopes to finish her DBE (Doctor of Bioethics) degree in May 2017.

After leaving the pulpit, Jodie joined an egalitarian minyan in Chicago, where she still belongs today. “Two weeks after I left the pulpit, I was sitting in the synagogue to which I now belonged—as opposed to one I was leading, and I realized I was reclaiming the spirituality that had led me to Seminary in the first place. I delight in the continuing opportunity to be ‘a part of’ rather than ‘apart from’ a congregation.” Jodie believes her greatest contribution as a rabbi was giving herself permission to leave pulpit work and enter chaplaincy. She is encouraged that rabbinical students today receive more personalized career guidance rather than she did. She describes herself as a 21-year-old kid right out of college when she started Rabbinical School, and her self-perception as a rabbi has grown over time as she has pursued new possibilities.

## Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

### Rabbi Julie Gordon, HUC '84, RA '88

Rabbi Julie Gordon was a trailblazer from the time she was a young Jew growing up in a small town in Minnesota and started a USY chapter in Albert Lea with four of her friends! She then became a regional officer in USY and the only girl on the executive board. At age 16, Julie decided she wanted to train for bat mitzvah though it wasn't her community's tradition. Bert Cooper, who taught all the local bar mitzvah boys, graciously agreed to teach Julie and two other girls.

After meeting Rabbi Laura Geller in 1975, Julie wanted to be a rabbi and also share her love of Conservative Judaism with others. She is deeply committed to egalitarianism and feminism. "I wanted to be a leader from the very beginning and I decided 'I can do it!'" In 1978, Julie enrolled at JTS as a non-matriculated graduate student in anticipation of entering rabbinical school. In May 1979, Rabbi Neil Gillman, former dean of the rabbinical school, advised Julie to go to Hebrew Union College's rabbinical school, telling her "You can always come home to us."

Julie was ordained by HUC-JIR in 1984 and hired to be the rabbi of Park Slope Jewish Center, making her the first Conservative rabbi serving a congregation in Brooklyn. In 1987 she went to Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, z"l in the RA office for career advice. Wolfe volunteered to call Rabbi Bernie Raskas at Temple of Aaron in St. Paul, Minnesota because he knew they would need two rabbis as Bernie prepared for retirement. In 1988 Julie was hired as the congregation's rabbi-educator and beginning in 1989, after Rabbi Raskas' retirement, Julie served as co-senior rabbi at Temple of Aaron until 2001.

Julie strives to be a caring listener, a welcoming guide and a spiritual teacher in every professional setting she has finds herself. From 2002-2010 she served as the Director of Social Action for the Jewish Community Relations Council, Spiritual Life Director at the Minneapolis Jewish day school and Principal at St. Paul Talmud Torah Afternoon School and Midrasha. While at the Minneapolis Day School, she wrote "B'chol L'avcha: A Shabbat and Festival Companion" which is used in many day schools for Kabbalat Shabbat celebrations. In 2010, Julie fulfilled a dream to be a student in Israel at the Pardes educator program, the Conservative Yeshivah and Ulpan Micah.

Since 2013, Julie has been the Director of Education at Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Synagogue in Bethesda, Maryland. While Julie's career path has not always moved in the direction she anticipated, she has always been clear and confident regarding the core of her rabbinate: teaching through example, welcoming people into the Jewish community and inspiring them to deepen their Jewish commitments through study and warm experiences.

When asked what advice Julie had for colleagues carving out their careers, she offered these three suggestions. (1) Treasure where you are at the moment; it may not be where you'll be in five years! Our career paths do not always follow a straight trajectory and that is ok. (2) Be kind and take care of yourself because nobody else is going to do it. (3) Be supportive of female colleagues. We need each other and can offer a great degree of understanding based on our shared experiences.

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## Rabbi Susan Grossman, JTS '89

Rabbi Susan Grossman grew up in the Bronx with no Jewish education, entered rabbinical school with recommendations from two Orthodox rabbis and is one of the most prolific woman in Conservative halakhah. During undergraduate studies at SUNY-Binghamton, Susan spent a year at San Francisco State learning TV journalism and becoming a regular at the House of Love and Prayer where she met Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, z"l who inspired Susan to study and explore Jewish life and prayer.

After graduation, Susan became communications director for the Student Association of the State Universities (SASU) in Albany, NY. She also volunteered with Federation where she met Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl whose rabbinate, combining spirit and activism, inspired Susan to consider the rabbinate. While she wanted to attend JTS, at that point it wasn't possible. She came to New York City to work in Jewish journalism with great references for an application to Columbia's Journalism School, yet her heart drew her to deeper Jewish learning. As long as the Conservative rabbinate remained closed to women, full-time Jewish studies would not pay the bills so she joined Yitz Greenberg's National Jewish Resource Center (now CLAL) as director of Zachor, in charge of Holocaust programming and studied part-time for her Masters in Jewish Studies at Brooklyn College.

As the probability of women's acceptance to JTS became likely, Susan and her husband David officially attended Midreshet Yerushalayim where Susan fulfilled all the rabbinical school Israel requirements. After the decision to admit women, she applied in Israel to enter the first class of women. It was difficult for Rabbi Baruch Feldstern to find rabbis willing to consider women candidates. The committee he composed was resistant to Susan's acceptance but she is very grateful to Baruch and Rabbi Morris Allen, both tremendously supportive of women's ordination, who fought for her acceptance.

Susan entered JTS in 1984 and while she had planned to enter academia, Rabbi Bill Lebeau inspired her to apply for a congregation following ordination in 1989. Susan applied for her first position while pregnant and the woman who chaired the search committee recognized the situation and encouraged Susan to complete her first visit and only reveal her pregnancy if she was called back for an offer. In 1989 Susan became the rabbi of Genesis Agudas Achim in Tuckahoe, NY. Yoni was born six weeks before Rosh HaShanah and Susan was on the pulpit for the High Holy Days.

After eight years it became clear the Jewish community in Southern Westchester was shrinking. Susan guided her congregation toward a merger and announced in 1997 she would seek a new position. The congregation was heartbroken but supportive.

Susan's job search in 1997 was tough. It was a bad year for placement, particularly for women. There were many congregations looking, but many wouldn't interview women and many that would interview women were more liberal than Susan was on certain halakhic issues. When Susan considered looking at organizational positions, Rabbi Harold Kushner encouraged her to not give up and she decided to apply at one more congregation. When she visited Beth Shalom Congregation in Columbia, Maryland, she knew she was in the right place and has served Beth Shalom since 1997.

While she has dedicated extraordinary energy and compassion to her work in the pulpit, Susan continues to write as well. In 1992, she co-edited with Rivka Haut, z"l, *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue* and is honored to have served as an editor of *Etz Hayim*, working with Harold Kushner on the drash section and suggesting and co-writing the halakhah maaseh section with Rabbi Elliot Dorf. She was appointed to the Committee of Jewish Law & Standards in the early 1990s, and has penned responsa permitting women as witnesses and judges; codifying the Conservative practice of only seven total days of niddah; and defending a woman's right to the safest medical abortion procedures available to protect her health. As chair of the CJLS Personal Status sub-committee, she shepherded Rabbis Dorff, Nevins and Reisner to cooperate on one combined responsum, passed in December 2006, advancing gay rights. She also helped shape the RA's model baby naming ceremonies.

As a congregational rabbi, Susan has "raised the bar, being accepting and expecting" and her congregation takes great pride in their high standards for Jewish education. Susan also mentors and encourages younger women to enter the pulpit. Her advice to colleagues follows her own practice: "Don't let the bad guys get you down; be the best you can possibly be; take care of yourself—sleeping, eating, exercising and doing something nice for yourself every day; and persevere through the difficult times because the rewards of the pulpit are extraordinary."

## Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

### Rabbi Elana Kanter, JTS '89

Rabbi Elana Kanter was inspired by her father Rabbi Shammai Kanter, z"l. Growing up listening to her father's sermons and watching him minister to a congregation, Elana had her strongest positive role model for the rabbinate and always received good advice and support from her father as well as the other rabbis in her family—her brother Rafi and her husband Michael Wasserman.

While the evolution of the Conservative rabbinate contained tremendous obstacles and challenges for women like Elana, she joins her classmates in celebrating the blessings of being a pioneer. "At first people would look at you as a kind of relic, in a great way...they couldn't believe women could be rabbis!" reflects Elana. She enjoyed the great sense of progress they experienced in the late '80s with women's ordination and Elana considers herself privileged to be a part of history moving Judaism forward.

Elana learned quickly that any anger or resistance that was coming her way as a "woman rabbi" was not personal but a manifestation of people's own fear and discomfort. Throughout her rabbinate Elana has experienced that significant change is possible in communities when there is a clear vision, strong interpersonal relationships and perseverance. After ordination she became the Jewish Studies Coordinator at the Epstein Day School in Atlanta, Georgia and from 1993-2000 taught in the Jewish day school in Birmingham, Alabama where she also started a leadership institute at Federation. Elana was the recipient of the Covenant Award for exceptional Jewish educators in 1998.

Elana has been a pioneer not just in the history of the Conservative rabbinate but also in the Jewish community work she has undertaken. Along with her husband, Elana founded the NewShul in Scottsdale, Arizona in 2002 and both of them have permanent seats on the seven-member steering committee that runs the congregation. Michael has primary responsibility for running the shul, but they lead services together. There is no board; there are no dues; and at steering committee meetings they have fun, study Torah and take care of shul business. "It is the shul we would like to join if we hadn't started it," comments Elana.

Elana considers her greatest contribution to the Jewish people to be her three children. (Currently her daughter is serving in the IDF along with the daughters of Rabbi Debbie Cantor and Rabbi Paula Mack-Drill!) Elana has crafted a rabbinate that has enabled her to juggle successfully the demands of raising a family and creating a career focused on teaching. For the first 25 years of Elana's rabbinate she worked in Day School education because she felt most passionately its importance for the Jewish future. But as the cost of day school education became problematic, Elana began to contemplate the next step in Jewish education. At the age of 50, she reviewed her long-time interest in women's learning, thought, "if not now, when?!" and decided to pursue her passion as vocation. She went about securing support to open the Women's Jewish Learning Center in 2010 and today Elana has 75 women of all ages and denominations from across the greater Phoenix, Arizona area studying Jewish texts, literature and values. In Slingshot 2012-2013, the Women's Jewish Learning Center was named one of North America's most innovative Jewish non-profits.

Elana's advice to colleagues is to follow their dreams as she has done. "If you have the opportunity to start your own thing, whatever it is, do it! It's incredibly rewarding and you really get to fashion the kind of contribution you want to make to the Jewish community." Sometimes your passion in the rabbinate may be "the road less travelled, that has its scary parts, but it is also extremely rewarding."

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## Rabbi Jan Caryl Kaufman, HUC '79, RA '85

Jan Kaufman can pinpoint the date on which she decided to become a rabbi. It was April 1, 1966 and she was in the 6th grade at the modern Orthodox Jewish day school her parents sent her to, for which she is “forever grateful”. Her teacher - Mr. Manischewitz - was talking about Zecharias Frankel who had walked out of a rabbinic meeting in 1845 because German reformers had determined to eliminate Hebrew as the language of prayer. Jan loved learning Hebrew, texts, Jewish history and being observant. She was impressed with Frankel’s stance on Hebrew and the fact that he was a “proper scholar” with a doctorate. “I want to be just like Rabbi Frankel” she decided and became a devotee of historical progressive Judaism.

As a 7th grader at Baltimore Hebrew College’s Hebrew High School Jan already knew she was a “people person” (she wrote the gossip column for the BBYO newsletter) who “wanted to know everything about everybody”. Love of learning and being a “people person” seemed the ideal qualities for becoming a rabbi and since Sally Priesand was already a rabbi so it never occurred to Jan, whose mother had a PhD in physical chemistry, that she couldn’t do it too. The only obstacle to becoming a Conservative rabbi was that women weren’t being ordained at JTS and since Jan was too young to go to HUC she spent a year studying history at JTS and then began rabbinical studies “downtown”.

Jan had no problems with being at HUC and enjoyed life in New York City where she found her Conservative niche at Anshe Chesed and first met Rabbi Wolfe Kelman who “picked me up and brought me home”. She became a 4th child in the Kelman household since the three Kelman kids were scattered. Wolfe Kelman was Jan’s “big champion” - as he was for a number of the early women rabbis - and assured her that she’d get into the RA and was always helpful in promoting her professionally.

Jan was ordained at HUC in 1979 and as one of 12 women rabbis in the country at the time she had no problem getting a job - Associate Director of Hillel at the University of Maryland. But there were obstacles. Social life was much more complicated for someone becoming a rabbi AND breaking a gender barrier: the “cold, hard fact” is that you are “statistically less marriageable”. Professionally, Jan maintains, the obstacles for women tend to be the “second job” and getting tenure in a position so it becomes easier to move laterally than vertically. After that first job Jan ended up in “pink collar work” - teaching in Jewish day schools. As a woman rabbi, she says, you’re “so grateful to have a job, you just take it. And work harder for less money, at least then.”

In 1981 Jan became a teacher at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland and “tried to up the pink collar quotient” during her 10 years there. She also had a part time pulpit in Annapolis for two of those years, was librarian at Adas Israel, the director of the D.C. Jewish Studies Center and graduated from law school! By the time the JTS faculty decided to admit women to rabbinical school, Jan had been a rabbi for four years. But when the time came for Amy Eilberg to be ordained and to join the RA, Jan and Beverly Magidson were also accepted as members.

Jan is proud of her career at Charles E. Smith where, as she puts it, “I made a lot of Jews.” She carried her love of progressive, historical Judaism into the classroom where her students learned how to spell Wissenschaft on the first day of class and the same standards of academic rigor applied as in any other class. Rabbi Jan was all about making her students educated, observant Conservative Jews and every aspect of her teaching - from every vocabulary word to every test question – was designed to achieve that. She is grateful for the mentorship she received from the school’s headmaster, Dr Shulamith Reich Elster, the daughter, wife, niece and aunt to RA colleagues.

In 1991 Jan returned to New York as Director of the Schechter High School and three years later began her 19 year career at the RA. Jan estimates that during those years she had at least 600 conversations annually with RA colleagues and while her work was highly varied, she says “I’m most proud of my work on the mahzor.” In spite of her immense contributions to Conservative Judaism and to the Rabbinical Assembly, Jan is not satisfied - “I wanted to be stratospheric but I wasn’t tough enough.” Her advice to young colleagues? “Don’t waste time. Rush through school so you have a lot of experience while you’re still young. Get married early. The odds are better.” Jan’s concluding comment will come as no surprise to the reader: “I treasure the relationships I made with colleagues over my years at the RA.”

# Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

## Rabbi Shelley Kniaz, JTS '88

After the decision was made to admit women to rabbinical school for ordination, Burt Visotzky approached Shelley Kniaz in the hallway of the seminary and asked: “Are you staying?!” She couldn’t resist the opportunity to fulfill her dream.

Rabbi Shelley Kniaz grew up in Beth Israel, a Conservative congregation in Madison, Wisconsin. In high school her rabbi, Charles Feinberg, persuaded her parents to send her to Camp Ramah and inspired her by his example to become a rabbi. She loved tutoring children at her synagogue and teaching there while in college. Shelley knew she wanted to work in Jewish education. She also knew she was not permitted to attend rabbinical school in the Conservative movement. After graduation from the University of Wisconsin in 1980, Shelley studied at JTS toward a master’s degree in Jewish education which she earned in 1984 and then, with the help and support of her parents, Lorna and Dr. Harry Kniaz, ז”ל she entered rabbinical school.

While Shelley experienced and broke through the barrier to rabbinical school, she also experienced the limited view of the rabbinate dedicated to the pulpit setting. During her rabbinic studies Shelley worked as the principal of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism religious school in New York. Although this was a significant position with regular interaction with the congregational rabbi, staff and students, Shelley was not permitted to receive credit for the requisite professional internship. After negotiating for some time, she was given credit on the condition that she do hospital visits with her congregational rabbi at Town & Village Synagogue in NYC, Henry Glazer. As Shelley did her coursework she continued to volunteer as a teacher and prayer-leader in her synagogue T & V. She also taught part-time in various settings: adult education courses through the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School, trained preschool teachers in Conservative congregations through USCJ and JTS, taught methodologies in teaching at the JTS School of Education. She also taught for three years in the Solomon Schechter of Bergen County.

When Shelley was ordained in 1988, she left the SAJ to work at the Solomon Schechter Day School of Bergen County. After one year she became the Assistant Director of Education for the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism with Rabbi Robert Abramson. Bob was a supportive mentor and six years later he encouraged Shelley to pursue her doctoral studies in Jewish education full-time. In every educational position Shelley has filled, she has brought her personal approach to teaching and inspiring her students. “I think of Jewish education like building a house—one brick at a time. One Jew, one family, at a time! Every person whom I am able to inspire to enrich his/her life with Jewish observance, community and Talmud Torah is infinitely significant.”

In 2000, Shelley moved to Teaneck, NJ with her spouse, Rabbi Eliezer Diamond, and their son, Matan Baruch, to join the community at Congregation Beth Shalom. In 2004 Shelley she became a co-author and editor of the 6th-8th grade Etgar curriculum for synagogue schools, a joint program of JTS and USCJ. Shelley was “like a kid in a candy shop” doing what she loved, creating innovative, content-rich curricula and watching teachers implement the material in the classroom. She was also thrilled to return to a congregational school in 2008 when she became the full-time Director of Congregational Education at Temple Emanuel of the Pascack Valley in Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey. In this position Shelley brings her talents for developing quality education in an enjoyable, stimulating learning environment for students, their families and the school faculty.

Since her first position during college as a Hebrew school teacher, Shelley has found mentors with whom she can learn and sponsors who can help her find the right match for a job. She encourages all rabbis to continue to be learners as well as teachers. “My best resources are other people. I go to my chevrotah Lori [Forman-Jacobi] who reads everything and she tells me what’s new in the field! Take advantage of new opportunities to learn and grow.”

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## Rabbi Naomi Levy, JTS '89

Rabbi Naomi Levy wanted to be a rabbi since she was four years old. People would laugh when she shared this, classmates at Yeshiva of Flatbush high school thought her longing was blasphemous, and yet she held onto her dream. In Naomi's senior year at Cornell University, JTS decided to admit women into its rabbinical school: "I felt very blessed," reflects Naomi. "A number of the women who entered the Seminary with me had fought so hard for the cause of women. I wasn't on the front lines of the battle. I was one of those lucky ones who got to benefit from their amazing efforts."

When Naomi was in rabbinical school, she pleaded with her dean, Rabbi Gordon Tucker, to excuse her from homiletics class because she was certain she was never going to be a pulpit rabbi! Ironically, Naomi went from having a phobia about public speaking and writing to creating a career as an author who lectures widely to Jewish and non-Jewish audiences. Naomi travels around the country speaking and teaching on prayer, faith and hope.

After ordination in 1989, Naomi began working at the University of Judaism. Soon she was courted by a synagogue. Although she was not interested in the position, Naomi agreed to visit the congregation and instantly she knew she was meant to be the rabbi of Temple Mishkon Tephilo in Venice Beach where Naomi met her husband Bob and gave birth to her two children Adin and Noa. As a pulpit rabbi Naomi was forced to write weekly sermons and she began to love writing. Soon she felt a pressing need to write a book about her experiences. She was ready to make sense of her father's tragic murder and she wanted to share the timeless lessons she had learned from her own remarkable congregants. She decided to step down from her pulpit to begin writing in earnest.

In 1998 Naomi published her first book, *To Begin Again* that became a national bestseller and led to appearances on "Oprah" and "The Today Show." After teaching, touring and lecturing on the lessons of *To Begin Again*, Naomi wrote *Talking to God*, published in 2002 in which she explained that she began writing personal prayers when she became pregnant with her son. There was so much she wanted to say to God, but of course there were no traditional prayers to recite. "Writing personal prayers transformed my spiritual life, my relationship to God...and I didn't stop."

As Naomi travelled with *Talking to God*, she taught rabbis and lay leaders how to have honest discussions about prayer and how to personalize their prayer. Everywhere she went she met people who shared a similar story: they thought they were done with God and Judaism; they would never have gone to see her in a synagogue; but as they listened to her in a bookstore, they felt a renewed sense of connection.

Naomi's experiences on the road and her memories of people peeking into the door of her Venice Beach synagogue and stepping out again because of the intimidating nature of the service, all combined to compel Naomi in a new direction. She felt a deep need to reach out to unaffiliated Jews. "I didn't want to look back on my life and regret that I did nothing to address the problem of Jews walking away from Judaism when I could have done something". Nashuva was born in 2004 with eight people sitting around Naomi's dining room table. They wanted to create an outreach organization that would engage Jewish outsiders and expose them to Judaism's wisdom, joy and deep spirituality. Naomi created a new siddur with a new translation of the prayers and began teaching Jewish meditation. She sought out musicians who would make the service come alive with melodies from all over the world. In 2014 there were 60,000 people across the globe participating in Nashuva's service through live webcast.

Naomi continues to write and teach. She published *Hope will Find You* in 2010 in which she shares the lessons on her journey with her daughter Noa who was born with a rare metabolic condition. The book teaches us how to embrace life's beauty and how to welcome hope in. Naomi is currently at work on a book about the soul titled *Einstein and The Rabbi* (due out in 2016). Through her rabbinic career, Naomi has experienced "a Jewish world that is not in synagogue but is yearning to connect." Naomi's Hebrew name is Nechama and comforting people is at the core of all she does. Through her ministry and her writing, Naomi helps people find healing, hope, comfort and the capacity to begin again.

## Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

### Rabbi Beverly Magidson, HUC '79, RA '85

When Rabbi Beverly Magidson was a young teen in high school, she confided to her diary: “If I were a man, I’d want to be a rabbi.” Raised in a traditional Midwest Jewish community, Beverly learned to daven from her father and was so “fired up” after a month at a local camp patterned after Camp Ramah, that she continued at a community Jewish high school program through 12th grade. During college - amidst all the publicity about Sally Priesand becoming a rabbi - Bev was “still there”, still committed to the idea that “helping people become better people connected to Yiddishkeit” and “being a rabbi combined everything important to me.” She transferred to Brandeis from the University of Chicago so she could major in Jewish Studies. During her senior year (1972-73), advised that there was “some openness” to the idea of women rabbis on the part of the new Chancellor Gershon Cohen, she was one of 3 women to apply to JTS rabbinical school. Rejected because her background “was not strong enough,” she was encouraged to get a Master’s at the Teacher’s Institute at JTS but applied to HUC and began rabbinical studies in 1974.

During those years at HUC, Beverly visited JTS (where her husband was getting a Master’s in Jewish Education) and met Anne Lerner who was encouraging and supportive, as well as Wolfe Kelman who suggested she should apply for RA membership after the requisite two years had elapsed following ordination from HUC. Bev knew she didn’t “belong” as a Reform rabbi and since Conservative women couldn’t be ordained she doubted that a pulpit was in her future, although Wolfe Kelman sent her placement lists for Conservative pulpits after RA members had received them. After she was ordained in 1979 she served three years as Associate Director at Washington University Hillel in St. Louis and then she was hired – to her surprise – as the rabbi of a Conservative congregation in Clifton Park, New York where she worked for eight years (1983-91).

Beverly recalls that while her congregants were always supportive, for the rest of the world she was a “curiosity” during those years because she was a woman or because she was a Reform ordainee serving as senior rabbi in a Conservative shul. “Does she know her place?” people wondered. “Has the Conservative movement gone off the deep end?” “I don’t see how any married woman could do all these things. What does your husband think?” she was asked. In May 1981 - two years after ordination as Wolfe Kelman had advised and nearly a decade after her letter to Gershon Cohen - Beverly applied for membership in the RA. She was approved by the Membership Committee and Executive Council but the vote of the RA plenum in March 1983 fell four votes short of the ¾ required for admission. Beverly’s identity as a Conservative Rabbi was finally confirmed in May 1985 when she and Jan Kaufman joined the RA along with Amy Eilberg.

After leaving the pulpit in 1991, Beverly found her true rabbinic calling doing chaplaincy work. While she believed leaving the pulpit was “not good for women’s acceptance in the rabbinate”, she felt she had to do what was right for herself and her family and “knew there would be other women who would fill lots of roles...” The career move - to part time chaplaincy and day school teaching in Albany - was motivated by finding a stronger Jewish community and an environment that didn’t overwhelm the family as life in the pulpit tended to do. It was in that new environment that Beverly grew to love and appreciate the value of chaplaincy. As is true for many female colleagues, Beverly’s new rabbinic work was initially “a patchwork quilt of various chaplaincy jobs” but she now works full time exclusively in the field of geriatric chaplaincy. She believes the chaplaincy field has grown in part because women have moved into the field and helped professionalize it, citing the “nurturing and caring” so often associated with women as qualities that are changing the rabbinate more generally.

Reflecting on the years since college graduation in 1979, Beverly says, “I’ve watched so many good things happen and some not good things happen. So much has changed; but I feel that what I did helped open that door so other women could enrich Judaism. I read about the recent advances of Orthodox women into leadership positions and know that we helped make that possible.” And her advice to other women in the rabbinate? “Do what’s right for you!”

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## Rabbi Avis Miller, RRC '87, RA '88

In 1984 Rabbi Avis Miller was invested as a rabbi at the Adas Israel Congregation by Rabbi Stanley Rabinowitz. The rabbi and cantor of the congregation together placed a robe and tallit on Avis's shoulders in front of the assembled congregation and from then on she worked at Adas Israel as Rabbi Miller. At that time she was a rabbinical student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College!

Avis grew up in the Conservative movement but when it was time for rabbinical school, admission to JTS for ordination was not possible so Avis attended the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia while living in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. When JTS decided to admit women in 1984 Avis had almost completed her studies at RRC. She knew there was a historic precedent of RRA members being admitted to the Rabbinical Assembly and in 1988 Avis was accepted as a member of the Rabbinical Assembly.

Avis's career as a congregational rabbi had begun in 1983 at when she first led High Holy Day services at Ada Israel. Her very first Yom Kippur sermon sparked the creation of the Anne Frank House, the first communal Jewish effort to combat homelessness in D.C. Avis became Rabbi Emerita in 2008 and in her retirement, she continues to do the rabbinic work which has always been her passion: teaching and engaging the next generation of Jews to build up the Jewish community. Avis was a pioneer in the work of Keruv and her greatest "sipuk nefesh" comes from seeing her conversion/confirmation/bar-bat mitzvah students accomplish great things in the field of Jewish education and culture.

As rabbi at Adas Israel Avis crafted her own approach to adult education and keruv. She started the area's first learners' minyan and workshops for engaged and expectant couples, led 399 women through 17 different Adult B'not Mitzvah classes and sponsored hundreds for conversion. In the 1980s she initiated the first contemporary guide to Bikkur Holim. She was the first woman to chair a committee for the Rabbinical Assembly (Keruv/Giyyur, 1992-5; 2004-6) and was twice president of her RA region.

Avis enjoyed the sense of participating as a pioneer in watershed moments in Jewish history. In late 1989 she went with Rabbi Jerome Epstein to Ethiopia to help get the Jewish community out. In response to her subsequent sermon on the mitzvah of redeeming captive, her congregation raised \$150,000 to fund the transportation of the Jewish community from Gondar to Addis Ababa in order to leave Ethiopia for Israel on Operation Solomon. Avis is incredibly proud of her congregation for their generosity and support of these great acts of pidyon sh'vuyim.

As she reflects on her career, Avis acknowledges that she was lucky. "To quote my sister Marcia, I hit the trifecta! It was the best time to be a Jew, an American and a woman." When considering obstacles as a woman in the rabbinate, Avis did not feel there were many at the beginning of her career. She relates this to the culture of Washington, DC. "There are many professional women in Washington. You're doing the job, just as women are doing the job in government." While she felt accepted in the local culture, unfailingly each week she would be approached by a guest at the bar mitzvah who would ask her: "What exactly are you?!"

Avis and her husband Ralph are now blessed with five married sons and 15 grandchildren. Avis was able to work long hours while raising children because she had an "anchor in [my] family". Not only was she blessed with a supportive spouse but she and Ralph cultivated a large group of supportive friends inside and outside the congregation. When the difficulties of working in a large institution were pressing, Avis always had the confidence that the day-to-day interactions she was having were making a difference in people's lives and in the Jewish world.

Here is Avis's advice to our colleagues: "Know yourself and keep your priorities in order. There are choices you have to make. These are hard choices. And our most precious resource is our time . . . At the end of the day, I've done a lot of funerals, been with a lot of elderly people and people don't say 'I didn't spend enough time in the office'."

## Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

### Rabbi Rhonda Nebel, JTS '90

It was daily Hebrew School as a 4th grader in Mattapan, Massachusetts that set Rhonda Nebel on the path to rabbinical school at JTS. Rhonda recalls that she fell in love with Jewish education and “wanted to study, study, study.” She also had a passion for working with people and realized these two loves could be married in the rabbinate. In her senior year of high school she had “huge blocks of free time” which she spent in the library of her shul. Her rabbi had invited her to study in the library to help her get ready for a rabbinic career. Rhonda believed a rabbinic education was the best path to her goal of being a Jewish educator. Among the books she read was Mordecai Kaplan’s *Judaism as a Civilization* which had “no God” and eliminated the possibility of rabbinical school at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Since it was clear to Rhonda that she had to be a Conservative rabbi she began graduate school at JTS in 1981 because “one day they will ordain women and when they do, I’ll be there.”

That day came more quickly than she had anticipated. From the time she entered rabbinical school in 1984 Rhonda describes herself as having “blinders go on”; her goal was to “get through and do my business and try not to get distracted.” Of course she was aware of the “unrest”: everything was so new and undefined, male students dropped out and went to YU and “so many things were going on because of the politics you could get sucked in and sucked under.” She recalls the professor who chose niddah as the topic in a Talmud class and “gave the most uncomfortable passages to discuss in mixed company”. The other two women in the class dropped out but Rhonda stuck with it and earned the professor’s respect. “You have to have a thick skin when you’re a ‘pioneer’”, she explains. “I was firmly planted, I knew what I wanted and plowed through.”

Rhonda knew she didn’t want a pulpit; she wanted to run a school that was fun and accepting, that produced proficient kids who didn’t hate going. She found her first job through an ad from the RA placement service for an education/youth director in New London, Connecticut. Her application was answered by a call from Rabbi Carl Astor at Congregation Beth El who said “we want you” and she spent the next ten years there, doing the work she loved and learning from Rabbi Astor what it really was to be a pulpit rabbi. A move to Lexington, Massachusetts to be an education/youth director was motivated by the wish to be closer to family. Rhonda spent one unhappy year there and then took a year off.

When Rhonda began looking for an education director job again she hit one of those bumps in the career path when two job offers were suddenly withdrawn. She spent the next year teaching English in a public school while living with her husband and young daughter in her mother-in-law’s basement! But the story has a happy and surprising ending: two job offers to be both an education director and a pulpit rabbi. After a weekend interviewing in Flanders, New Jersey, Rhonda walked into her next interview at Temple Beth Chai in Hauppauge, Long Island where 90 people had come for Ma’ariv. Following the davening, Rhonda asked, “What do you want to know”? She told them she “wasn’t coming in green” and wanted to settle down, have stability and raise her daughter. Rabbi and congregation fell in love and have stayed that way for the past 12 years.

Rhonda describes her rabbinate as “warm, comfortable, accessible, and non judgmental” and the “door is never closed”. She is better in the pulpit now, having seen good rabbis and bad. She describes the 40 year old shul as “unpretentious” but “unique” in having a huge, active social network among the congregants. She describes the shul as “stuck in time” when she arrived but she has worked patiently from the bottom up without revealing “an agenda” and “slowly, slowly we’ve changed things”. That includes both shortening and changing parts of the service to enhance the experience as well as adopting a more lenient policy towards intermarried couples. While her predecessor would not allow non-Jewish parents on the bimah the congregation loves the fact that “the only difference between intermarried and non-intermarried couples is that the non-Jewish spouse can’t vote.” Moreover, the non-Jewish wife of the shul president is the administrator of the Hebrew school (and, yes, Rhonda is the principal!).

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While she describes herself as “a rabbi who happens to be a woman”, Rhonda does think that it is easier for women to be nonjudgmental. Her advice to younger colleagues? “Shuls are about relationships that need to be cultivated; shul is not the center of people’s lives, it’s about how they feel when they come into the building.”

“Follow your gut instincts; don’t be someone you’re not, thinking that you’re pleasing others.” Make sure your style fits the demographic of your community:

“People grow and change and so does your career. Don’t do anything before you’re ready or you’ll be doomed.”

## Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

### Rabbi Debra Orenstein, JTS '90

Looking back on her childhood, Debra remembers: “Whenever I went to shul, I saw a relative on the bimah.” As a 7th generation rabbi, her path to the rabbinate started generations back. By the time she was 8, she had announced to her parents that she would be a rabbi. Although her parents told her that “women could not be rabbis” and that her desire was “impossible,” she “always assumed they were mistaken.”

Debra’s Jewish life was full of contradictions: at 8 years old she helped run junior congregation, and co-led the Torah Readers Club. Yet her father mentored many young men to be rabbis, but no young women – not even his daughters. Her father taught Gemara to teenage boys on Shabbat afternoons, but did not invite her. Debra’s bat mitzvah was among the first in the synagogue to be held on Saturday morning. Although she had an aliyah and read Torah, women were not permitted to leyn on a “regular Shabbat morning.” (Eventually, her father led the congregation to complete egalitarianism and became a booster for women’s ordination.) From the bimah, Debra talked about her future as a rabbi but at kiddush following the bat mitzvah, JTS Chancellor Gerson Cohen told her: “What you said was beautiful, but it won’t happen.”

In 1983 as she was preparing to graduate from college, Debra called Dr. Cohen to inquire about the future of women in the rabbinical school at JTS. He told her, “It won’t happen in my lifetime, and it probably won’t happen in yours.” As she explored other options, a JTS professor called with the news that a vote on women’s ordination was planned and urged her to apply to another JTS program, so she could take classes and be on the scene when women, hopefully, would be admitted to rabbinical school.

Like many of her colleagues, Debra recalls the obstacles facing women. Her first year was especially tough, since the faculty had not yet voted. It was a “year of uncertainty and debate” because the “issue was still unresolved and raging.” She was asked by the JTS administration to advocate for women’s ordination at Conservative synagogues and media appearances. “At times this was like being thrown to the wolves,” she recalls. At age 20, she debated JTS professors in public forums and was sent to speak for Seminary Shabbat at Temple Israel Center in White Plains, then a “hub of the movement against women’s ordination.” There was also the discomfort of being in JTS classes where one professor routinely began by calling out “Gentlemen!”; another invited only male students to his home for Shabbat; and another announced “I don’t answer women’s questions.” David Weiss Halivini, although also opposed to women’s ordination, made a point of being personally supportive to women. He invited Debra to study with him in his office, which she did on several occasions. Professors Neil Gillman and Paula Hyman were mentors.

Having waited and advocated to be included, Debra believes that she and many women came to JTS with a strong passion and high expectations for rabbinical education. Yet conversations about theology, spirituality, feminism, and the personal meaning and contemporary application of traditional texts were largely unwelcome. Access was granted to women, but women’s roles, perspectives, and influence were sore subjects. Debra and Elana Kanter were among the founders of the Vaad Gemilut Hasidim, and Debra recalls that some faculty members objected to this project as “bitul Torah.”

As ordination approached, Debra applied for a Finkelstein Fellowship at the University of Judaism where she became a full-time instructor and worked on a feminist critique of rabbinical school curriculum, as well as the *Lifecycles* series, which Jewish Lights later published. After that fellowship ended, she became a fellow at the Wilstein Institute for Jewish Policy Studies. She also continued to teach part-time at the UJ (now AJU) for 20 years. One scholar-in-residence weekend at Makom Ohr Shalom in Los Angeles led, over time, to Debra joining Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi as co-officiant there on High Holidays and then to her becoming the spiritual leader of Makom Ohr Shalom throughout the year.

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Family brought Debra back to the East Coast and to a pulpit at Congregation B'nai Israel in Emerson, New Jersey. Debra sums up her rabbinate as a “set of serial interests and passions”: promoting women’s perspectives and voices; exploring ritual creativity and the variety of Jewish spiritual expression; pursuing gratitude – which was a central focus for several years, culminating in a 2-CD teaching; and, most recently, freeing slaves (see the Freeing Slaves page at RabbiDebra.com).

Her advice for prospective colleagues? “Look at rabbinical school as if you’re already ordained and you’ll start your career with a six-year sabbatical. What do you want to focus on?” She urges, “Direct your own education!” “Make a choice about where to put your energy – what gives you the most satisfaction and meaning? Stay in touch with your original sense of mission and pursue the connection between Torah and life – in whatever capacity you choose.”

# Stories from the First Generation (cont.)

## Rabbi Jonina Skoff Pritzker, JTS '90

For Jonina Skoff growing up, every day was Take Your Daughter to Work Day. She remembers always following her father Rabbi Benson Skoff, z”l as he went about being the rabbi of a large shul in St. Louis where he served for 50 years. She and her brother Rabbi Joshua Skoff loved to play rabbi together (In 1990 the Rabbis Skoff were the first brother and sister to be ordained together.) Jonina would observe her father in many roles - teaching, doing a wedding, at the cemetery, or in the pulpit where he delivered his “weekly marching orders” to his congregants, talking to them about how they needed to be involved in the world. She always felt he was doing meaningful things and decided early on that only professions that have an immense impact on people’s lives and on the world interested her. Everything else seemed to fall short; no other career seemed “engaging enough”.

At her bat mitzvah on a Friday night in her father’s non-egalitarian shul Jonina read an “extra” Haftarah but she was so sure about following in her father’s footsteps that she never asked herself if women could be rabbis: “It never dawned on me that I couldn’t do what he was doing.” Because she entered rabbinical school right after college graduation in 1984 she didn’t experience the angst of “waiting in the wings” to be admitted like a number of her JTS classmates. She explains that she “never saw the world in terms of gender”. Jonina took a number of Talmud courses but didn’t have any of the painful or embarrassing experiences other classmates report. She acknowledges that there were conversations going on about such experiences but they “were not going on with me.”

As graduation approached, Jonina interviewed for pulpit positions (of course!) and became the rabbi at a small shul in the Greater Boston area, having been wooed by that shul and one in Houston. She left the congregation after ten years to become the second rabbi at a larger shul (over 600 families) closer to Boston, a congregation that was wonderful “in a completely different way” where she spent the next six years. After such career success, Jonina encountered one of those work/family complications that arise for rabbis. There were a few congregations looking for a solo rabbi, and one in Connecticut with over 600 families was very eager to have her become their rabbi - it was “a good community, a good fit, an attractive offer”. The position would have required dividing the household between Boston and Connecticut and the congregation wanted to make it work but Jonina and her husband made “the right decision for all the right reasons” and stayed in Boston.

After 16 years in the pulpit, one of Jonina’s objectives was to take time to work on projects related to Israel, a subject that had been a primary focus of her rabbinate over the past 10 years. She worked, for instance, with The David Project, founded to bolster the ability of college age students to speak up and defend Israel and co-authored an Israel curriculum that is being taught in Hebrew High Schools around the country. Inevitably, another pulpit beckoned as well and Jonina became the rabbi of a small community that came together eight years ago, knew her and invited her to be their rabbi. At Congregation Or Yisrael, Jonina leads services on Shabbat and holidays, preaches, teaches a lot - especially Tanach - and a regular class on medical ethics but has time to pursue other interests as well, especially Israel related.

Jonina’s advice is the same for male and female colleagues: if you can articulate the things that move you the most and make you feel the most passionate about Judaism, communicating these feelings will be “infectious and motivating”. Recalling her eulogy for her father, Jonina observes, “You can go through your life and think you’re making your own decisions, but in the important things I stepped into the track he laid down.” Even in the 50th year of his rabbinate, the elder Rabbi Skoff was “genuinely motivating and still trying to solve the world’s problems.”

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## Rabbi Marion Shulevitz, JTS '89

Throughout her life, Rabbi Marion Shulevitz has wanted to be a rabbi. She also wanted to fly to the moon, she recalls, “and they were both on a par in terms of viability.” Although friends and family laughed at Marion when she expressed interest in the rabbinate, her parents supported her in her Hebrew studies. While a bat mitzvah in 1946 was out of the question, when she wanted to go to Israel at the age of 19, they allowed her to go for a six week summer program which was most unusual for a young Jewish woman in 1952!

Marion grew up in the Conservative movement at Congregation Shaarei Tzedek in Detroit and attended Wayne University there for its Hebrew studies program. Shaarei Tzedek was not open to women’s participation then but, as Marion recalls, Rabbi Irwin Groner promised many years later to push for egalitarianism in the congregation when JTS accepted women. He was true to his word.

Marion considers some of her greatest contributions to the Jewish community to be the volunteer work she did as an active member of the Jewish communities in which she lived. When her children were young, she was on the board of the Hillel Day School PTO and chair of the early education and adult education committees of Congregation Shaarei Tzedek. When the family moved to Puerto Rico in 1968, she became librarian of the Puerto Rico Jewish Community Center, chair of several Hadassah committees and president of the sisterhood. After their move to Miami in 1975, Marion worked with Rabbi Sol Landau of Miami’s Beth David to help make the congregation egalitarian, encouraging women to read Torah and Haftarah, counted for a Minyan and attend weekday morning services.

Marion’s greatest source of support is her life-partner and husband Bill who made her rabbinical studies possible. When his retirement and interest in the financial markets took the couple to New York City in 1980, he encouraged Marion to attend JTS. She still wanted to become a rabbi but the Seminary was not yet accepting women. On Judith Hauptman’s suggestion Marion interviewed at HUC-JIR’s rabbinical school. She acknowledged she was not a Reform Jew and was told she would not be admitted for this reason and because she was too old for rabbinical school! Marion began studies at JTS as a non-matriculating graduate student and began rabbinical school in 1984 as a 51-year old mother of three!

Marion was ordained in 1989 and enjoyed a career in chaplaincy that began at New York’s Metropolitan Jewish Hospice. She soon moved to The Hospital Chaplaincy Inc. in New York that served several hospitals. The condition of employment was completing Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) training that was not part of rabbinic education in her generation. In 1995 Marion became Interim Chaplaincy Supervisor at the New York Board of Rabbis thanks to a grant they had secured for her to offer in-home pastoral care for those who were not connected with any other program. Marion finished her professional career at the Amsterdam Nursing Home, retiring in 2014.

As a chaplain, Marion’s greatest joy was visiting with people one-on-one and helping them find a sense of connection and meaning in Jewish tradition or in their own faith tradition. The chaplaincy rabbinate helped Marion connect with people who were in need and gave her profound satisfaction when she could witness, in the moment, how her support had helped them. One of the tasks Marion most enjoyed was crafting services for Jewish patients. “No matter where you were, the rule was the same... you can do anything you want, as long as you do it in 45 minutes!” Marion relished finding the core elements of each holiday and connecting th patients’ experiences of suffering, stress, or rehabilitation with the Jewish liturgy.

In her career Marion always worked to open up the rabbinate to include chaplaincy. Her professional positions have included chaplaincy work in Hospice, Senior Homes, and hospitals. While she was not the first Jewish woman in chaplaincy, she consciously worked to keep the barriers to women’s participation lowered “as they have a tendency to pop up again after they are lowered the first time.” Marion offers this advice to colleagues: “If you come up against an obstacle, go around it! Keep trying.”

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