

Newsletter

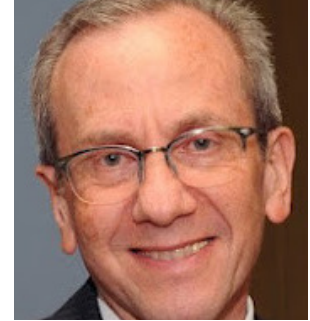
2020 - 2021 ■ 5781



ACADEMY
for JEWISH
RELIGION



From the Chair of the Board



When we read *Parashat Vayeitzei* in mid-November this year, I celebrated the 57th anniversary of my becoming a Bar Mitzvah. It hasn't escaped me that I was born 5 years before AJR was first established, and it was 5 years ago in early 2016 that I had the privilege of joining the Board of Trustees. So, all this appears, as is so often in life, to reflect the subtle *etzba Elohim*, the finger of God that has played a role in bringing me to AJR. And yes, as our patriarch Jacob noted below when awakening from his famous dream of a ladder with angels ascending to and descending from heaven, AJR is an AWESOME place. We are a place in which study and love of Torah, God, and the Jewish people is expressed and nurtured in its fullest and broadest sense. We have, throughout our history, worked with diligence and enthusiasm to embody our defining statement, ". . . ordaining rabbis and cantors and training leaders and scholars who combine their mastery of the intellectual and spiritual richness of our tradition with openness to its application in the pluralistic, contemporary Jewish community . . ." We have doubled the size of the school within the past four years while creating a Cantors-to-Rabbis program, a *Kol-Bo* program for ordination as both a rabbi and a cantor. We also received two transformative grants and have succeeded with many other innovative and pioneering programs and accomplishments, as you will see in the following pages.

So, what – you may ask – is the secret to both

our longevity and future-oriented, constant innovation? The answer may lie within the imagery of the ladder cited below in Jacob's dream. Unique among "tools" that assist us to reach otherwise unattainable heights, a ladder requires us to both step up to the rung closest

"How awesome this place is! It is none other than God's house. . ."

(Genesis 28:17)

to us AND to reach up to a higher rung. AJR's amazing administration and staff, faculty, students, alumni, supporters and our Board of Trustees understand the lesson of the ladder. And it is that commitment - to always seeking to reach higher and to achieve that which seems unreachable - that will enable us to continue to innovate and be responsive to the spiritual and religious needs of the Jewish people and the world at large for the years ahead.

I invite you to join us on this heavenly ladder. Step up, stretch out and be a part of our efforts, now and in the years ahead, to continue to be this awesome Jewish seminary transforming the Jewish world!

William Liss-Levinson

A Word from the CEO and Academic Dean



I recently came across a photo that is one that always touches me. It's a photo from 1951 of the first meeting of Israeli pioneers meeting on the dunes where Tel Aviv was born. The photo is fascinating. A group of people standing on empty dunes only 70 years ago, while we know



the tremendous metropolis that Tel Aviv is now. As I looked at the scene I thought about what it means to be a pioneer, and what it means to stand on the shoulders of pioneers.

This year, at AJR we celebrated our 65th anniversary. We too started with a group of people with a vision for an institution dedicated to *klal yisrael*, the whole Jewish community, and a willingness to work hard, to think creatively, and to actualize their sense of what clergy training could mean.

Just as Tel Aviv is now a thriving metropolis, AJR is now a thriving institution of higher learning. Our M.A. program brings together a deep understanding of sacred text and an appreciation of the contemporary Jewish community. Our clergy training is creative, academically rigorous, spiritually deep, and personally meaningful. Our students learn sacred text, Hebrew, history, philosophy, pastoral skills, and more. But at the same time, they take courses in the arts and in science. You could say that we understand that our

students need to be renaissance people, and that their education needs include not only STEM (science, technology, engineering, math), but actually, STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts, math.) This expansive education allows them to lead the full Jewish community, to reach people where they are, and to be a force for moral literacy in society.

AJR has experienced exponential growth over the past 65 years, especially in the last five years. We know that we are standing on the shoulders of pioneers as we grow. But we also know, just as those early pioneers did, that our goal is not to just enjoy the growth, but, to continue to develop and expand by creating new programs, bringing in new students, enhancing our curriculum, and forming new relationships with individuals and institutions in the Jewish community.

We invite you to get to know us better. Just this year, for example, in addition to our curricular work, communal building, and varied communal programming, we are working on areas as varied as bringing science into clergy education, working with Christian seminaries to help Christian seminarians work with the Jewish community, furthering our sacred arts curriculum by expanding on our work in studying text through movement and circus arts, and developing courses for ASL interpreters and Deaf lay leaders to give them enhanced understanding of Jewish prayer, which they can pass on to their communities.

Join us, and be a part of the future of Jewish leadership. Partner with us in our growth, in our vision, and in building the Jewish future.

Dr. Ora Horn Prouser



We are
grateful and excited
to applaud
AJR's
65th Anniversary
and
Accreditation!

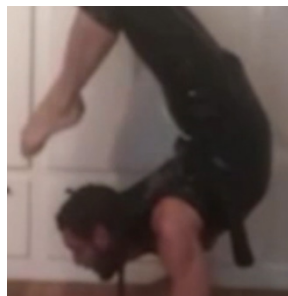
January 10, 2021 7:00 PM EST





A spectacular online evening extravaganza!

With several hundred attendees, performances by AJR staff and members of *Time Flies Circus*, praise from leaders across the Jewish world, and several immersive learning opportunities, AJR soared above all expectations.





SUPPORT.
STRENGTH.
FLEXIBILITY.
COOPERATION.
WIT.
BALANCE.

Circus performers use these to create awe-inspiring acts.

AJR uses them to create a close community of learners who develop deep bonds of trust and confidence. Through innovations including the Peace Studies program and Torah through Circus Arts, students take chances and learn to fly. Through AJR they become ready to inspire others.

65TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION TESTIMONIALS FROM OUR PEERS

"AJR brings [students] together into constellations that I don't see anywhere else in the Jewish world and also gives them a place where they can develop both the unique qualities of their relation to tradition and spiritual leadership and a strong sense of what binds us all together. They are what the Jewish world needs as we go forward in the 21st century."

- Joy Ladin, *Professor of English at Stern College*

"The value of AJR is so clear because in our very partisan time, having people come together to be trained as clergy who come from different denominational backgrounds and different ideological perspectives and to learn together is really the wave of the future. AJR has been doing that for a long time."

- Sid Schwarz, *Rabbi, social entrepreneur, non-profit CEO, author*

"Pioneers in offering pluralistic education and flexible part time options for those called to these roles, AJR has been a shining light as we all strive to train inspired leaders who have the passion, learning and commitment to serve the varied needs of the Jewish community."

- Shuly Schwartz, *Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary*

"The Academy for Jewish Religion plays a critically important role in the American religious landscape because not only do they train leaders for the Jewish community, they train leaders who embody and live up to precisely the kind of pluralism which we need now more than perhaps any time in any of our lives."

- Brad Hirschfield, *President of CLAL*



SERVICE OF ORDINATION AND GRADUATION

MAY 6, 2021
24 IYAR 5781



ACADEMY
for JEWISH
RELIGION

**ORDINEES
AND
M.A.
DEGREE
RECIPIENTS**



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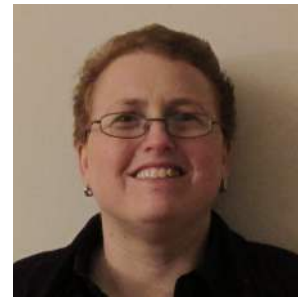
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DEGREE
RECIPIENTS**



STEPHEN MARK AXINN



ASHER HILLEL BURSTEIN



WENDY J. GRODENCHIK

**5781
AWARD
RECIPIENTS**



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SPECIAL RECOGNITION



RABBI DANIEL PRICE
MARBEH SHALOM
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AWARD



RABBI KATY ALLEN
ARC ALUMNA OF THE
YEAR AWARD

A CELEBRATION OF SERVICE

THURSDAY, JUNE 17, 2021

7:00 P.M. EDT

כל מי שעוסקים
בצרכי צבור באמונה

*They who serve the community
with faithful devotion*

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FOR 13 YEARS
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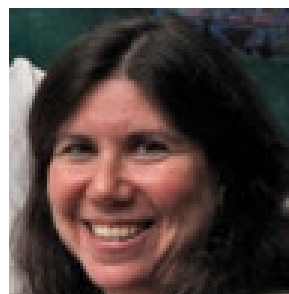


RABBI / CANTOR
HOWARD NACHT



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OF 1996 FOR 25
YEARS OF SERVICE
TO THE JEWISH
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CANTOR KATHY J. BARR



CANTOR MOSHE BEAR



CANTOR ELAINE FAVER z'l



RABBI
DAVID GREENSTEIN, PhD



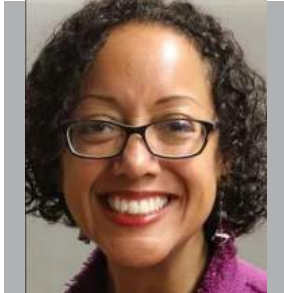
CANTOR ROBIN JOSEPH



RABBI
STEVEN RUBENSTEIN, BCC

Retreat 2020

What Ought to Be Shall Be: “Carrying on Heschel’s Quest for Racial Justice”



Tamara Fish

In summer of 2020, America witnessed numerous instances of racial tension and related civil unrest. Issues of racial justice rose to greater consciousness, particularly among religious leaders, and with the help of Tamara Fish, AJR quickly pivoted our Retreat to tackle this issue head on.

Tamara is the co-founder of Khazbar and former president of the Jewish Multiracial Network (JMN).

A Jewish Preparation for the Work of Racial Justice

Talking about Race in Our Communities ■ Rethinking Racial Justice

Understanding the Roots of Racial and Economic Inequalities

A Panel Discussion: Counting all Jews and Implications for Jewish Communities



Ilana Kaufman

Executive Director,
Jews of Color Field
Building Initiative



Marla Brettschneider

Professor of Political
Philosophy, University
of New Hampshire



Eric Greene

Associate Communications
Director for Diversity and
Campus Climate, UCLA

Intensive 2021

***Ba Bayamim*—Coming Into Our Years: AJR's Aging Intensive**

Wise Aging ■ Spiritual Assessment for the Aging in a Chaplaincy Setting
With Our Youth and Our Elders: Forging Jewish Community for All Ages
Living Forward, Understanding Backwards: A Chupah of Values To Embrace
Our Sacred Aging ■ The Sacredness of Aging: An Exploration of Diversity, Mental
Health, and Ritualizing the Passage of Time ■ Including People in Community as
They Age and Change: A Scenario ■ Including those with Dementia in our
Communities ■ What do Our Elders Want from the Jewish Community?
Panel Discussion: Experiences with Aging

Some of our Intensive Presenters



Rabbi Richard Address
Founder and Director,
Sacred Jewish Aging



Rabbi Dayle Friedman
Author, *Jewish Wisdom
for Growing Older*



Rabbi Michael Goldman
Director, Rabbinical Services
and Programs, Legacy
Senior Communities



Rabbi Simon Hirschhorn
Psychoanalyst,
formerly of Hebrew
Home at Riverdale



Rabbi Beth Naditch
Aging Chaplaincy,
Hebrew Senior Life



Dr. Linda Thal
Author,
Wise Aging

Bringing Science to Jewish Clergy

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) selected AJR as one of eight seminaries for the 2021 cohort of their Science for Seminaries Project. AJR is the first Jewish seminary to receive this \$75,000 grant. With the help of a dozen preeminent scientists, AJR will enhance its curriculum through the creation of three new courses, the reimagining of its Critical Issues course, and its 2021 school-wide Retreat on "Mindfulness, Music Therapy and the Brain Research That Speaks to Them Both."

Fall 2021

Critical Issues in Jewish Law and Science

Exploring genetics and Jewish law, including GMOs, gene therapy, and Jewish identity based on genetic testing

Spring 2022

Generations of Sky and Earth: Science in Dialogue with Biblical Imagery

Examining natural imagery in the Hebrew Bible in light of science

April Intersession 2022

What Clergy Need to Know About Psychopharmacology: A Basic Understanding

Learning about fundamentals of psychiatric disorders and medications, coupled with a pastoral dimension



Summer 2022

Scientific Literacy for Clergy

Understanding core areas of science in dialogue with contemporary Jewish life



Mosaic Religion and the Religious Mosaic

AN APPROACH TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN SEMINARIANS

AJR's recent accreditation through the Association for Theological Schools (ATS) opens exciting new pathways for AJR to have a more widespread impact on interfaith contexts. Supported by a generous nearly \$50,000 Pathway for Tomorrow Initiative grant from Lilly Endowment, in summer 2021 AJR launched its project "Mosaic Religion and the Religious Mosaic: An Approach to the Jewish Community for Christian Seminarians" to prepare pastors and congregational lay ministers to better participate in thoughtful interfaith work with the Jewish community. Responding to growing antisemitism in America, this project offers a crucial step towards building lasting bridges between our respective communities.

Recent months have demonstrated that many Americans cannot escape their own political and religious silos when engaging with others. One expression of this disconnectedness is the significant rise in antisemitism in America. In response, some Christian clergy have seen it as part

of their sacred mission not only to preach empathy, but, more fundamentally, to model interpersonal interaction grounded in sensitivity to the plight of the other. In order for pastors and ministers to effectively combat the challenges raised by social divisiveness, those called to Christian ministry must familiarize themselves with those outside of their own fold in capable of leading their communities to confront the reality of an increasingly interconnected yet divided society.

AJR is uniquely poised to partner with a variety of Christian seminaries to share knowledge of the diversity of Jewish life with Christian seminarians. Through our Mosaic Religion and the Religious Mosaic project AJR plans to expose Christian clergy to the diversity and nuances of the North American Jewish community, sensitize Christian clergy to distinctly Jewish spiritual needs, and building bridges through joint study of sacred texts.



2020-2021 COURSE & PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Course Highlights

Breaking the Mold of Clergy Entrepreneurship

Rabbi Elan Babchuck

Teaching new tools, skills, and perspectives to undertake innovative action in your communities.

Jewish Music in Diaspora

Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas

Exploring Jewish culture and identity as inherently diasporic.

Jewish Identities in the Eye of the Storm

Dr. Yakir Englander

Examining the different meanings of Jewish identities in the 21st century

Reparations in Biblical and Rabbinic Law and Lore

Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein

What is the place of reparations in the mythic Jewish story of liberation from slavery? What are halakhic models for reparations in practice?

Healing Services

Rabbi Marcelo Bronstein

Create and lead healing services for a variety of settings including sickness, divorce, miscarriage, cancer, infertility, abuse, and more.

Torah Meets Tech

Rabbi David Paskin

Exploring big ideas around using technology to enrich worship and teaching Torah in a digital age.

The Virtual and the Real: "Doing Jewish" Digitally in the 21st Century

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat & Rabbi David Markus

Now that digital Jewish life is here to stay, what spiritual (r)evolutions should follow suit, and how can spiritual leaders skillfully nourish, respond to them, and even lead them?

The Importance Of Developing Interfaith Relationships In Your Clergy Work

Rabbi Jo David, DMin

Working collaboratively with people of other faiths can be life changing, exhilarating, challenging and enriching in many ways - it can also be extremely difficult.

Erotica, Melancholia and Parodia: A Close Look at Shir Hashirim, Eikhah and Esther

Dr. Howard Markose

Parody, erotica, and mourning are three of the most unexpected thematic genres to find in the Bible. And yet, Esther, Song of Songs, and Lamentations seem to use these modes to a significant extent.

Program Highlights

A Special Program for Juneteenth

A Conversation With Military Chaplains About Social Change

with chaplains from JWB Jewish Chaplains Council

Personal Relationships to Prayer *an ongoing series*

"Weeping With All the Letters of the Alphabet"

A Tisha B'Av Program

21st-c. Responsa? Responding to Congregants' Queries

L'maan Tizkor: Remembering the Exodus after George Floyd

"The Yemenite Experience"

Shlomit Levi

[AIB NEWSLETTER](#)



Faculty Update

RABBI DAVID ALMOG

"Truancy Stories as a Site of Rhetorical History," Ancient Judaism Regional Seminar, UPenn, 2021; participated in the "God Who Forms Their Hearts As One: A Class for Black Christian Clergy and for Jewish Clergy of All Races" series.

RABBI RACHEL BARENBLAT

Crossing the Sea (Montreal: Phoenicia Publishing, 2020) and created "Holy at Home," six editable *machzor* presentations to bring personal High Holy Day experiences to screen-sharing participants; "Day One: Taking Action (and Responsibility)," in S. Kleinbaum and M. Moskowitz eds., *Chaver Up!: 49 Rabbis Explore What it Means to be an Ally through a Jewish Lens* (Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, 2021): 4-7.

DR. YAKIR ENGLANDER

"Aging and the Beauty of Being" *Times of Israel Blog Post* (Jan. 5, 2021) and "Men, Peace and Anti-Semitism" on MantorShift Podcast.

RABBI DR. MATTHEW GOLDSTONE

"Moses as Leader in the Eyes of the Tannaim," in J. Prouser ed., *Ra'u Or: Essays in Honor of Dr. Ora Horn Prouser*: 43-57; "Early Rabbinic Reluctance to Protest," *AJS Perspectives* (Spring 2021): 34-35; "Online Minyanim and Traditional Jewish Law," *NewCAJE, online*; "Creating Easy Interactive Online 'Escape Rooms' for All Ages to Teach Jewish Content," *NewCAJE, online*; "Balancing Conflicting Needs in Times of Exigent Circumstances," *Society of Jewish Ethics, online*.

DR. EDWARD GREENSTEIN

"The Story of the Story as the Focus of Engagement," in *Ra'u Or*, 68-80.

RABBI DR. JILL HACKELL

"The Wonder of Trees: Musings in Honor of Tu B'Shevat," in *Ra'u Or*, 90-95.

RABBI DR. JILL HAMMER

Return to the Place: The Magic, Meditation, and Mystery of Sefer Yetzirah (Ben Yehuda Press: 2020); "The Witch of En-dor: Tending the Spring of Generations," in *Ra'u Or*, 96-108; "Biblical Women: Emerging from the Margins through Midrash," a curriculum for the Melton School;

taught for Romemu Yeshiva, PJ Library, Climatefest, the Mitsui Tu b'Av Festival, Rayfest, IJKL and other gatherings and institutions; spotlighted for her work at the Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute: "There's no one right way to kohenet: The Hebrew priestess movement aims to center women's voices," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (Jan. 29, 2021).

RABBI DR. JEFFREY HOFFMAN

"A Rabbi Muses About Entering The Zone At Grateful Dead Concerts And At Synagogue Worship Services" in *Ra'u Or*, 108-118.

DR. ORA HORN PROUSER

Mazal tov to Dr. Ora Horn Prouser on the publication of the festschrift *Ra'u Or: Essays in Honor of Dr. Ora Horn Prouser*. "Graven Images: Reading the Bible Through the Arts," *NewCAJE, online*; "Reading the Bible in Uganda: The Role of cultural context in understanding the Bible," *NewCAJE, online*.

DR. JOB JINDO

"Bible, The Hebrew" in S. Goetz and C. Taliaferro eds., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Blackwell, 2021); "On Poetry and Prophecy in Jeremiah" in L. Stulman and E. Silver eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021): 192-216.

CANTOR MICHAEL KASPER

"Light and Peace in Our Daily Liturgical Declarations," in *Ra'u Or*, 124-131.

RABBI DAVID MARKUS

Received Oreach Rabbinic Fellowship; "Show Me Your Way: Trans Microcosm of Spiritual Allyship," in S. Kleinbaum and M. Moskowitz eds., *Chaver Up!: 49 Rabbis Explore What it Means to be an Ally through a Jewish Lens* (Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, 2021): Pages 17-26; Anchor Panelist, "Bend the Arc Examines the Moral Imperative of Voting in Panel Discussion," Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle (August, 2020); Board Chair, Bayit: Building Jewish; Liturgist, Bayit Liturgical Arts Working Group (HiHos 5782, Rosh Hodesh Elul, Tisha b'Av, Shavuot, Passover, Tu B'shevat, Chanukkah, Sukkot, HiHos 5781); Executive Committee and Governance Chair, Lawyers Depression Project; Lead Presenter, Professional Ethics and Spiritual Formation, *Lawline*; Lead Presenter, Spiritual-Professional Development Program, Cardozo Law School, Yeshiva University.

Spotlight on AJR Student, Andrea Shupack

I was one of those kids who always wanted to go to Hebrew school. When my eighth grade year found me living away from my Jewish family, I still insisted on being dropped off at High Holy Day services. By my freshman year of college, I was teaching at a Sunday school and occasionally lay leading when the Rabbi was out of town. Yet, when my Rabbi constantly encouraged me to consider going to cantorial school, I was adamant that this was not a good fit. I didn't want my spirituality to get mixed up with my love of performing. After dropping my lifelong-plan to be a music teacher, and spending years teaching in synagogue schools instead, it finally started to sink in that I wasn't performing when I led *davening*.



After a decade of working as a cantorial soloist I was compelled to walk up to an AJR booth at a conference (I shocked myself that I did this), and declare that I was interested in not just Cantorial school, but Rabbinical school as well. As someone who has participated in and loved elements from all denominations, AJR's commitment to pluralism was essential for me. When I virtually visited both California and New York's schools with the same name, even though New York was not as practical, I knew in my heart that it was the right fit. It was not only warm and inviting, it was creative and inspiring. I feel so grateful that AJR exists, and lucky that they offer remote learning.

Family and friends often ask me what my plans are when I become a Rabbi/Cantor. I have to admit, I still don't know. What I can say is that I am constantly growing and realizing new potential. I am a different person and leader today than I was when I started 2 1/2 years ago. Any school can teach you content, but AJR goes beyond that, inspiring students to be their best, and express their unique gifts. It's more than a school, it is a family.

I still have a lot of imposter syndrome, but at AJR I have found new confidence and authenticity. I know that whatever paths I choose to take upon ordination, they will come from my deepest, best self - the one who has the most to offer the Jewish world. I was concerned at first about how much I could get out of an online learning experience. This journey has surprised me in many ways. In particular I've been amazed by the incredible support I've received from students and teachers, and finding that AJR is home.

Andrea Shupack

Kol-Bo Student

**In loving
memory
of our *Kol-Bo*
student**

**Dr. Evette
Katlin z”l**

**Scholar,
Musician,
Spiritual
Seeker, and
Beautiful Soul**





PLEASE SUPPORT AJR!

Partner with us in encouraging and shaping communities that are built on pluralistic dialogue and understanding.

Partner with us in training the leaders that the Jewish world needs today.

Partner with us in spreading our message of cherishing those with whom we agree as well as those who challenge us.

Consider donating stock or donating from your IRA.
Contact ajroffice@ajr.edu for details.





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