



Enriching Tradition, Opening Minds

RRC 2006
ANNUAL REPORT



Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

בית המדרש לרבנים ליהדות מתחדשת

Message from the President

By Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz



Turning talented people into rabbis will always be the primary mission of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. For 38 years we have pursued this mission with steady focus. At our graduation ceremonies in 2006, we will graduate our 300th rabbi.

The effect of the cumulative work of our many graduates has been profound. I can think of no other institution of its kind that has had such a major impact on the Jewish community. In the pages that follow, you will read about some of the more striking ways in which our faculty and students are enriching Judaism's **great body of tradition** and opening minds—hence, this year's theme for our annual report.

Until recently, our influence came exclusively through our graduates. In the past few years, however, we have undertaken initiatives to allow the wisdom and influence of RRC to reach the community directly, without our graduates acting as intermediaries. This direct service to the community is a sign of RRC's having reached a new level of institutional maturity.

Beginning in the fall of 2006, we will launch a distance-learning program for adult learners seeking high-level educational programming. Tamar Kamionkowski, Ph.D., RRC's dean and vice president for academic affairs, will offer two six-session courses—one in the fall and one in the spring. It is

our hope that distance learning—learning via computer and other technologies that allow the teacher and learner to bridge geographical distances—will allow many people to experience firsthand RRC's approach to Jewish education.

We are also reaching out to the broader community through our new and improved Web site, www.rrc.edu. The Web site, to be launched this spring, was completely redesigned this past year and incorporates new content, including a section titled "Jewish Community" in which learning resources about Judaism and Reconstructionism can be found.

In this section of our Web site, you will find information about our three academic centers, which have helped RRC make direct contributions to the Jewish community. Kolot's Web site, www.ritualwell.org, is the premier site for creative Jewish ritual on the Web. The Rosh Hodesh program for teenage girls, which Kolot spun off last year to a new nonprofit, now operates 175 groups across North America. Hiddur's Sacred Seasons project, designed to help bring Jewish holiday and Sabbath observances to elders living in long-term care facilities, is now in the hands of professionals in more than 150 such facilities. And the Center for Jewish Ethics has helped create a new consortium, the Academic Coalition for Jewish Bioethics,

which has co-sponsored conferences on important issues in bioethics and, through the RRC Press, has published guides on *tzedakah*, *kashrut* and bioethics, with more to come.

Another area of outreach is our new West Coast initiative. This past year, RRC hired Rabbi Henry Shreibman (RRC '81) to teach, lead services and conduct meetings with people throughout the San Francisco Bay Area as a way to bring a Reconstructionist approach to people who have not yet experienced it.

Rabbi Shreibman has reached out to a wide variety of people and added significantly to their Jewish lives. It is our hope that this work will eventually become self-funding, and we will be able to place more of our graduates in similar positions elsewhere. In this way, RRC can help improve Jewish life in ways we could not have imagined only a few years ago.

We will not lose our focus on rabbinical training. This is our central and most important task. We are monitoring these new initiatives to make sure they will improve our core educational program, while also bringing important value directly to the community.

We hope that our influence will spread and help bring *shalom u'shleymut*, peace and wholeness, to the Jewish community and to the world.

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The Rabbi's Long Road Home

By Eileen Fisher

This spring, Spanish-born Jordi Gendra—raised as a *converso*—will become one of a rare breed.



It is early September in Barceloneta, Spain's Miami Beach on the outskirts of Barcelona, when summer releases its last hot breaths. Later in the day, temperatures will rise to about 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Swarms of tourists and city residents will make their way past a chorus line of high-rises and palm trees, onto the burning sands. But at 9 a.m., the air is temperate and it is quiet enough for Jordi Gendra to hear a rabbi whisper in his ear.

The rabbi is Haifa's Edgar Nof, and on this day in 1995 he and two others who make up the *beit din*, or rabbinical court, are leading Gendra and 17 others through the *birkat kohanim*, the priestly blessing that concludes the process of their Jewish conversion. Nof and others believe it is the first time the ceremony has taken place in Spain since 1492, when rulers Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the country's Jews, and holding the services at the Mediterranean Sea lends them a special poignancy. "There are accounts in the medieval documents," Gendra will recall later. "The Jews were thrown into the sea. You had paid your ticket to go to Italy, to go live wherever, and the sailors threw you into the sea and kept the money."

And he will remember in particular a remark that day by Jonathan Magonet, of the World Union for Progressive Judaism: "Now from that very sea, we have made new Jews."



Among the group that day were many who, like Gendra, came from families of *conversos*, those Jews in Spain who converted to Christianity—or took on the appearance of conversion—to escape persecution or expulsion. Nof had been visiting Barcelona every three months since 1992 to help establish a new Reform counterpart to the Orthodox synagogue that had been the city's only Jewish option. Because the members of the group had no documents showing their Jewish identity, he had encouraged them to follow the rules established by the Central Congress of American Rabbis: In cases of questionable Jewish identity, follow the traditional process of conversion. Everything was done strictly according to *halakhah*, the dictates of Jewish practice. The program of education, *brit milah* (circumcision) for the men, and *mikveh* (ritual submersion in the sea, ending with the priestly blessing) had taken three years to complete.

For Gendra his conversion would be a turning point, setting him farther along a path that would distinguish him even among these 18 historic new Jews. In 2001, he would leave Spain for the United States to begin rabbinical studies at RRC. And this spring, he is on track to join a breed that historians and observers of current Judaism in Spain deem very unusual. “Indeed, the case of Jordi Gendra belongs to a very rare category of people who were born in Spain and have become rabbis,” says Dr. Yom Tov Assis of Hebrew University’s Department of Jewish History. Moreover, he adds, “Although there are quite a number of descendants of *conversos* who have returned to Judaism, we do not have many rabbis who belong to this group.”



“Gendra” is not one of the small class of surnames easily recognized in Spain as Jewish. Yet being *converso* had always set the Gendra family subtly apart. Growing up even in cosmopolitan Barcelona, where he was born in 1970, Gendra remembers the rule of Jewish identity as a policy slogan turned on its head: “Don’t tell, don’t ask.”

“One of the pieces I learned as a child was to be careful, because if you were recognized [as Jewish] you could be persecuted,” he says. Surrounding this family secret were some customs his grandparents passed along: covering one’s head, rinsing and salting meat, lighting candles. Yet



Gendra remembers the rules of Jewish identity as a policy slogan turned on its head: “Don’t tell, don’t ask.”



their context, as is typical in *converso* culture, was hazy. “You would light a candle every Friday night. Why? Because in our family, that’s the tradition. My grandmother never cooked pork. Why? Because she doesn’t like pork; she never has. We never ‘go there.’”

At age 11, just as he was coming into his own as an independent urban kid, his father—following a dream Gendra equates with the American pursuit of suburban paradise—moved the family to

Olot, a town of only 30,000 inhabitants. In this place where everyone knew everyone else, Gendra and his two younger sisters were marked by their distinctive accents. Because their father was the CEO of the electric company, they were considered socially elite. And they also were the only kids who didn’t attend monthly Mass at their new school, a Catholic academy located across the street from the Gendras’ new home.

Perhaps it was being thrust into a contrasting setting that made Gendra want to articulate his Jewish identity. With a nod from his parents, he decided to learn Hebrew. “So, *oy vay*, at about 14 years old I got a copy of *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*, published by Oxford, which was in English. Learning the Hebrew helped me improve my English, though the English there was full of ‘thee’ and ‘thou’!”

At that time he also started attending what was the only synagogue in Barcelona. What Gendra learned of Jewish practice then seems remote to him today—the Moroccan *nusach*, or liturgical melodies, in an Orthodox setting. He persisted, continuing to construct a Jewish identity. In 1988 he decided to go to the

University of Barcelona for more language study, eventually earning his B.A. and M.A. in Semitic philology. It was in that academic department that he met a colleague, Manel Frau, who still is his partner today.

In the summer of 1992 he and Frau, who had been accompanying him to synagogue, decided to escape the city during the Olympic Games. They went to Israel and stayed in the Bacca neighborhood of Jerusalem, surrounded by lots of Americans. But Gendra thinks of that time as his summer in Paris. “You cannot yearn for Paris if you have not been to Paris,” he says. “And for us, going to services at the progressive Kol Haneshamah was like going to Paris. We discovered there was a Jewish world outside the walls of our synagogue—another way of understanding, practicing and living Judaism. And we decided: We like it!”

On their return to Barcelona the two found the new, more liberal group Atid. Headed by Nof, the visiting rabbi from Haifa, it was populated by many Argentinean émigrés they had known at the Orthodox synagogue. Gendra and



Frau learned from Nof, who was raised in Argentina, how to conduct the form of Jewish services they preferred.

They became more and more active as volunteers in the Jewish community. That September, Atid, which had been meeting only a few times a year, became much more active. At its peak, it drew 70 people to worship in a different living room each week.

Gendra created his own *siddur*—typing the Hebrew along with an Argentinean translation, and photocopying. He would preach every weekend—not so difficult, as he was translating Midrash and other religious Hebrew texts at school during the week. By 1997, when Gendra persuaded Frau they should forsake their windowless walk-up in Barcelona for Frau’s family’s seaside apartment in sunny Mallorca,

Gendra had gathered an agenda to bring to the island’s Jewish community. “One idea was that the Jews should not live in the corner of the society—that it was better that they be known,” he says. The Jewish Community of Mallorca, on the island that had seen Spain’s most virulent anti-Semitism, began to do outreach. Gendra helped produce Mallorca’s first Yom Ha’Shoah commemoration. The bishop and the president of the region attended.

That same year, Gendra read an article in *Moment* magazine about Reconstructionist Judaism. He went on to read Mordecai Kaplan’s *Judaism as a Civilization*, which in turn influenced the way he shaped the Mallorca synagogue. Though Gendra already had begun to think about the concept of the synagogue as the hub of community life, he says, “The Kaplanian program helped me to translate these kinds of values into practical steps. Kaplan expressed the ideas that were inside me,” putting a name and a clearer definition on thoughts Gendra had been brewing for some time.



For Gendra, coming to RRC in 2001 was a natural and very practical step. With the congregation in Mallorca, he had been guided mostly by instinct. To learn the best ways to implement his ideas—a body of knowledge he came to call “practical rabbinics”—he says RRC clearly was the place to go.

At first his considerable background in Hebrew language and translation made some of his RRC assignments seem redundant. “I knew the text from a linguistic standpoint. In my first class here with Tamar [Kamionkowski] in biblical text, I was thinking, ‘Why am I translating this again?’”

But soon came a realization essential to RRC’s academic approach. “I discovered that everybody was coming with a different understanding of the text. I thought, ‘Oh my God. Every person brought something new to the reading for me. What I know today doesn’t come only from my teachers; it comes from the community.’”

He has been practicing as a student rabbi with groups in Burlington, NJ, and in the Detroit area. Asked if he plans to return to Spain, at first he reacts with humor: “No way. The U.S. is Paris for me. I want to be in Paris!”

But he adds that some time in the future, after Frau finishes his cantorial degree at Gratz College, a return to Spain might be in their plans. “Our dream is to stay here as long as we can, to get experience, then to go back to Spain.” He feels that to go now, fresh from school, could be risky. “I prefer to have a good career behind me when I go there, to have more authority.”



Where once his family was discriminated against for being Jewish, Gendra reports that as a convert, he now is sometimes snubbed for not being Jewish enough. “Some people in Spain remember me from the conversion process. And to some, both Jews and non-Jews, the conversion is a handicap. If you are a rabbi, you have to be the quintessential Jew. Being a convert makes you less of a Jew.”

Within the group of 18 converts, different people had approached the quest for authenticity in different ways. At least two Gendra knows of paid for genealogical research, tracking their families back to medieval times and finding documents that showed their Jewish roots.

But to Gendra that would have been beside the point. “I never did this process. My policy is, this is about me, not my ancestors. It’s me deciding to join [as a Jew]. I am doing this for whose sake? For theirs, or my own? This is *my* spiritual research.”

He adds that the moment he received his document of conversion was not a personal landmark. He says he felt that he had already arrived as a Jew, that the *beyt din* could not confer a Jewish identity upon him; instead its job was to recognize that he had constructed one.

After all, what could be more prototypically Jewish than his long, persistent search for a religious terrain he could call home? Soon, as a rabbi, he will begin a new stage in his return from a spiritual diaspora.



A Teacher and Her Student Reflect on Learning

By Gerald S. Cohen



The energy emitted from Sarra Lev's Talmud class is palpable. As she paces back and forth like a caged lion, she poses questions and challenges assumptions at a decibel level that belies her diminutive stature.

Among her students, she's known as a stickler. She works hard to draw them out and, as she says, she doesn't care what opinions they express, as long as they express them.

But more than her style of delivery, what makes her stand out is her appreciation for the different learning styles of her students. As she looks out on her classroom, she sees a wide diversity in life experience and age. Seated around the seminar-style desk are some recently graduated from undergraduate institutions and others who have already worked 20 years or more in their chosen fields.

Reaching all of them—the ones who have never left the classroom and the adults who may be a little rusty in scholarly pursuits—is a unique challenge for a

professor, and perhaps nobody is as acutely aware of this as Lev.



Lev grew up in a Toronto family that spent a lot of time thinking about how people learn. Her mother, an instructor of special education teachers, showed practitioners how to teach the same material to people with different learning styles—a practice that in education circles is called “differentiated instruction.”

Her mother learned these skills by working firsthand with students who have learning differences. Lev remembers from an early age listening to her mother tutoring students in the dining room. The task was always to train them how to think, no matter what their point of origin. “Watching how people learn differently had a huge influence on me,” Lev says.

In her own classroom, as she goes through the paces, Lev hears the voice of her mother. “I try to

present a topic in as many ways as I can,” she says. “I use my body to walk around the class and set things up. I use the board to chart things out. I sometimes say, ‘Right now you are a rabbi and I am a congregant, and I know *nothing* about this topic, so how are you going to present this to me now?’ So I think I try to get at whatever we are doing from as many angles as possible and hope that it hits everyone somewhere.”



Sandy Rubenstein is a 51-year-old RRC student who worked for many years as a clinical social worker and as a Jewish community service professional. She describes herself as someone who was raised as a secular Jew in California. In her 40s, she went to work for the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation as its West Coast regional director and began longing for a closer spiritual connection with Judaism. She



Sandy Rubenstein with Cantor Chayim Frenkel (l) and Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben at her 2000 Bat Mitzvah service

says it was this work experience, as well as her father's death, that made her decide to become a rabbi—a decision that completely surprised her. In 2000, she became a Bat Mitzvah. Then she started preparing in earnest to reach her dream.

Rubenstein began studying Hebrew at the Hebrew Union College and the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, went to summer *ulpan* at Brandeis University and was able to bump her Hebrew language skills to a level that made her a potential rabbinical school candidate. In 2002, she was accepted to RRC.

Despite her impressive accomplishments, she says she found her sudden immersion into rabbinical school challenging. “I have very high learning standards. To come back to school and not be an expert is very humbling,” she says.

“I try to get at whatever we are doing from as many angles as possible and hope that it hits everyone somewhere.”

Sarra Lev

Rubenstein has done well, she says, because of her persistence, determination and willingness to use the resources and support available to adult learners at RRC. One resource is *hevrutah* (see next story), a style of learning that pairs students with others in study groups. Another is Rabbi Judith Abrahamson, who is RRC's educational resource specialist and is available to students who

seek her counsel and assistance. Abrahamson's position is unique for a rabbinical seminary, and RRC is beginning to receive calls from other seminaries interested in her kind of services.

But Rubenstein says instructors like Lev have been critical to her success. “She can individualize her teaching method to bring out the best in a student. Also there was a match: Her exactitude fit my personality. If you work hard in her class, and you show up prepared, and if you are willing to let her know what you don't know, you will succeed.”



Rubenstein took Midrash and Talmud II with Lev and is now taking Talmud III with her. Although she says she was at first self-conscious about her ability, Rubenstein believes Lev brought out the best in her. “What was different about Sarra was that she didn't care how many times she had to say something before you got it. And she had the ability to create examples. She's extraordinary.”

Both Lev and Rubenstein independently recalled a breakthrough moment in a Talmud II class about midway through the semester. Rubenstein decided to interpret a passage quite differently from the way other students in the class were interpreting it. A spirited 20-minute discussion ensued, during which Rubenstein passionately defended her position against everyone else in the class. Lev stood by and watched with wonder. She knew that Rubenstein's interpretation was correct, but

that is not what made her so emotional as she retold the story months later.

“If you work hard in her class, and you show up prepared, and if you are willing to let her know what you don't know, you will succeed.”

Sandy Rubenstein

“I remember the class so vividly and just thinking to myself how incredible it was that she was right on and completely confident about it,” Lev recalls. “If she had been wrong and had been completely confident about it, it would have been just as inspiring to me. But the fact that she had been right and was completely confident was such a brilliant moment.”

Rubenstein says the teaching skill, passion and dedication of the faculty at RRC separate it from other institutions. And that has made all the difference to someone like her, because she passionately wants to achieve her dream of becoming a rabbi.

“For me, it's important that someone at my stage of life can dedicate and commit to this,” she says. “Don't tell me I can't do this. I'm very determined, so help me. And that's what this institution is all about. What I've learned here is you just have to ask for help.”



Hevrutah: The Singular Experience of Studying in Pairs

By Gari Julius Weilbacher

When you enter the Sidney and Dorothy Becker Reading Room in RRC's library, you will almost always hear the low hum of deep conversation. Known as the "*hevrutah* room," this area is anything but silent. With texts and books splayed on tables, people in dyads talk, discuss and argue fine points of Torah, Talmud, language and more.

Partnered study, or *hevrutah*, is a traditional approach to learning ancient texts. But while other rabbinical training programs commonly offer *hevrutah*, RRC has undertaken a pedagogical analysis of it that is entirely distinctive. In fall





Hevrutah, a term that stems from the Hebrew word *haver*, or friend, brings two people together to pore over sacred texts—to discuss, teach and learn from one another.



2005, Academic Dean Tamar Kamionkowski and a group of students initiated the *Hevrutah* Task Force, charged with bringing to partnered study Kamionkowski's vision of illuminating and supporting various learning styles. Made up of four students and three faculty members, the task force is committed to creating the most meaningful and effective *hevrutah* experiences for all RRC students, a diverse group.

Hevrutah, a term that stems from the Hebrew word *haver*, or friend, brings two people together to pore over sacred texts—to discuss, teach and learn from one another. Kamionkowski says, "The wisdom generated by two is greater than one alone. Classroom discussions begin on a higher plane because the students have already had a dialogue about the texts. The conversation in class is now at the secondary level. We learn more by studying in community."

Yet the question of how complicated, rich and ancient material can best be learned—a question Kamionkowski has brought to the fore of her deanship—is complicated in itself. RRC teaches in a number of modalities: on one's own, in *hevrutah* and in communal settings or classes. For the task force, issues abound: How does *hevrutah* accommodate different learning styles? What are its pedagogic aspects? How can *hevrutah's* intimate relationship best facilitate deep learning? Equally important—as in any pairing—how are the relational aspects of *hevrutah* negotiated? That is, how and when are partners selected? What if there is an odd number of people in the class? If the relationship does not work out, how is an unsuccessful *hevrutah* negotiated?

Third-year student Vanessa Grajwer sits on the task force. "*Hevrutah* is the place where text and relationships meet," she says. "We learn narratives as we experience intimate discourse. As we study the texts and *aggadah* in Talmud, we jointly develop a reciprocal system of thinking through texts." Grajwer notes that along with these benefits there is tension between the communal responsibility to ensure that everyone has a meaningful *hevrutah* experience, and the personal selection of an individual who will advance the partners' academic, and sometimes spiritual, growth. Learning styles and goals are mirrored in these partnerships. Some students want to cover greater breadth, and others want to go deep within the material, covering less.

RRC's take on the pedagogy of *hevrutah* learning will follow students into their future careers as rabbis and educators. Many Jewish learning experiences involve *hevrutah* study, and RRC students will be particularly aware of its potential pitfalls and benefits.

To Kamionkowski, *hevrutah* reflects the Reconstructionist value of respecting one another and honoring diversity. She and the task force are seeking ways to orient incoming students to RRC's *hevrutah* model. This age-old, intimate intellectual relationship will continue to be explored and refined, she says, to determine how a student can best become an effective rabbi and an effective Jew.

Repairing the World from the Inside Out: Four Faces of *Tikkun Olam*

By Eileen Fisher, Lauren Handel and
Gari Julius Weilbacher

Applying the teachings of the Torah to daily living and community service is central to student learning at RRC. We call it *tikkun olam*—repairing the world through social action.

***Tikkun olam* is a long-held value of Judaism. As applied to modern living, it can encompass a range of projects and activities—everything from political lobbying to working in soup kitchens. Following are the stories of students who, on their own terms, have taken time from their studies to repair their world one piece at a time.**

Tapping into the Quest for Justice

This past summer in Chicago, not far from the suburbs where she had grown up, Michal Woll visited a different world. The RRC student found herself in the working-class, rapidly gentrifying community of Pilsen, just west of the city's downtown. There, Pilsen's Mexican-American residents were testifying in a zoning meeting against a proposal to redevelop a defunct factory as condominiums—which would further raise property values and would not create jobs. The following week, as the city council approved the proposal, Woll and a group from Pilsen held a press conference to protest the vote.



Woll initiated the action in her capacity as a rabbinic fellow with the Jewish Council for Urban Affairs. She was one of five rabbinical students from different seminaries and from all branches of Judaism who spent the summer with JCUA, learning about Jewish perspectives on social justice and about how to do social justice work in their rabbinate.

She found that the fellowship gave her something she needed. “I had opinions, but unlike many others at RRC, before rabbinical school I had

worked in the corporate and tech world, not as an activist,” says Woll, who had been a bioengineer and then a physical therapist. “I had to learn how to voice those opinions as a leader. How would I bring that piece into my rabbinic identity? I didn’t know how to create or tap into organizations that work for change.”

Each morning the fellows studied Jewish texts on issues such as poverty, housing and labor law, exploring the connection between social action and Judaism. Woll’s summer colleagues wondered how they would motivate other students at their home institutions to get involved in broad social issues. For her, no such concern existed.

She appreciated the opportunity to bring text and tradition into activist pursuits, to integrate rabbinic role and voice. “That’s the piece I thought I could bring back from JCUA: for those who are practicing activism, a familiarity with the Jewish texts that support it—a way to see Jewish tradition as a cause for that effect.”

In a recent sermon, Woll wrote, “It is very hard to translate the Torah law directly into programs or a societal structure that might work in our day and place. But we can hold the *kavannot*, the intentions, of the law that should guide them: to love rather than oppress the stranger, to treat all as full citizens of our land, to assure that all will be blessed and not be in need... ”

Lurer ministered to young people more at ease in Iraq than at home, soldiers who were itching to go back and who were uncomfortable in their civilian skin.

In Service to Those Who Serve

In the heat of the summer, fourth-year student Amanda Lurer joined ranks with other clergy students attending the United States Navy Chaplain Candidate Program in Rhode Island and the Marine Corps' Camp Lejeune, NC. For a period of seven weeks in 2005, the experience put Lurer directly in touch with the war in Iraq and with the men and women who are fighting in that war.



During those weeks, Lurer ministered to young people more at ease in Iraq than at home, soldiers who were itching to go back and who were uncomfortable in their civilian skin. Many required marital counseling, with almost predictable breakdowns in their young families within six to nine months of coming home.

In addition to these tasks, Lurer conducted a beginners' service for the three Jews and 15 non-Jews confined to the brig, and counseled and accompanied a World War II veteran in his final weeks before death.

Lurer was introduced to the chaplaincy program by Rabbi Jon Cutler, RRC '87. After graduating, Cutler entered the U.S. Navy as a chaplain and was on active duty for a number of years. He is presently in the U.S. Navy Reserves and rabbi of Congregation Teferes B'nai Israel in Warrington, PA, where Lurer taught for three years.

Chaplains serve their own faith group first and then any and all others. For many of those she served, Lurer was the first Jew they had ever met. Yet Lurer says she never experienced discrimination and that her gender was more puzzling to some than her religion.

Rank and authority drive the military. While she was the lowest-ranked officer, Lurer was the highest-ranked Jewish clergy. "The enlistees are berated all the time," Lurer says. "Often the chaplain is the only person they can talk to without being yelled at, creating opportunities for connections that don't happen with other officers." She took these moments to talk about the openness of Judaism.

When Lurer left Camp Lejeune, she took with her the Marine's primary experiences: war and death. It was an encounter beyond anything she could have experienced at RRC or in any synagogue she might serve. And for the soldiers she counseled, it was an opportunity to receive solace and comfort, and to breach yet another cultural boundary.

Change Begins with a Change of Heart

RRC student Brian Fink is only in his 20s, but he already has had a lifetime of experience in social justice work—enough to teach him that working from the inside out produces the best results. His approach: Rather than picking a cause and asking people to support it, start with what's on their minds, then find ways to put their thoughts into action.

Fink spent five years working with a homelessness outreach project in New York City. As an undergraduate, he produced an honors thesis with the eerily prescient title “Community Sustainability for New Orleans.” Now, in a fellowship and internship through the Jewish Funds for Justice and through work with the Interfaith Hospitality Network, he is seeing firsthand how to build activism from the ground up.

For the JFJ, Fink has been attending training sessions on faith-based community organizing and working with a group at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York City, where he is meeting with individual members of the community to learn about the group's characteristics and goals. “Members of the community meet with other members and really get to know their stories,” he says. Rather than asking targeted questions designed to ferret out activist interests, the questioning might start with, “Tell me about yourself.” In the

process he will get to know many members of SAJ. Even if no activist goals emerge, he says the one-on-ones become a valuable tool for community building—and that, in his view, always should be the starting point.

Fink also has been participating in the start-up of a new effort, which is a good example of how to jump-start advocacy by giving people direct experience helping others. Through a new partnership, the Northwest Interfaith Hospitality Network,



which houses homeless Philadelphia families for short periods in churches and synagogues, is adding a proactive element to its service work. “You do the volunteering first, and then you have real faces and real experiences to attach to these abstract issues—homelessness, poverty,” Fink says. “You find out that because the people you're hosting work at McDonald's for minimum wage, they don't have enough money to pay for everything. Then you think

proactively: ‘Well, maybe we should work to raise the minimum wage.’”

In his various jobs, Fink has seen different sides of human-service work. After undergraduate school, initially through Avodah: The Jewish Service Corps, he did legal outreach that could directly impact life-or-death issues. He was working with the Urban Justice Center's Homelessness Outreach and Prevention Project, conducting clinics in soup kitchens and food pantries in New York City. For two hours at a stretch, he would listen to people describe their problems and would identify issues that could be addressed through the law, such as gaining welfare benefits, food stamps or Medicaid, or stopping eviction.

Although Fink sees many parallels between that early work and his current chaplaincy with the Jewish Family Service, in his chaplaincy he encounters fewer acute issues and fewer direct solutions. “These people are depressed because they're in a personal-care or boarding home, and they're losing abilities, and people they know are dying,” he says. “I can't fix that.”

Yet in legal outreach, there were limitations as well. “When people would tell me how depressed they were, I had to respond, ‘Okay, now tell me about your welfare case. I can help you get food stamps, and maybe that would make your life better.’ Chaplaincy is more holistic.”

A Journey into Jewish Values and the Issue of State-Sponsored Torture

Second-year student Jarah Greenfield found herself last summer in the middle of a hot-button debate on government-sanctioned torture, a controversy that pitted the Bush administration against members of Congress on both sides of the aisle. Ultimately the advocates for an anti-torture policy prevailed.

The journey took her from Martha's Vineyard, MA, where she worked as a summer rabbinic intern for Rabbis for Human Rights–North America, to Washington, D.C., where she and colleagues met with Sen. John McCain, the Arizona Republican who spearheaded the effort in Congress to stop American torture of foreign detainees.

"In the international landscape, the use of torture marks the U.S. as a country that disregards the rule of law," she says. "That's why this work is so important to me. It's about living in a democracy where the rule of law actually protects people. Infringements of justice are happening abroad and harming both the people we torture and ourselves. The whole issue of torture is as much about the human dignity of the victim as it is about who we are and what we're doing in the world."

RHR–NA, based in Martha's Vineyard, and founded by Rabbi Brian Walt, (RRC '84) is a multi-denominational, national rabbinic organization devoted to education and advocacy for human rights. Greenfield was on

the committee that established RHR–NA's initial campaign, "Honor the Image of God: Stop Torture Now." She helped create and publish educational materials that would become the foundation of the campaign, as well as the document *A Rabbinic Resource on Jewish Values and the Issue of Torture*, which was distributed to thousands of rabbis across the United States and in Israel. The document was designed as a resource to help rabbis address the issues of Jewish values and torture within their communities. Greenfield also helped strategize and lay out a plan for a national campaign.

RHR–NA began its multifaceted campaign last January to oppose the use of torture in American-controlled prisons and facilities. As a first step, RHR–NA signed a public letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee expressing grave concerns about attorney general nominee Alberto Gonzales, who advised the president that he might disregard the Geneva Conventions and authorize the use of torture. RHR–NA believes this interpretation led to the abuses at the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and possibly at other secret locations.

RHR–NA's letter called on the leaders of the Judiciary Committee to conduct a "vigorous investigation of Gonzales' views on torture and international law and hold him to a high moral standard of accountability for his actions."

The letter was followed by a visit last summer to McCain, during which Greenfield and other

members of RHR–NA offered their support for a McCain amendment to the 2006 Defense Appropriations Act that would force all U.S. agencies to comply



with the Geneva Conventions against the use of torture. In October 2005, the Senate voted 90–9 in favor of the McCain amendment. Later the president threatened to veto the measure unless the CIA was exempted from the provision. In mid-December, after the House passed a resolution supporting the amendment, the White House relented and agreed to McCain's conditions.

Greenfield says the meeting with McCain was an interesting political lesson for her. "When you're talking about a true human-rights issue, you can cut across political boundaries because you're dealing with the most basic common concerns of one individual and another—no matter what race, what gender, what political affiliation or what religion. And I think that's applicable for why we should care about detainees who are being tortured, and who are, by and large, Muslims and not Jews."



Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman greets an elderly Israeli woman.

Spiritual Care in Israel: A Flowering in the Desert

By Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman

In a Jerusalem hotel, a *haredi* physician with a long beard and black coat and a secular Israeli man with an earring were discussing a presentation by an American woman rabbi on spiritual care and dementia. They were exploring the application of her ideas to the Israeli context with an American modern Orthodox chaplain, a secular nurse and a young female RRC student. And all of this was occurring in an atmosphere of passionate engagement and profound mutual respect.

This scene was astonishing. Had someone described it to me, I might have said, *lo hayah, ve'lo nivrah*—that's sheer fantasy. First, as recently as a couple of years ago, there was no field of spiritual care in Israel—not one professional chaplain working in a hospital, nursing home, trauma unit or mental health facility. The concept that people should be supported spiritually when experiencing brokenness and crisis, now commonplace in North America, was virtually unknown in Israel.

Second, the religious-secular divides in Israel have often seemed insuperable, particularly in matters of faith and spirituality. It was once inconceivable that such disparate professionals could join in exploration of spiritual matters.

Yet the conversations about spiritual care among these different constituencies actually occurred at the “Dialogue on Spiritual Care in Israel” conference in December 2005, where it was my honor to deliver the opening presentation (in Hebrew!), “Seeking the *Tzelem*: Spiritual Accompaniment as a Support in Dementia.” At the two-day conference,

80 Israeli psychologists, social workers, physicians, nurses and rabbis were joined by a delegation of eight members of the National Association of Jewish Chaplains. Both American Jewish chaplains and Israelis presented perspectives on spiritual care. This landmark conference was underwritten in part by New York's UJA—Federation, one of several American organizations that have been nurturing developments in this arena in Israel.

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The conference co-chairs both had ties to RRC's Hiddur: The Center for Aging and Judaism, which I direct. Rabbi Gary Lavit, an Orthodox rabbi and chaplain of West Hartford's Hebrew Home and Hospital, is a member of Hiddur's advisory council. Rabbi Anita Steiner, the Israeli co-chair, returned to Israel after graduating from RRC in 2004 with a specialization in geriatric chaplaincy through Hiddur's Rabbinic Education on Aging Program. She had made *aliyah* more than 30 years ago and left a long career in social work to study at RRC. For her, this gathering represented the fulfillment of her dream—to build a professional field of chaplaincy in Israel.



Spiritual care—or *livui ruhani*, spiritual accompaniment—is both a discipline and a professional field. In spiritual accompaniment, rabbis, cantors and chaplains offer spiritual presence to people experiencing transition, brokenness or pain. Spiritual caregivers help by developing relationships through our Jewish tools (text, prayer and ritual) and through the technical skills of listening and assessment.

I have learned through two decades of spiritual accompaniment that this work can transform lives at critical junctures. When I began my career in this country in 1985, there was no professional field for this work—no standards, no theory or literature. I was present at the formation of the National Association of Jewish Chaplains in 1989. I have witnessed the development of standards and training, and the professionalization of our field. Through my teaching and writing, I have worked to ground professional spiritual care in Jewish text and tradition.

In Israel, the field is still in its infancy, so the concept of spiritual accompaniment was new to many of those in attendance at the conference. Among the challenging questions they raised were these:

- How is spiritual care distinct from the psychosocial focus of social work and psychology?
- How can Israelis create an approach accessible to and helpful for the broad spectrum of Jewish Israelis, as well as Muslim Israelis and Christian Israelis?

- How can professionals in the field develop an authentically Israeli model of spiritual care, while gleaning as much as possible from the foundation built by North American Jewish chaplains?

These challenging issues were discussed and analyzed at the conference. By the end, we had clarified the distinctive contribution of spiritual care in offering presence without agenda and drawing upon Jewish tradition to support the whole person. The success of the American model of multifaith chaplaincy augurs well for the Israeli field's prospects in meeting the needs of a religiously diverse populace. The third challenge, how to craft distinctively Israeli models of spiritual care, is being addressed by the creative professionals developing the field of spiritual care in Israel. I have no doubt that they will evolve a discipline and discourse specifically suited to the Israeli milieu.

On the Ground: Seeing the Possibilities

Our sharing took place “on the ground,” as well as in the immensely stimulating formal and informal conversations at the conference. Each member of the NAJC delegation visited Israeli institutions in which spiritual care might make a contribution. I chose to visit eldercare facilities.

I visited Idan HaZahav, a warm and loving Bet Avot (“home for parents”) nestled on a residential street of Katamon, a Jerusalem neighborhood. There I met with senior staff and visited residents alongside the director, Danny ben Sheetreet. I had many magical moments with the elders I met. One I will remember always was my encounter with “Malka” (the names of clients have been changed to protect their privacy), who was very unhappy and complaining bitterly. I listened as she poured out her heart. Without warning, she took my hand and began to bless me: “God should bless you, He should take care of you and give you everything you could possibly wish for.” Her entire demeanor was transformed in response to our pastoral encounter. Instead of screaming and shaking her fist, Malka was now looking into my eyes, holding my hand and radiating love.

I also visited a dementia day program at Shaare Tzedek Medical Center with Leah Abramovitz, the visionary founder and director of Melabev, an Alzheimer's services network. As I chatted with one group of participants, on the other side of the bustling and cheerful room, “Sarah,” a Hungarian-born woman, was sobbing inconsolably as she talked about the family she lost in the Holocaust. When I started singing a Yiddish song with my tablemates, Sarah got up, wiped off her tears and heartily joined in our song. The staff was amazed at this turn of events.

In these visits, and in my conversations with leaders in aging services and research, we glimpsed how spiritual care can contribute to the



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dignity, meaning and wholeness of aging Israelis. Just as elders in nursing homes and other facilities here have benefited from the services of student interns in Hiddur's Rabbinic Education on Aging Program, so, too, elders in these Israeli care settings would find enrichment and healing through spiritual care offered by Israeli professionals. The professionals I met were excited about this prospect and open to developing pilot efforts, internships or volunteer placement of spiritual caregivers.

What the Future Holds

The ongoing collaboration between North American chaplains and those inventing the Israeli field of spiritual care holds great promise for all of us. For the Israelis, the experience, training and professionalism of North American Jewish chaplaincy can provide concrete models for developing a new field with the highest professional standards. For us, the rich exploration of Jewish text and tradition that is informing Israelis' nascent conceptualization of spiritual care in their context may offer new grounding to North American Jewish pastoral caregivers' work and thought.

And for me, participating in this delegation was personally and professionally thrilling. I am honored that my life's work in conceptualizing Jewish spiritual accompaniment has become a resource to Israelis as they develop and conceptualize modes



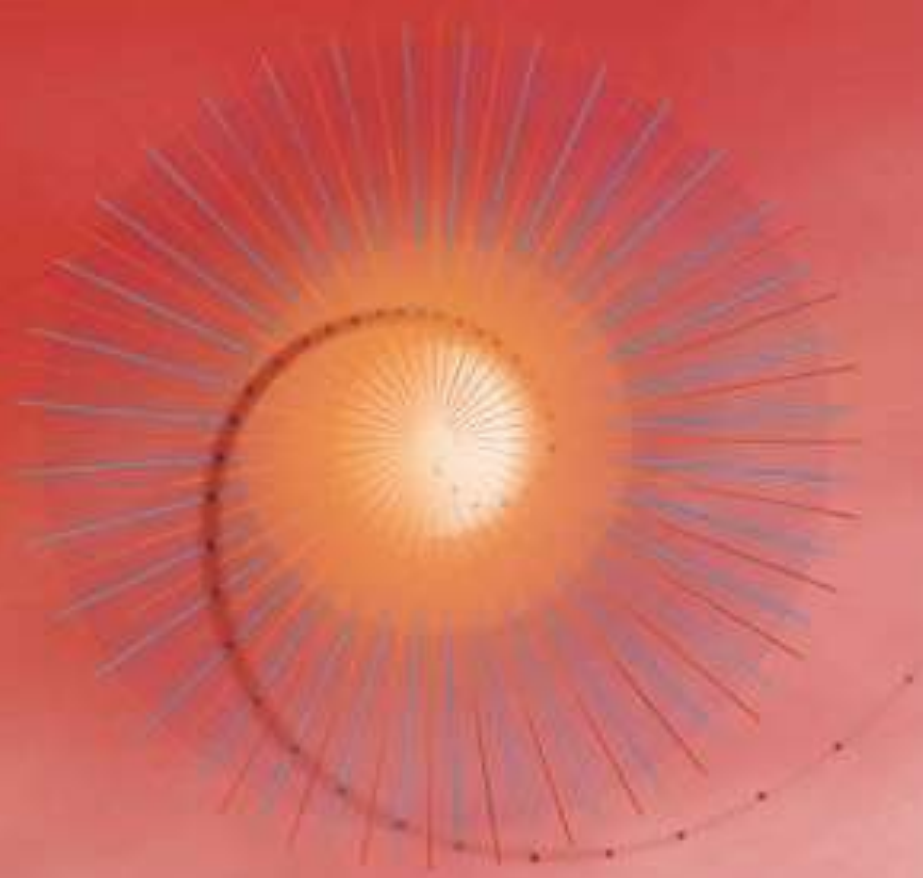
of spiritual care that are appropriate for their unique context and culture.

Hiddur's continuing involvement with developing spiritual care for the elderly in Israel is tremendously exciting. I hope that RRC students in their Israel year will have the opportunity to grow through volunteer spiritual care positions with elders. I also look forward to partnering with Israelis in Hiddur's work, developing Jewish spiritual resources for later life.

The flowering of spiritual care efforts in Israel stems from a profound spiritual hunger. Religious and secular Israelis alike seek to find meaning and solace

in the midst of illness and fragility, personal and national tragedy and uncertainty. In the words of Amos 8:11, this is "not a hunger for bread, nor a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of the Eternal." I pray that Israelis' unique creativity and their partnership with North American spiritual care professionals will satiate that hunger and nourish all of us.

Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman, MAJCS, MSW, BCJC, is founding director of Hiddur: The Center for Aging and Judaism of RRC (www.hiddur.org). Established in 2003, Hiddur works to transform the culture of aging in the Jewish community through rabbinic training and the creation of spiritual resources for elders and their caregivers.



Kolot Expands and Redesigns Web Site on Rituals

By Gari Julius Weilbacher

The Talmud says every person must say 100 blessings a day, implying that there ought to be a blessing for each of life's significant occasions. Until recently, however, there were no blessings for women when they got pregnant, had miscarriages, gave birth or weaned babies. Nor were there any blessings for individuals when they moved, got married, sent children off to college or saw grandchildren for the first time.

Indeed, the last few decades have seen an upsurge in creating, re-creating and adapting Jewish ritual. Even so, many Jews still had no idea how to get access to these innovations. Jewish women's organizations such as Kolot, RRC's Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies, still had to respond individually to many phone calls from people who wanted a baby-naming ceremony, had questions about their new Miriam's Cup for the Seder table, or needed help developing a commitment ceremony.

To address that issue, Kolot has launched a revamped, expanded and enriched version of its Web site, Ritualwell.org, the most extensive and unique Web site of contemporary Jewish rituals ever

“We created this Web site to make innovations in Judaism widely available and accessible to everyone—to Jewish professionals as well as individuals and families who are experimenting with ways to celebrate holidays and honor life-cycle passages,” says Lori Lefkowitz, Ph.D., director of Kolot and executive editor of the Web site. “Ritualwell.org is also a way for people to share ceremonies and prayers. Ritual and prayer help people maintain a healthy perspective on life and encourage us to live more meaningfully.”

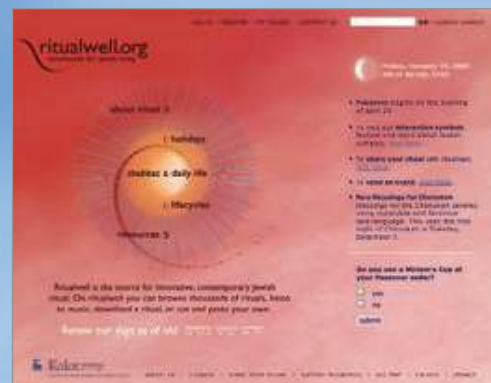
Ritualwell.org is both interactive and responsive. If it is daytime in the visitor’s location, the page appears in sunny daylight colors; if it is nighttime, the screen shows a starry night sky. Visitors who are interested in knowing when the sun sets for candle lighting can click on graphic depictions of candles that adjust to the time zone in their own location. The home page shows secular and Hebrew dates, as well as graphic representations of the current phase of the moon.

And the site is inclusive: In addition to providing traditional

prayers, Ritualwell.org invites visitors to submit their own rituals, deepening their connection to Judaism and to others. Submissions have included rituals for aging Baby Boomers and a meditation for radiation therapy. Individuals can register on the site and save documents in a private folder, as they cut and paste to personalize their own rituals or handouts.

Many individuals have supported the development of the site. In particular, Kolot acknowledges generous grants from the Pat Barr Fund, the Walter and Elise Haas Fund, and the Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation.

“Kolot is proud to make this remarkable and beautiful resource available to users around the world,” Lefkowitz says. “We are gratified by the warmth of people’s response to the materials we have collected and posted, and we hope that Ritualwell.org will help people find comfort, hope and joy through Jewish religious practice. We look forward to gathering and sharing even more material from the growing Ritualwell.org community.”



Kaplan's Grandson Makes a Great Discovery and Offers Reflections on Reconstructionist Judaism

By Gerald S. Cohen



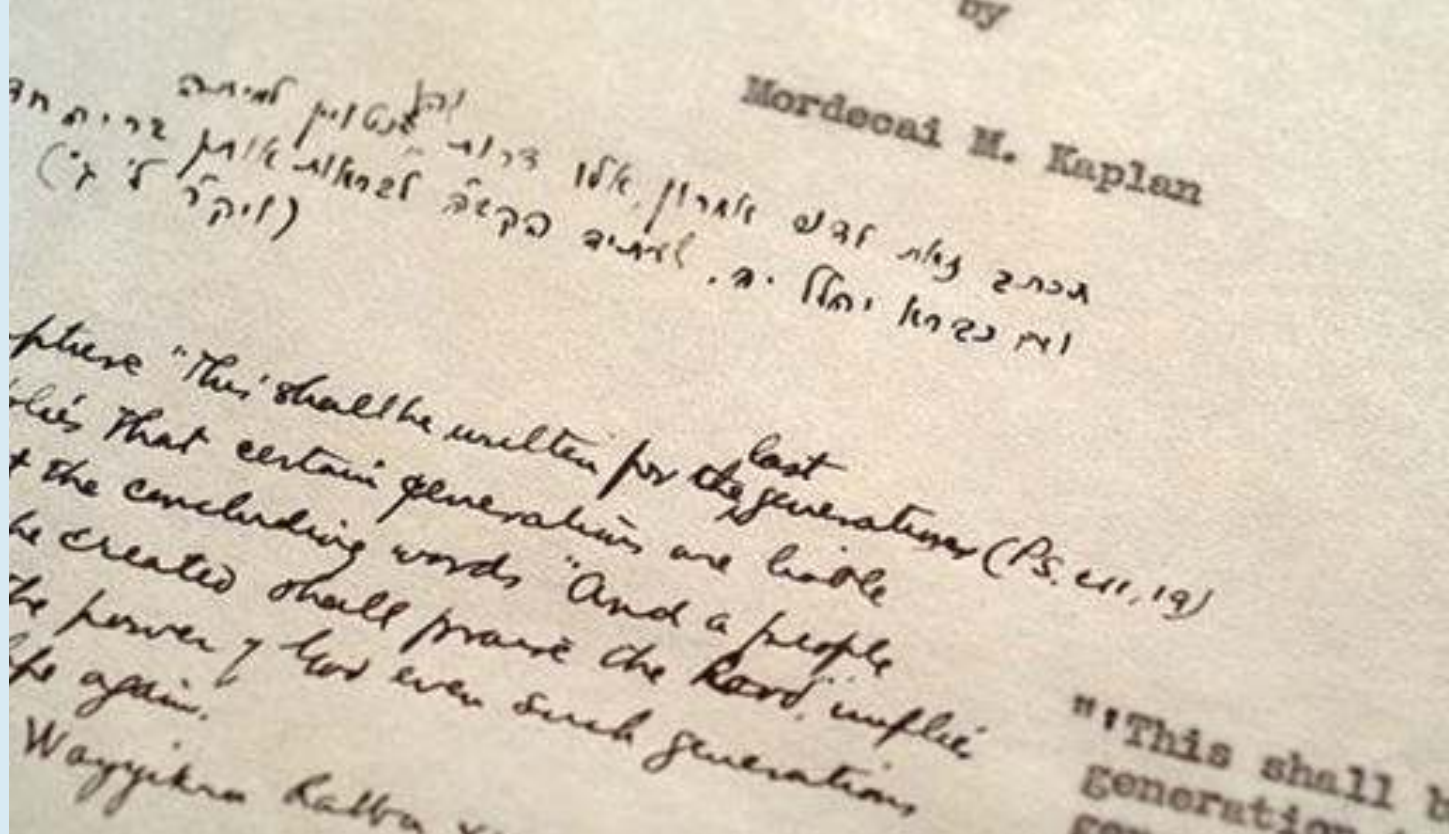
Hadassah Kaplan Musher and Dr. David Musher

Dr. David Musher, a New York City physician and grandson of Mordecai Kaplan, was cleaning a room in his mother's home a year ago when he suddenly had an interesting encounter with history. There among books and other articles in the Upper East Side apartment, wrapped in a plastic garbage bag and bound with a string, was a weathered, typewritten manuscript.

Penciled onto the pages in the precise, neat and legible handwriting of Kaplan were notes and musings—some in English and some in Hebrew. Musher knew immediately from both the handwriting and the title page that he was holding *Judaism as a Civilization*, Kaplan's seminal work published in 1934.

Because the manuscript was showing the effects of age, Musher brought it to the conservancy department of the New York Academy of Medicine and asked the staff to go to work on it. The painstaking process of washing, cleaning and repairing every single page, including correcting the pH balance of the paper, began. When the work was done, Musher wondered what he would do next. After some reflection, he concluded that he should donate the manuscript to the Eisenstein Reconstructionist Archives at RRC, where it currently resides.

"When I first mentioned to my mother my thoughts about giving it away, she said, 'Shouldn't we keep it in the family?' I said, 'What does the family need this for?' And I thought about giving it to JTS (the Jewish Theological Seminary) because they have some of his original diaries. But I really felt RRC was a more appropriate place for it. It was his concept of Reconstructionist philosophy that has become embodied by the Reconstructionist movement and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College."



Judaism as a Civilization established Kaplan—the intellectual founder of Reconstructionist Judaism—as one of the 20th century’s foremost philosophers and innovators in Jewish thought. He wrote the book when he was 53 and later followed it with others, but it was this work that probably reached the most people and had the most impact. In language that was compelling and rational, Kaplan laid out his concept of Judaism as an evolving religious civilization. He argued that for Judaism to survive and grow, it must honor the past but respond to changes in social, political and cultural thought.

How the manuscript found its way to the home of Hadassah Kaplan Musher, the 94-year-old second daughter of Mordecai Kaplan, is not much of a mystery. “Obviously you inherited it when he died in the early 1980s,” Musher explained to his mother nine months later, as she and her son looked over the manuscript in his office. Hadassah, a spry woman, indicated that she had simply lost track of the manuscript.

“I recognize the handwriting,” she told her son, with a look of wonder. Although Kaplan’s wife typed his sermons, Musher speculated that a woman his grandfather employed had typed this manuscript. “I have no idea where the original handwritten copy of this is, although I do know that he made drafts of everything in his diaries. What would really be fascinating would be to do an analysis of this, his diaries and the printed edition to see what changes there might be.”

In language that was compelling and rational, Kaplan laid out his concept of Judaism as an evolving religious civilization. He argued that for Judaism to survive and grow, it must honor the past but respond to changes in social, political and cultural thought.

Musher says he was excited when he realized what he had discovered that day in March, as he prepared his mother’s maid’s quarters for a new live-in assistant. He showed it to a friend at his synagogue, who pointed out the significance of some of the passages. One, for example, was in

Hebrew and Aramaic. The quote referred to an English passage from a philosopher and contemporary of Kaplan's, George Santayana. Kaplan knew the quote was derived from an Aramaic passage in the *Zohar*. "In those days they didn't have computers, so the idea that he knew that Santayana had quoted from the *Zohar* was brilliant," Musher explained.

But Musher also indicated that the surprise of the discovery was tempered by the fact that over the years he had become accustomed to being the grandson of somebody famous in certain circles. "I've been living with this history; this is my heritage. I have to tell you that at least once a month someone in KJ (Congregation Kehilath Jeshrun) mentions Kaplan to me—at least once a month and with great reverence. Today the junior rabbi made such a comment as he looked at the pictures on the wall in the library at KJ. He said to me, 'You know, they don't have pictures of all of the rabbis from KJ here. Mordecai Kaplan is not here.'"

And no wonder. Kehilath Jeshrun is an Orthodox synagogue, the first synagogue where Kaplan worked as an 18-year-old rabbi. Later, Orthodox Jews shunned Kaplan for his writings, which they considered sacrilegious. In great displays of anger, some burned his works.

With a bit of mischief, and for his mother's benefit, Musher added, "I am highly cognizant of the fact that I am modern Orthodox and this is my heritage." Taking the bait, his mother shook her head and said she would never forgive her son for leaving the Reconstructionist movement.

"My grandfather's main concern was with the future of Judaism. He talked about it constantly."

David Musher

"My oldest brother joined Lincoln Square synagogue right after it opened, and it was Orthodox," Musher continued. "Everyone wondered how could Mordecai Kaplan's grandson join an Orthodox synagogue? My grandfather was tickled pink! He was so proud of the fact his grandson had joined a synagogue. It made no difference what synagogue it was. The fact that he had joined a synagogue is what was important."

"You see, my grandfather's main concern was with the future of Judaism. He talked about it constantly. Authenticity and loyalty to the Jewish people—this is what he talked about."



Musher described his own upbringing as very observant. He

said his family kept kosher, observed the Sabbath and celebrated all the holidays. Before he joined Kehilath Jeshrun, he was a member of Society for the Advancement of Judaism and West End Synagogue, both Reconstructionist congregations. At West End, Musher himself served as president. His mother reminded him again that he was raised in a Reconstructionist home. Plodding on, he said, "We both grew up under my grandfather's tutelage. If you wanted to anthropomorphize God, he had a white goatee and blue eyes. He was the guy who was sitting opposite me."

Reflecting again on the manuscript, Musher said he had read every page as he scanned it electronically. "He was brilliant, absolutely brilliant. Parts of it were obtuse. But he was a really great educator and a great Zionist and a great thinker."

The manuscript, after it is categorized and prepared by the College's archivist, will be available to scholars for viewing and study. The archives include the largest existing collection of personal papers and correspondence with Kaplan, as well as the papers of Ira Eisenstein—Kaplan's son-in-law and RRC's founding president—and the papers of Judith Kaplan Eisenstein.

Our Faculty Is a Resource to Other Religions

By Gerald S. Cohen



The understanding that Jews live in a pluralistic society is central to Reconstructionist Judaism, and it fuels the teaching and insights of RRC faculty who are working in interfaith settings.

Among the faculty members who are working in the interfaith arena are Jacob Staub, Ph.D., Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, Ph.D., and Rabbi Dayle Friedman. All have been invited by spiritual leaders of other faiths to bring their Jewish perspectives to conversations about problems shared by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike.

In the past year, for example, the Ministry Development Council—an organization that addresses leadership issues facing churches—invited Staub to discuss how RRC evaluates the spirituality of its students. Friedman addressed a Baltimore meeting of the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies about the Jewish spiritual approach to end-of-life issues. And the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, asked Fuchs-Kreimer to spend a week cloistered with two other women—Protestant and Muslim theologians—exploring and discussing their traditions’ approaches to providing for those who cannot provide for themselves.

These efforts take a cue from Mordecai Kaplan, the intellectual founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, who believed it was critical for Jews living in the New World to filter their Jewish traditions, values and beliefs through their American experience. Unlike many of his peers, he did not believe that Judaism could flourish only in hostile environments. Rather, he believed that Jewish concepts of God, Torah and Israel could evolve and mature in the politically and socially emancipated environment of Western democracies. To succeed and flourish in an open environment, he argued, it was critical to embrace pluralism and to understand and interact with various traditions, uniting in common values such as equality, tolerance and freedom.



“In trying to understand the other, you understand yourself better. And when you see how the other sees you and understands you, you see yourself differently. It can be a real eye-opening moment.”

Jacob Staub

Staub, Friedman and Fuchs-Kreimer say they value interfaith work because the perspectives of other religions bring important insights to their own thinking as rabbis and as instructors. “Interfaith interaction really is illuminating on all sides, especially when it’s done among like-minded people in good faith,” Staub says. “In trying to understand the other, you understand yourself better. And when you see how the other sees you and understands you, you see yourself differently. It can be a real eye-opening moment.”



For two days in September, Staub attended a conference of the Ministry Development Council on the complex task of how to evaluate spirituality and fitness for the ministry. Staub shared that at RRC students are periodically evaluated for their fitness to serve, based on a number of criteria. This is different from Protestant seminaries, which, according to Staub, tend to focus mainly on academics, leaving issues of ordainment and determinations of fitness to congregations or regional bodies.

Spirituality and fitness for the rabbinate are two issues Staub has thought about a lot over the years. During the admissions process, RRC tries to get a sense of the candidates’ ritual practice, prayer life, experience of God or godliness in their lives and their commitment to *tikkun olam* in a sacred context. But Staub says it is difficult to evaluate someone’s spirituality because it manifests in so many ways. “Some people are

spiritual by study and intellect and reason and analysis; some people are spiritual devotionally and emotionally; and some are spiritual in their actions or aesthetics,” he says.

Ultimately, Staub says, RRC does the best job possible to assess candidates’ spirituality and then give them opportunities to mature once they are admitted to the College. He is convinced that spiritual growth can happen only in a confidential environment. “The spiritual quest can have a dry spell,” he says. “You can have a dark night of the soul, you can be out of touch with God for a long period of time. That’s progress, and it’s not something you can quantify.”

Staub told the professionals gathered at the Ministry Development Council session that their jobs should be to nurture spirituality in confidential settings, not to measure it. Many who heard his words were psychologists who had been asked by congregations to measure clerics’ spirituality, but knew their personality tests could not do this.

For Staub, there was value in sharing this information. He says it was surprising to him that Protestant seminaries were grappling with the same questions of spiritual development as Jewish seminaries. It turns out they also were struggling with other issues that concern Jews: affiliation, the meaning of prayer and loss of the younger generation.



Friedman, whose focus is aging and spirituality, has spent much of her professional life working in an interfaith context. She was a founder of the Forum on Religion and Spirituality in Aging, a multifaith group committed to fostering the spiritual dimension of human existence as a central element in the aging process.

Last year, Friedman was part of a keynote panel discussion in Baltimore devoted to the nettlesome topic of medicine, religion and end-of-life decisions. The discussion occurred in the midst of the national debate over whether the courts should allow the removal of a feeding tube from Terri Schiavo, a Florida woman who lived for years in a vegetative state. The panel discussion, sponsored by the Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies, featured perspectives of a Muslim, a Jew, Christians and medical professionals.

“Knowing more about Christian and Muslim perspectives deepened what I do,” Friedman says. “It was helpful to hear the perspectives that spoke to the quality of end of life. It was also important to know that there is that diversity of voices, which wasn’t necessarily coming across in the national debate—and it was important to add my voice—that there’s more to the sacredness of life than just the number of moments lived.”



“Knowing more about Christian and Muslim perspectives deepened what I do.”

Dayle Friedman

Fuchs-Kreimer traces her interest in interfaith work to a 1974 conference of Christian theologians that was later chronicled in Eva Fleishmann's book *Auschwitz: The Beginning of an Era*. "One night in June 1974, I sat in the cavernous Cathedral of St. John the Divine on 113th St. [in New York City] and heard Christian theologians ask themselves hard questions about the Nazi Holocaust," she recently reflected in *RRA Connection*, a newsletter of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association. "The moment was pivotal both for Christian thought and for my life. I was inspired to devote many



"The Muslim-Jewish dialogue is of a piece with my fundamental belief that people from widely different perspectives can learn from one another and that learning makes the world a safer place."

Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer

years to studying with Christians who were engaged in anguished self-criticism and creative reconstruction of their faith. I found their enterprise morally compelling, and I wanted to be part of it. I traveled to Germany with Jewish and Christian scholars. I took part in innumerable dialogues on theology, politics and everything in between. I earned a Ph.D. in the field."

More recently, she notes that Muslims are playing more important roles in interfaith dialogues, a development she finds very compelling, given the complex relationship between Jews and Muslims. Fuchs-Kreimer is very involved in these discussions.

Last summer, the emir of Qatar invited her and three Jewish colleagues to attend a widely publicized international conference of Muslims, Christians and Jews. It was the first time Jews had been asked to participate in the conference, which was covered extensively in domestic and international media.

In January, at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, she spent a full week cloistered with a Protestant minister and a Muslim Sudanese-American who is an assistant professor at Villanova University. The three women were asked to exchange ideas on how their religions approach social justice for the disenfranchised—represented in the Torah by widows and orphans. Each was charged with showing up with a knapsack full

of texts and engaging in deep dialogue. The three strangers conversed late into the night and broke only to attend Sabbath services with each other. Later they reported their findings to an audience at the nave of the Cathedral.

In the spring semester, Fuchs-Kreimer began co-teaching a new course on Muslim-Jewish topics with Adnan Ahmad Zulfiqar, a Muslim student in his final year of a joint J.D./Ph.D. program at the University of Pennsylvania. The course, *Contemporary Manifestations of Islam*, includes a service-learning component that brings together RRC students and Penn Muslim graduate students to team-teach sessions to elementary and middle school students at a Muslim school and a Jewish day school.

"The Muslim-Jewish dialogue is of a piece with my fundamental belief that people from widely different perspectives can learn from one another and that learning makes the world a safer place," she says.

Through their work, Staub, Fuchs-Kreimer, Friedman and others at RRC continue to position the College as a resource not just in the Jewish community, but for the community as a whole. In so doing, they serve as models to students, who will one day work in pluralistic environments that require Jews to live, work and solve problems collectively with their Christian and Muslim neighbors.



Creating a Legacy for RRC

By Robert F. Horowitz, Ph.D.



The word “legacy” means anything left behind or passed down by our predecessors. In a legal sense, it is

money or property bequeathed by a will. You can create a legacy for RRC in a variety of ways—by establishing a charitable gift annuity or a charitable remainder trust, or by naming the College in your will. Legacy gifts at RRC have played an important role in providing resources that sustain the College’s vision of creating Jewish leadership for a changing world.

When you create a bequest, you can accomplish a variety of objectives, such as:

- Making a larger gift than might have been possible during your lifetime;
- Enhancing a lifetime of generous giving to RRC; and
- Receiving an estate tax deduction, which reduces the taxable portion of your estate and the estate’s tax liability.

A bequest is the most common and most direct way of establishing a planned gift for RRC. Charitable bequests are attractive to many people because current assets are not affected. There are several types of bequests that can be made to support RRC such as the following:

- **Specific.** You may leave cash or specific assets, such as stocks or property, to the College. A bequest of this type is for a fixed amount or a piece of property.
- **Contingent.** You may name RRC as the beneficiary of your estate if others named in the will are not living or capable of inheriting when the will takes effect.
- **Residual.** You may direct that RRC receive the entire estate or a percentage of the estate that remains after other distributions are made.
- **Testamentary Trust.** There can be a provision in your will that establishes a trust upon death to provide lifetime income to a spouse and/or other beneficiaries. After a specific time or the death of the first beneficiary, the trust’s assets pass to RRC.

Apart from your will, you may wish to designate the College as a beneficiary of an IRA, a 401K or other retirement plan.

You also may assign the proceeds of a bequest for restricted or nonrestricted uses. Funds from a bequest can be used for the operating needs of RRC or for a specific program, department or purpose within the College. If you wish, you may indicate that

the bequest be added to the College’s endowment funds or be used to establish a named endowment fund. Unrestricted bequests provide the greatest flexibility for the College, since they enable RRC’s leadership to direct the funds where they are most needed at the time.

Whatever your objectives, bequests are an effective and economical means of carrying out your wishes to leave a legacy to perpetuate the important work of RRC in the Jewish community. They are historically the most popular planned giving instrument used by contributors, the easiest to understand, and they do not require you to part with assets during your lifetime.

When you create a bequest, the College strongly recommends that you seek legal advice regarding your personal circumstances, your overall creation of an estate plan and the preparation of all necessary documents. RRC can suggest language for various types of bequests, but we advise that the ultimate language of your will be crafted with the assistance of your attorney.

For more information, please contact: Vice President for Institutional Advancement Robert F. Horowitz, Ph.D., at 215.576.0800, Ext. 143, or rhorowitz@rrc.edu; or Director of Planned Giving Nancy Wimmer, Esq., at Ext. 150 or nwimmer@rrc.edu.

Financial Statements

Statements of Financial Position (Audited) as of August 31, 2005

ASSETS

Cash and Equivalents	1,425,680
Accounts Receivable, Pledges Receivable, and Other Assets	7,086,343
Beneficial Interest in Charitable Annuity Lead Trust	3,619,713
Investments	
Operating Funds (including Restricted Funds)	479,108
Endowment and Trust Funds	17,877,602
Land, Building and Equipment	<u>2,419,730</u>
Total Assets	\$ <u>32,908,176</u>

LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCES

Liabilities

Accounts Payable and Accrued Liabilities	63,575
Deferred Revenue and Other Liabilities	<u>547,457</u>
Total Liabilities	\$ <u>611,032</u>

Fund Balances

Operating Funds (including Restricted Funds)	7,485,947
Plant Fund Balance	2,338,777
Endowment and Trust Fund Balances	<u>22,472,420</u>
Total Fund Balances	<u>32,297,144</u>
Total Liabilities & Fund Balances	\$ <u>32,908,176</u>

Financial Aid and Endowments

Financial aid is increasing as a percentage of tuition



Endowment is up 68% since 2002



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(September 2004–August 2005)

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