

RABBI DEBRA ORENSTEIN

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EDUCATION

- Jewish Theological Seminary of America, M.A. and ordination, 1990.
- The University of Judaism, B.H.L., 1989.
- Princeton University, A.B. in History, 3.9 GPA, summa cum laude, 1983.
- Solomon Schechter Day School, Cranford, NJ, Grades 3-12.

OTHER TRAINING & CERTIFICATIONS

- Certificate in Positive Psychology (CIPP), Whole Being Institute, One-year Program, 2016. The lead instructor was Tal Ben-Shahar, formerly of Harvard University. CIPP is the equivalent of a Master's Degree in the Science of Happiness and Human Flourishing
- Tiny Habits Coaching Certification, 2017 with instructors BJ and Linda Bogg. BJ is the Director of the Persuasive Technology Lab at Stanford University.
- Rabbinic Institute, Institute for Jewish Spirituality, Two-year Program, 2001-2003. Additional subsequent retreats, training in Spiritual Direction, and the 2018 online Elul Meditation Intensive.
- Pepperdine Center on the Family, Certification in Interpersonal Communication and Active Parenting, 2000-2001.
- Pepperdine Law School – Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution, Mediation Training, 1999.
- Daniels School of Communal Service – Hebrew Union College, Synagogue Administration Course Certification, 1999.
- Meisner-Carville School of Acting, Conservatory Program, 1990-1992.
- Internship in Pastoral Psychiatry with Dr. Mortimer Ostow, 1988-1989.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2010-Present – **SPIRITUAL LEADER of Congregation B'nai Israel**, Emerson, NJ.

- Major duties include conducting services, teaching, curriculum development, programming, counseling, lifecycle events, leadership development, fundraising, staff and faculty supervision, and administration. I work in partnership with the cantor, Hebrew School principal, lay leaders, volunteers, and office staff to serve the synagogue and wider community.
- Instituted new programs, resulting in outreach and “in-reach” with renewed enthusiasm among members. Among these:
 - themed Shabbat services – e.g., Yoga Shabbat, various musical themes, and an annual ecumenical Freedom Shabbat honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel
 - drumming circles
 - adult education ventures – e.g., series on Spiritual Conversations, Lifecycle, and text study; meet-ups in local cafes for learning
 - intergenerational holiday workshops
 - a Green Group for environmental action
 - interfaith dialogue with Christians and Muslims involving spiritual leaders, lay leaders, and teens
- Two capital campaigns, one to retire the mortgage and another for renovations, were completed successfully.
- In the first 18 months of my tenure, membership increased by 25%. Membership has either increased or remained stable every year.

2018-Present – **ADJUNCT FACULTY MEMBER at the Academy for Jewish Religion**, Yonkers, NY.

- Created new curriculum and taught courses in Homiletics, Introduction to Jewish Meditation, and Prayer Leadership for rabbinical and cantorial students.

1991-Present – **SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE** at synagogues, community centers, federations, universities, camps, conventions.

- Speaker at national conventions and retreats, including Hadassah, The Rabbinical Assembly, Women's League/Sisterhood, Koach, Central Conference of American Rabbis, and The Jewish Theological Seminary's Rabbinic Training Institute.
- Designed curricula for dozens of lecture series, workshops, seminars, and *Shabbatonim* (immersion weekends).

- Delivered over 500 talks in various venues, including month-long, community-wide scholar-in-residence appointments in West Palm Beach, Chicago, and Detroit.
- Keynote speaker at the Chautauqua Institution for the Department of Religion. Rabbi-in-residence multiple times for the Hebrew Congregation of Chautauqua.
- Created curricula and taught online for webinar companies and rabbinical organizations. Topics included: The Highs of High Holidays, Compelling Rituals, Liberating Your Seder from the Maxwell House Haggadah (co-taught with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi), Ending Slavery and Human Trafficking, Gender Issues in the Rabbinate.

1991-Present – **LIFECYCLE ADVISOR & PASTOR.**

- Consultant to rabbis and rabbinical organizations on lifecycle issues, traditional ceremonies, and new rituals.
- As pastor to families and individuals, I provide:
 - counseling
 - individualized study programs, mitzvah projects, and rituals
 - officiating that grounds new ceremonies in tradition and breathes new life into established customs and rituals

1991-2010 – **SENIOR FELLOW of the Susan and David Wilstein Institute for Jewish Policy Studies** initially housed at The University of Judaism in Los Angeles, and later independently in Los Angeles and at Hebrew College in Boston.

- Principle areas of research, writing, editing, and consulting included Jewish spirituality, lifecycle, ritual, the synagogue, marginally affiliated Jews, gender, intermarriage, and the future of the American Jewish community.
- Produced four articles, two books, and one major conference.
- Consulted on other articles and conferences, including work by Drs. Arnold Eisen and Steven M. Cohen.

1995-2010 – **SPIRITUAL LEADER of Makom Ohr Shalom synagogue, Tarzana, CA.**

Selected accomplishments at Makom Ohr Shalom:

- Led unique High Holiday services with a wide outreach to the unaffiliated; co-officiated with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Rabbi Mordecai Finley, and Cantor Monty Turner. Guests included Rabbi Stan Levy, Theodore Bikel, Craig Taubman, and Debbie Friedman.

- Created an intensive program and focus on gratitude, shaping the culture of the congregation and promoting new rituals, study, and meaning in the lives of members.
- Edited a Friday evening siddur that fostered inclusion and engagement.
- Developed and led services that were new to the congregation, including Havdalah Evenings for current and prospective members, a Shabbat morning Young Families Service, and themed Friday evening services that drew hundreds of newcomers and members.
- Instituted new forms and formats for rituals, classes, meditation, and prayer services. Incorporated guided meditation and chanting into every Shabbat service. Innovation was the norm.

1990-2010 – FINKELSTEIN FELLOW & INSTRUCTOR at American Jewish University (formerly the University of Judaism), Los Angeles, CA.

- Faculty member in the rabbinical, undergraduate, adult education, conversion, Hebrew High School, Elderhostel, and master's programs.
- Fields of instruction: Bible, Rabbinics, Theology, Spiritual Formation, Jewish Theater, Introduction to Judaism, Prayer, Jewish Spirituality, Jewish Holidays.
- Primary teacher for conversion for hundreds of students, including one who became a rabbi.
- Designed several new courses which were incorporated into the curriculum.

1987-1988 – CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT INTERN & LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT at the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Washington, D.C.

- Represented the Conservative movement and worked together with Reform Jews and a wide coalition of interfaith partners.
- Focused on domestic economic justice. Helped craft health care legislation. Collaborated on policies to reduce homelessness and increase affordable housing.
- Worked with and mentored by Rabbi David Saperstein and Dr. Leonard Fine.

BOOKS (author and/or editor)

No More Slaves!: A Resource Guide for Engaging and Empowering Young Jews (from tweens to college students) To Help End Human Trafficking by 2030. New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2020 (available as an e-book and by download).

Legacy for Life: The Wisdom and Example of Rabbi Jehiel Orenstein. Hackensack, NJ: Rediprint, 2017 (2nd edition is available as an e-book and by download).

Next Year, Free!: A Modern Slavery Curriculum. Co-edited with Rabbi Erin Hirsh. Washington, D.C., Free the Slaves, 2016 (available as an e-book and by download).

Lifecycles 2: Jewish Women on Biblical Themes in Contemporary Life. Co-edited with Rabbi Jane Rachel Litman. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1997.

Lifecycles 1: Jewish Women on Life Passages and Personal Milestones. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1994.

From Generation to Generation. Co-authored with Rabbi Israel Mowshowitz. NY: New York Board of Rabbis, 1992.

The Synagogue Voter Registration Guide. Washington, D.C.: Religious Action Center, 1987.

The Tisha B'av/Nagasaki Day Handbook: Jewish and Japanese Attitudes Towards Destroying and Repairing the World. Co-edited with Erica Raphael. Washington, D.C.: New Jewish Agenda, 1981.

ESSAYS AND ARTICLES

Occasional blogger for *The Times of Israel*, with the post “Top Ten Ways to Prepare for the High Holidays” selected as a featured “blog of the day” on September 12, 2019.

Columnist for *The (New Jersey) Jewish Standard* and *The (Los Angeles) Jewish Journal*. Many of these dozens of articles are available at RabbiDebra.com.

Four essays in the book series *Learn Torah With...*

“The Meaning of Tallit” in Nancy Micklewright, ed., *Under the Wings of Shekhinah*. Forthcoming. Chapter available at RabbiDebra.com.

“The Jewish Rites of Death and Mourning” in Barry Cytron, ed., *Jewish and Catholic Views of Death*. Chapter available at RabbiDebra.com.

Making Prayer Real: Leading Jewish Spiritual Voices on Why Prayer Is Difficult and What To Do About It by Mike Comins, etc. Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010.

Jewish Parenting chapter in Bradley Shavit-Artson, ed. *Walking with Life*. Los Angeles: American Jewish University, 2009.

“Samson and Delilah: Betrayal of What and by Whom?” in Elyse Goldstein, ed. *The Women’s Prophets Commentary*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004.

“Matriarchs and Patriarchs” in David Lieber, ed. *Etz Hayim Humash*. Philadelphia: JPS, 2001.

"Sacred Revelations" in Lynn Crosbie, ed. *The Click: Becoming Feminists*. Toronto: Macfarlane Walter, 1997.

“Sarah and Hagar” in Public Affairs Television, ed. *Talking About Genesis*. NY: Doubleday, 1996.

"Rosh Hashanah and the Image of the Mother." *The Single Scoop* (Fall 1996).

Also published in *The Los Angeles Times*, *Women's League Outlook*, *Women's Rabbinical Group Newsletter*, *The Wilstein Institute Bulletin*, *Hadassah*, *Comment and Analysis*, *Direction*, *Lilith*, *Ometz*, and *Sh'ma*.

TEACHING “ALBUMS” (downloadable and on CD)

Gratitude: Receiving Blessings and Giving Thanks as a Spiritual Practice.

Compassion Constantly: Keeping Lovingkindness and God’s Grace in the Foreground.

Awe Always: Cultivating Reverence for God, Life, and the Spiritual Work Before Us.

Transformation Now: Finding the Urgency and Patience We Need to Truly Change.

SERVICE, JUSTICE WORK, & REPAIRING THE WORLD

- Co-founder, Passover Project in affiliation with Free the Slaves, motivating leaders to help Jews connect to the relevance and values of our tradition by freeing slaves (current, 7th year). By the numbers:
 - Solicited and edited curricula for formal and informal education by a dozen rabbis and educators with varied backgrounds and demographics, from all five major Jewish movements,
 - over 50 synagogues and schools around the country joined as Passover Project Partners, principally through their rabbis, with more still signing on.
 - Additional organizational and outreach partners ranging from the New York Board of Rabbis to Jewish Lights Publishing to Oy Toys.
 - As of 2019, 18,663 views and 7,689 downloads by individuals who have downloaded online resources from FreeTheSlaves.net/Judaism (many of them rabbis and educators, thus extending the reach of the materials).
 - Donors contributed \$90,000 via the Passover Project to Free The Slaves,

supporting the work of rescue, rehabilitation, and prevention.

- Co-founder, Creation Care Committee of the Pascack Valley Clergy Council, bringing together communities of faith for joint study and action on stewardship of the planet (current, 2nd year).
- Member, Rabbinical Assembly Task Force on Human Trafficking (current, 2nd year).
- Fundraiser for Breaking the Chain Through Education, Fistula Hospital, Free the Slaves, and other charities (current, for at least 20 years).
- Treasurer, Westwood-Area (NJ) Interfaith Council (2 years).
- Chair, Pascack Valley (NJ) Clergy Council (1 year).
- Board Member, MorningStar Commission on Jewish women and the Media (7 years).
- Founder and co-director, Frieda's Table: Absolutely Tolerable, Actually Fun, Distinctly Jewish, Guaranteed Non-Embarrassing Jewish Singles Programming (3 years).
- Member, National Foundation for Jewish Culture Entertainment Industry Council (3 years).
- Mentor and tutor to at-risk children through Fulfillment Fund & School on Wheels (4 years).
- Editorial Board Member, *Women's League Outlook* (4 years).
- Member, University of Judaism's Task Force on Spirituality (1 year).
- Member, Rabbinical Assembly's Social Action Committee (4 years).
- Chair, Women's Rabbinical Group (2 years).
- Co-founder and Chair, Va'ad Gemilut Hasadim, Jewish Theological Seminary (2 years).
- Rape Crisis Counselor, St. Luke's Hospital Emergency Room, New York, NY (3 years).

AWARDS AND HONORS

- 2020 Awarded honorary doctorate by The Jewish Theological Seminary of America.
- 2018 Appointed to Editorial Board of *Conservative Judaism* magazine

- 2014 Featured by *The Forward* as one of the nation's most inspiring rabbis.
- 2005 Commendation for Communal Service from the County of Los Angeles.
- 1997 Association for Women in Psychology Book of the Year Award (*Lifecycles 2*).
- 1995 *Body, Mind, Spirit* Award for Excellence (*Lifecycles 1*).
- 1994 Benjamin Franklin Award for Best Religion Book of the Year (*Lifecycles 1*).
- 1992 Excellence in Teaching Award granted by the student body of The University of Judaism.
- 1990 Jewish Theological Seminary's Wolfson Award for Outstanding Scholarship and Service.
- 1989 The University of Judaism's Louis Finkelstein Award in Rabbinic Literature.
- 1983-'84 Charles A. Revson Fellowship (for the history Ph.D. program at JTS).
- 1984 The Jewish Theological Seminary's Geffen Prize in Modern Jewish History.
- 1983 Phi Beta Kappa.
- 1982 Princeton University's Keyton Prize in History.
- 1982 Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School grant for summer study abroad (in Israel).

SPECIAL SKILLS & EXPERIENCES

- Guest on dozens of radio and television shows; regularly featured in print interviews.
- Unique style of reading Torah, interweaving Hebrew, translation, and commentary, all sung in trope.
- Fluent Hebrew. Passive Yiddish and French. Reading Aramaic.
- Content creator for new media, including webinars and online courses.
- Wife and mother of two fantastic teenagers.
- A seventh-generation rabbi, I was a member of the first rabbinical school class at The Jewish Theological Seminary to include women.

Letters of reference upon request.