

**“Think of how bland it would be if we didn’t know how to sing, how to dance; if we did not know how to carve poles--we need these things and they are gifts to everybody”**

- Barbara Wilson

Standing beneath the roof of the Chodorow synagogue at the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv, Israel, was a coalescent moment that has informed my rabbinate. I remember staring in awe and admiration of the paintings gilding the ceiling. The images were vibrant and colorful and came to life above my head; thus, they touched me in a powerful way. As a rabbinical student, I had never seen anything like it in our synagogues; as an artist and woodcarver, I had never seen anything like it; and as the grandchild of survivors, I had been told precious little about prewar Europe. I felt that a noticeable void had existed. I felt a need to fill the void and attempt to restore something that had been lost. On that day, I committed myself to creating an exact replica of a majestic Aron HaKodesh (Holy Ark) from one of the vanished wooden synagogues and bringing it back into ritual use. The project *Opening the Ark* was the brainchild of this moment of epiphany.

During the next two years of rabbinical seminary, I spent much time every evening refining my woodcarving skills. In my final year of rabbinical seminary, I was ready. I began soliciting grants from local and national organizations. I incorporated a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization, and I began managing a team of engineers, woodcarvers, architects, and volunteers.

When COVID-19 hit, the project was propelled to greater heights and proceeded faster than ever. Quickly, the pool of skilled and apprentice volunteers grew exponentially. I designated a volunteer coordinator. The project received new grants as it grew. As the world fell into a state of pandemonium, *Opening the Ark* provided us all with a gift—something

that could not be taken away from us with all the restrictions: art. The tragic irony is that one catastrophe (the Holocaust) nearly eradicated this art form, yet we are reviving it during another catastrophe (COVID-19).

Beginning in February 2021, the ark went on exhibition with a debut gala at the Skirball Museum. The opening gala on February 19 included a Torah service broadcast to 17,000 followers on social media across the multiple platforms of HUC, the Skirball Museum, and the *Opening the Ark* project. At that moment, we transferred the ark formally and spiritually to the Jewish people.

However, as we launched the ark into the ritual and museum spaces, something else came to mind that will define my rabbinate in the future. Building an ark is not enough for my rabbinate. *More important are the people who are called to the Torah, which we take from the ark.* Our Jewish identity is built upon actually opening the ark and reading from it, celebrating with its Torah in *simchas* (joyous occasions), rituals, and daily and weekend services, and sharing our Torah lovingly from generation to generation. For me, the congregation is the best place to enact these holy duties.

The absence of matter is what motivated me to recreate an Aron HaKodesh (Holy Ark) from prewar Europe. However, how sad would it be to imagine a pristine synagogue with a noticeable void left by the absence of the actual congregation? This is a very real scenario for many American synagogues. It is this same motivation that drove me to rebuild a perished item of our heritage, which will propel me into congregational life tomorrow. To thrive in 2022, we must create a growing community of family, inclusion, and acceptance. This is the direction of Judaism for the future.

Today, we are at a crossroads within Judaism, amplified by COVID-19. Many

of our buildings, schools, institutions, and prayers are at risk of becoming outdated very quickly; swallowed by modernity. We will need to rethink Judaism for tomorrow. *Our message of tomorrow must be one of radical inclusion, the embrace of family, and Jewish continuity.* This will be the next big chapter of my rabbinate. I am humbled by the opportunity to share the Torah in the future and call congregants to stand before our Torah and celebrate sacred occasions.

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## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

06/2021–06/2022    **Rabbi**, Temple Israel, *Columbus, GA*

- Served a small congregation of 121 families in Columbus, GA.

### ***Leadership***

- Grew the congregation's membership by 21% in one year.

### ***Worship and Life Cycle Events***

- Transitioned the congregation to online platforms averaging 200–400 virtual attendees per *Shabbat* service.
- Began new programming, including *Shabbat Yoga*, the *MileChai*-Temple Israel biking Club, and Shabbat meals in restaurants following services.
- Included routine guest lecturers on *Shabbatot* from the Anti-Defamation League, Hebrew Union College, the Union of Reform Judaism, and the American Civil Liberties Union.
- Conducted weddings, funerals, *bonei mitzvot*, and baby-naming ceremonies.
- Brought the Conservative and Reform congregations together for joint programming.

### ***Youth and Family Engagement***

- Introduced and taught the post-confirmation class at Temple Israel Religious School. In each session, we discussed Judaism and life as a Jewish adult over coffee.
- Introduced new families to Temple Israel with new opportunities for engagement through online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Pastoral Care***

- Provided pastoral care for congregants in hospital and at home.
- Led *shiva minyanim* for deceased congregants.
- Worked with the Caring Committee (*Kehillat Chesed* Committee) to provide support for ill members of the community

### ***Outreach***

- Began drafting a bill for Holocaust education in Georgia with state legislators.

- Was active in the Rotary Club of Columbus.
- Was active in representing the congregation at public events in Columbus, including promotion ceremonies for the Police Department and Town Hall invocations.
- Organized the first public celebration of Chanukah in Columbus, GA, with the entire Jewish community of greater Columbus. The event included Mayor Skip Henderson lighting the *Shamus* and Jewish representatives of Columbus in attendance and participation.
- Led a Shabbat of Healing following the incident in Colleyville with other faith leaders at Temple Israel.

09/2019–06/2021 **Rabbinic Intern, Adath Israel Congregation, Cincinnati, OH**

- Served a medium- to large-sized congregation of 600+ families in Cincinnati and a rabbinical team consisting of a senior and associate rabbi. Accumulated experience with pastoral care, youth and family engagement, worship and life cycle events, outreach, and administrative duties related to the congregation.

***Worship and Life Cycle Events***

- Alternated responsibilities with the senior and associate rabbis to lead weekday *minyanim*, *Shabbat*, and major holiday services.
- Led Friday evening (*Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Shabbat*) and Saturday morning (*Shacharit*, Torah, and *Musaf*) services.
- Led weekday and *shiva minyanim*.
- Delivered a biweekly *Divrei Torah*.
- On call for the senior and associate rabbis as needed for funerals, circumcisions, *bar/bat mitzvahs*, and weddings.
- Led family and youth programs for high holidays and weekly services.
- Created online transition to “*Tot-Shabbat*” programs for young families.

***Youth and Family Engagement***

- Offered outreach to young families through “*Shabbat in the Home*” programs. The “*Shabbat in the Home*” program entails inviting other young families to join our table for *Shabbatot* and *Chagim*.
- Served as 5th-grade substitute teacher for a Hebrew and Jewish Studies instructor at the Jarson Education Religious Center of Adath Israel.

***Outreach***

- Worked with prospective converts and the rabbinical team to ease their transition entering the Jewish community.
- Part of the *MitzvahVote Campaign* of Adath Israel; oversaw 100% voter turnout of congregants from Cider Village.
- Organized congregants to participate in the 38th World Zionist Elections.

- Led a series of classes on Jewish art (focusing on woodworking) that were open to the public.

### ***Administrative Responsibilities***

- Accumulated experience in weekly staff meetings covering expense reports, earnings, changes in health care plans, grant solicitations from the Foundation of Cincinnati, and the congregation's annual reports.
- Served as part of the organized effort for Adath Israel to acquire 501(c)(3) status.
- Chaired a ritual committee, which was heavily influenced by the major supporters of the congregation. Cultivating these relationships was key to its successes.

### ***Pastoral Care***

- Provided a primary point of contact for pastoral care to congregants at Cedar Village (the Jewish aged home of Cincinnati).
- Led *shiva minyanim* for deceased congregants of Cedar Village.
- Undertook hospital visits and phone calls to congregants following surgeries and hospital stays.
- Worked with the rabbinical team to create a *Bikor Cholim* Excel spreadsheet of congregants in hospitals who were undergoing surgeries and experiencing health complications.

### **01/2020–Present    Executive Director, Founder, *Opening the Ark Project, Cincinnati, OH***

- The *Opening the Ark Project* has rebuilt one of the lost majestic wooden Torah arks of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

### ***Fundraising***

- Launched the *Opening the Ark Project*; 501(c)(3) nonprofit status for donors and organizations.
- Raised fiscal support for the project from major national granting organizations, including Reconstructing Judaism, The Auerbach Foundation, The Refusenik Project, Jewish Learning Network, The Men of Reform Judaism, Reform on Campus, a direct grant issued by GoFundMe Charity, and the Adath Israel Congregation of Cincinnati.
- Gained fundraising experience with charity crowdfunding platforms.
- Exceeded all fiscal goals.
- Achieved 100% success in all grant proposals.

### ***Budget Management***

- Accrued experience with donor relations and cultivation. Earmarked costs for seven phases of the project's startup development. This budget covered costs for architects, structural engineers, construction materials (e.g., steel truss framework, harvested Siberian larch lumber, and custom columns), marketing, paint, and wood, as well as scientific analysis and the 501(c)(3) process.

### ***Marketing Experience***

- Gained experience creating videos and providing periodic updates for donors using the MailChimp platform.

### ***Public Relations***

- Cultivated relationships with major Jewish organizations in the Cincinnati area, across Ohio, and nationally.
- Arranged for the completed Aron HaKodesh to begin exhibition at the Skirball Museum and then move on to exhibition at the Ish Festival of 2021.
- Supervised a daily team of artists and volunteers.

05/19–08/19 **Chaplain Intern**, TriHealth Hospitals, Jewish Hospital, Christ Hospital: Arden Ct. Seasons Assisted Care Facility, *Cincinnati, OH*

- Completed 1 unit of clinical pastoral education.

04/18–08/18 **Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati Rabbinic Fellow**, Holocaust and Humanity Center, *Cincinnati, OH*

- Translated and transcribed Russian Holocaust survivors' testimonies into English for the new museum's permanent exhibit.
- Researched events documented in testimonies.

09/17–05/18 **Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati Rabbinic Fellow**, Kulanu High School, *Cincinnati, OH*

- Taught *Mussar* and *Kabbalah* courses using visual arts as a medium of expression.

05/19–09/19 **Summer Rabbinic Fellow**, Jewish Family Services, *Cincinnati, OH*

- Served the educational and spiritual needs of a diverse Jewish population in the Cincinnati, OH, region.
- Offered classes on the history of the Cincinnati Jewish community, Hebrew, and Israeli politics.

08/18–08/20 **Student Rabbi**, Beth Boruk Temple, *Richmond, IN* (monthly pulpit).

08/17–08/18 **Student Rabbi**, Temple Israel, *Paducah, KY* (biweekly).

08/16–05/17 **Religious Services Coordinator**, Beit Avot Jerusalem, *Jerusalem, Israel*.

05/15–08/16 **Religious Services Coordinator**, Greenwood House (**Senior Care Services**), *Trenton, NJ*.

08/14–08/16 **Hebrew and Jewish Studies Teacher**, Kehillat HaNahar, *New Hope, PA*.

05/12–05/13 **Research Intern**, GLORIA Center, *Herzeliya, Israel*.

01/07–12/09 **Medic/Chovesh**, Magen David Adom in Israel, *Beersheba, Israel*.

## **EDUCATION**

**Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH**

- Rabbinical ordination, 2021.
- Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters, 2020.

- *Rabbinical capstone: Opening the Ark Project: Bringing a Lost Polish Synagogue to Life (Advisor Dr. Jennifer Grayson).*

#### **Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem, Israel**

- Rabbinic Student Seminar, 2016–2017.

#### **Gratz College, Melrose Park, PA**

- Master of Arts (Summa Cum Laude) in Holocaust and Genocide Studies, 2016.
- Master of Arts (Summa Cum Laude) in Jewish Studies, 2016.
- *Master's Thesis: Film Producers of Jewish and Non-Jewish Origin in the 1930s and the 1940s and their Reception in America (Advisor, Dr. Michael Steinlauf).*

#### **American University, Washington, D.C.**

- Bachelor of Arts in International Studies and Jewish Studies, 2012.

#### **SOAS (School for Oriental and African Studies), London, England**

- Exchange student, 2011.

#### **COMMUNAL ACTIVITIES AND AFFILIATIONS**

- Der Arbeiter Ring/The Worker's Circle.
- NAJC/Neshama (Association of Jewish Chaplains).

#### **AWARDS AND PRIZES**

- Rabbi Samuel Teitelbaum Memorial Endowed Scholarship, Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion. Scholarship awarded for the duration of the five-year program for 90% of tuition costs.
- Cohades Scholarship, Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion. Awarded to students who provided student pulpit service to vulnerable congregations in the central region of the United States.
- Everett and Marian Gordon Scholarship, American University. Awarded to students in exceptional academic standing in the Jewish Studies program.

#### **Selected Publications**

- “The Amazing Story behind the Aron HaKodesh in the Scheuer Chapel of the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion”/“Zadziwiająca historia aron ha-kodesz z Kaplicy Scheuerów w Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion.” Muzeum Ziemi Nadnoteckiej, Trzcianka, Poland. December 2021. pp. 23–56.
- “Failing the Kurds Is a Failure of Justice.” *The Times of Israel*. October 2019.
- “Parshat Eikev, London Bridge Is Falling Down with Brexit.” *The Times of Israel*. April 2019.
- “Sermon for Pittsburgh Massacre.” *The Times of Israel*. November 2018.
- “Making Judaism Relevant in Our High Schools.” *Avodat HaKodesh*. March 2018.
- “LGBTQ+ Rights, Feminism and Samuel. Rosh HaShana Sermon.” *The Times of Israel*. September 2018.
- Additional publications available upon request.