



**RECONSTRUCTIONIST
RABBINICAL COLLEGE**

המדרשה ליהדות מתחדשת

Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

Graduation Ceremony

May 18, 2025 • 20 Iyar 5785

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Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

Graduation Ceremony

May 18, 2025 | 20 Iyar 5785

Order of Ceremony

ACADEMIC PROCESSION

Music performed by the Ken Ulansey Ensemble

OPENING PRAYER

Rabbi Linda Holtzman, '79

WELCOME

Seth Rosen

Chair, Board of Governors

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D., '99

PRIZES AND AWARDS

Rabbi Mira Beth Wasserman, Ph.D.

Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs

Rabbi Alex Weissman, '17

Director of Community Life and *Mekhinah*

Emma Fischer

RSA Board Member

HONORARY AWARDS AND DEGREES

Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D.

Seth Rosen

TEKES HATARAT HORA'AH

CONFERRING THE TITLE OF RABBI AND THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN HEBREW LETTERS

Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D.

Rabbi Mira Beth Wasserman, Ph.D.

Members of the Faculty

KABBALAT HATARAT HORA'AH RABBIS' RESPONSE

and MISHEBERAKH, A BLESSING

Rabbinical Class of 2025/5785

and Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D.

CLOSING PRAYER

Rabbi William Plevan, Ph.D.

RECESSIONAL

Music performed by the Ken Ulansey Ensemble

*Please stand during the processional and recessional
if you are able to do so comfortably. Following the
ceremony, please join us for the president's reception.*



Prizes and Awards

We bestow these prizes on the following students, faculty, staff and members of our community. We thank them for their service to the ideals of studentship and scholarship, social justice, the building of community and the growth of the Reconstructionist movement.

THE RABBI DEVORA BARTNOFF MEMORIAL PRIZE FOR SPIRITUALLY MOTIVATED SOCIAL ACTION

Through the generosity of the members of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, the Rabbi Devora Bartnoff Memorial Prize for Spiritually Motivated Social Action is awarded annually to a third, fourth or fifth-year student whose rabbinic work best demonstrates how *ru'akh hakodesh* (sacred spirit) inspires *tikkun olam* (social action).

| The 2025 recipient is Sam Kates-Goldman.

THE RABBI KENNETH BERGER AND AVIVA BERGER MEMORIAL PRIZE IN PRACTICAL RABBINICS

Through the generosity of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, the Rabbi Kenneth Berger and Aviva Berger Memorial Prize in Practical Rabbinics is awarded annually at graduation exercises to a fourth- or fifth-year student who exemplifies those qualities of rabbinic service that enhance the quality of congregational life.

| The 2025 recipient is Shira Singelenberg.

THE DAVID FERN MEMORIAL AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE RRC COMMUNITY

The David Fern Memorial Award for Outstanding Contributions to the RRC Community is awarded annually at the graduation ceremony to a member of the RRC faculty, administration or staff who has made a positive difference in the life of the RRC community, enabling its scholars and leaders to achieve more effectively their goals of Torah study, creating Jewish community, service to the Jewish people and professional service.

| The 2025 recipient is Amanda Mbuvi, Ph.D.

THE LILLIAN FERN MEMORIAL AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING STUDENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE RRC COMMUNITY

The Lillian Fern Memorial Award for Outstanding Student Contributions to the RRC Community is awarded annually at the graduation ceremony to a matriculated student who has made a positive difference in the life of the RRC community, enabling its scholars and leaders to more effectively achieve their goals of Torah study, creating Jewish community, service to the Jewish people and professional service.

| The 2025 recipient is B Epstein.

THE YAAKOV GLADSTONE AWARD FOR FINE TEACHING

The Yaakov Gladstone Award for Fine Teaching is presented annually at the graduation ceremony to a member of the faculty, nominated by students and chosen by student ballot, who exemplifies fine teaching. This prize is named in memory of Yaakov Gladstone, z”l, whose life exemplified fine teaching in the fullest sense.

The 2025 Gladstone Award winner is announced at graduation.

THE EVELYN R. MEHLMAN JEWISH MUSIC AWARD

In memory of Evelyn R. Mehlman, z”l, whose dedication to Judaism and to Jewish music was unparalleled, and who brought light to everyone she befriended, a prize is awarded annually to a full-time RRC student who advances the study or performance of cantorial or seriously intentioned music addressed to Jewish themes.

The 2025 recipient is Molly Paul.

THE JOSEPH L. AND ANN W. PINKENSON PRIZE IN RABBINICS

Through the beneficence of the Pinkenson family, the Joseph L. and Ann W. Pinkenson Prize in Rabbinics is awarded at graduation to a student who has excelled in the study of rabbinic literature and civilization.

The 2025 recipient is Chloe Zelkha.

THE A. WALTER SOCOLOW WRITING PRIZE

Through the beneficence of the children of A. Walter Socolow, z”l, the annual Socolow Writing Prize is awarded to a student for a paper, essay or monograph. The work must have been written expressly as part of the RRC course of study during the previous 12 months on a theme of interest to the Jewish people, with special attention to American Jewry, Reconstructionism and family life. It must be an articulate work, excellent in its conception, method, content and style.

The 2025 recipient is Jesse Weil for “Zionism and Ambivalence.”

THE FRED LOUIS STAMM MEMORIAL PRIZE

Through the generosity of the family of Fred Louis Stamm, the Stamm Memorial Prize is awarded annually at the RRC’s graduation exercises to a student who writes an essay that most contributes to the field of Jewish history and culture. The essay must consist of original research written during the previous year, focusing on any period of Jewish history and culture.

The 2025 recipient is Alana Krivo-Kaufman for “Who Shaped the Human Being With Wisdom?”

THE ALICE STEIN PRIZE IN CONTEMPORARY JEWISH CIVILIZATION

Through the generosity of the Joseph F. Stein Foundation, the Alice Stein Prize is awarded annually at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College’s graduation exercises to a student who creates an innovative project that explores relevant cultural and social issues, including but not limited to issues of gender, race, class and identity. A variety of formats will be considered as long as the project includes a clearly stated application to the reconstruction of contemporary Jewish life.

The 2025 recipient is Emily Herzlin for “Local Lulavim: A Reconstructionist Teshuva.”

RU’AKH AKHERET AND TIKKUN OLAM AWARDS

Each year the Reconstructionist Student Association honors students for their contributions to *tikkun olam* at RRC and in the wider community. In addition, the RSA gives the *Ru’akh Akheret* Award for a student contribution to the spiritual well-being of the RRC community.

The 2025 Tikkun Olam Award recipient (college) is Mat Wilson.

The 2025 Tikkun Olam Award recipient (community) is Louisa Solomon.

The 2025 Ru’akh Akheret Award recipient is Lesley Pearl.



Torat Yovel

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

Mazal Tov to the RRA rabbis who graduated in 1975 on their 50 years in the rabbinate.



Rabbi Ari Cartun | HUC '75



Rabbi Lee Friedlander | RRC '75



Rabbi Dan Nussbaum | RRC '75



Rabbi Arnold Rachlis | RRC '75

Honorary Awards and Degrees

Each graduation, we recognize outstanding individuals who strengthen and invigorate Jewish communities through their dedicated service. We also celebrate Reconstructionist rabbis who have devoted 25 years or more to the rabbinate, demonstrating exemplary commitment to Reconstructionist Jewish values and inspiring others through their leadership.

KETER SHEM TOV, THE CROWN OF A GOOD NAME

The *Keter Shem Tov* Award recognizes distinction in scholarship or community service in the pursuit of Reconstructionist ideals and is offered to individuals of the highest regard. The honor takes its name from *Pirkei Avot* 4:17: “Rabbi Shimon says there are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood and the crown of kingship, but the crown of a good name [*keter shem tov*] rises above them all.”

The 2025 Keter Shem Tov Award is presented to Rabbi Michael Strassfeld RRC '91.



Michael Strassfeld grew up in the old Jewish neighborhood of Dorchester/Mattapan in Boston. His father was the rabbi of the Orthodox synagogue and active in the civil rights movement, which left an indelible mark on him regarding the role of rabbis to address urgent social issues. He attended Maimonides Day School and Brandeis University, where he majored in Near

Eastern and Judaic Studies. While at Brandeis, he was the chair of the New England Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry and of Concerned Jewish Students, the group that protested at the General Assembly of Jewish Federations calling for increased funding for Jewish identity. He graduated *magna cum laude* with honors in 1971 and received an M.A. in Jewish Studies in 1972.

Strassfeld joined Havurat Shalom, one of the first intentional Jewish communities in the United States, and later co-founded the West Side Minyan and Minyan M'at in Manhattan, where he was involved in the revitalization of Congregation Ansche Chesed. Strassfeld was also the founding chair of the National Havurah Committee and a founding vice president of the Abraham Joshua Heschel School. He served as director of programs and executive director at Congregation Ansche Chesed. At the age of 41, he graduated from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and became the rabbi of Ansche Chesed, where he served for a decade. Strassfeld was on the faculty of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality and led healing services with Debbie Friedman, z"l, for many years.

Later, he served as the rabbi of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism until he retired in 2015 as rabbi emeritus. Following his retirement, he created the Jewish Counter-Culture Oral History Project, housed at the University of Pennsylvania, which has preserved the story of one of the most influential movements in Jewish life of the 20th century.

A prolific writer and observer of Jewish life for more than 50 years, Strassfeld co-edited *The Jewish Catalog* with Richard Siegel and Sharon Strassfeld, which has sold more than 300,000 copies (and is still in print). *The Second Jewish Catalog* and *The Third Jewish Catalog* followed. Strassfeld wrote the best-selling Jewish Holidays, which is also still in print. He was the editor of an early edition of *A Passover Haggadah for the Rabbinical Assembly* and later co-edited *A Night of Questions: A Passover Haggadah* with his wife, Rabbi Joy Levitt, published by the Reconstructionist Press. He was the Hebrew editor for the Reconstructionist mahzor. And he is the author of *A Book of Life: Embracing Judaism as a Spiritual Practice*.

Fifty years after the publication of the *Jewish*

Catalog, he returned once again to the challenges facing liberal Judaism with *Judaism Disrupted: A Spiritual Manifesto for the 21st Century*. He wrote about the book: "I looked back on my life and realized I keep on writing the same book over and over again. Except, I am different, and the world is different. We live in disruptive times. We must respond with daring and caring if liberal Judaism will thrive in this century. For me, the task has remained the same — making the wisdom and richness of the Jewish tradition accessible to everyone, not just those lucky enough to have my deep Jewish background. I am a radical traditionalist — someone who believes we need to make significant changes in the tradition we have inherited. But it is important for me to find within that tradition sources that support new ways of believing, belonging and behaving."

For several years, he led a small group on Shabbat mornings called the non-minyan, which explored alternative liturgies. His new project is focused on rewriting the traditional liturgy in a way that better connects to people's spiritual and emotional lives. Michael and Joy

have five children and five grandchildren, who are among the great blessings of this stage of life. And for his partner, *kishmah kein hi* — she is like her name — she brings him so much joy.

THE PRESIDENTIAL RECOGNITION AWARD

The Presidential Recognition Award is presented to an individual who has devoted their life to advancing Reconstructionist Judaism in both institution and practice, a person who has sown the seeds that nurture rabbinical training and movement leadership. This award honors an individual whose life's work has been to advance Reconstructionist Judaism profoundly, making an inclusive, vibrant, open and thoughtful Jewish practice available to countless individuals, and thereby transforming the landscape of Judaism in our day.

The 2025 Presidential Recognition Award is presented to John Riehl.



John Riehl is a longtime Reconstructionist leader. He is also a believer in *bashert*, the idea that some things are meant to happen to us. Riehl firmly believes that he was meant to encounter Reconstructionist Judaism.

Raised in a military family, Riehl grew up in San Jose, Calif., and attended college at the University of California Santa Cruz and the Monterey

Institute of International Studies, earning a degree in Russian and Soviet Area Studies.

Although he grew up attending church and Bible camp, Riehl realized that he did not believe in the central tenets of Christianity. The more he studied and talked with his Jewish friends, the more Riehl came to realize that Judaism was where he belonged. Riehl studied Hebrew in college and intensified his exploration of Judaism after accepting a position with the federal government and moving to Maryland.

In one of those *bashert* moments, Riehl literally walked into Oseh Shalom, a Reconstructionist congregation in Laurel, Md., off the street on *Erev Rosh Hashanah* during his first year in the state. He was welcomed by the congregation with open arms. Riehl underwent the conversion process under the guidance of Rabbi Seymour Esrog, a Conservative rabbi from Baltimore. It turned out that Rabbi Gary Fink, whom Oseh Shalom hired as its first rabbi, grew up in a congregation led by Esrog. Riehl saw this seeming coincidence as yet another powerful *bashert* moment.

At first, Riehl was a “reluctant Reconstructionist,” troubled by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan’s notion of God as “the process that makes for salvation in the universe” and by the decision to eliminate chosenness from Reconstructionist liturgy. He later realized that Reconstructionism had evolved from its classical roots and did not require anyone to approach God in a certain way. Rather, Reconstructionism offers an alternative way for Jews who don’t believe in a supernatural God to see the Divine in the universe.

Riehl currently serves as Oseh Shalom’s co-president. He has also served as president, religious vice president and chair of its rabbinic search committee. He often leads services, delivers *divrei Torah* (discussions of the weekly Torah portion) and lends his drumming prowess to enliven Oseh Shalom’s services.

For many years, Riehl served as the Chesapeake regional president of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation. “Seeing the Chesapeake Region grow from an afterthought and a footnote to being an incredibly powerful force in the

Reconstructionist movement has been one of the greatest experiences of my life,” he observes. Riehl served on the Role of the Rabbi Commission, which produced the famous “Purple Book,” and for many years worked closely with Jackie Land in organizing an annual Chesapeake gathering, which raised money for the movement and honored leaders from Reconstructionist communities in the greater Washington, D.C., region.

In 1996, Riehl joined the board of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation and, in 2010, the board of governors of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Since the two organizations merged, he’s remained active on the board of Reconstructing Judaism.

Blind from birth, Riehl has had to overcome deep prejudices and preconceptions about what blind people are capable of doing. As part of his job, Riehl has traveled overseas on numerous occasions, mostly to Central Asia and the Caucasus. Riehl has studied martial arts for more than 30 years and has a second-degree black belt in combat jujitsu.

In summing up his commitment to the movement,

Riehl says that “Reconstructionist Judaism truly embodies and lives the values I hold most precious: a profound respect for human beings as images of the Divine, active community participation and engagement, deep spirituality and a combination of profound respect for tradition and the courage to change and adapt to a changing world.”

DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS

RRC awards the Doctor of Humane Letters to a communal leader or scholar who is distinguished in the pursuit of Reconstructionist ideals, and has made an outstanding contribution to the Jewish community and/or to Jewish life in North America or Israel.

The 2025 honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters is awarded to Joel Hecker, Ph.D.



Joel Hecker, Ph.D., is professor emeritus of Jewish mysticism at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and has been teaching at the College since 1995. He is translator and commentator for volumes 11 and 12 of *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, the first complete annotated translation of the *Zohar*, the central and canonical text of Jewish mysticism. He is the author of *Mystical Bodies*, *Mystical Meals*:

Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah (Wayne State University Press, 2004; paperback 2023); co-editor of *Emotion in the Jewish Mystical Tradition* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2026); and has published widely on a range of themes in Jewish mysticism. He is currently working on an annotated translation of the *Ra'aya Meheimna* (Faithful Shepherd), the last stratum of Zoharic literature that remains mostly untranslated.

His scholarly interests include the history of ritual, embodiment, mystical techniques, performative emotion and visual culture in the *kabbalah* as well as the history of Jewish magic.

Hecker has been a fellow at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania; visiting research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem; visiting instructor at the University of Pennsylvania, the Jewish Theological Seminary and Yeshiva University; and has lectured at a range of universities, adult education institutions, as well as synagogues of all four major denominations. He holds a B.A. in English literature from the University of Toronto;

rabbinic ordination and master's degree in Jewish philosophy from Yeshiva University; and a doctorate in Judaic Studies, specializing in Jewish mysticism, from New York University.

As the only Orthodox faculty member at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College for the last three decades, he has tried to exemplify what living in two civilizations can look like. Having lived in Jewish communities ranging from Reform in Toronto, ultra-Orthodox in Jerusalem and Modern Orthodox in New York City, Toronto, south Jerusalem and Philadelphia, Hecker has absorbed lessons from them all and has aimed to forge a path that is dedicated to traditional observance while open to the insights into Judaism outside his own community. The effect has been both disruptive and energizing as a way of thinking about and living a robust Jewish life.

Hecker is grateful and appreciative of his colleagues and students, past and present, who have been supportive of his position at the College. He is grateful, too, to his wife, Frani; sons Razi, Shai and Hanina; and daughter-in-law,

Rachel, for their love through these many years.

Lastly, he thanks the *Ribono shel olam* — the blessed Holy One — Mystery that both fills and encompasses all reality, who has provided glimpses of glory through the Torah in its many faces.

2025 DOCTOR OF DIVINITY DEGREES

RRC awards the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity to those who have completed at least 25 years of commendable service as Reconstructionist rabbis. The following rabbis have devoted their lives to rabbinical service in keeping with Reconstructionist ideals and core values.



Rabbi Aviva Bass
RRC '00 | Coral Springs, FL



**Rabbi Micah
Becker-Klein**
RRC '00 | Bennington, VT



Rabbi Pamela Gottfried
JTS '93 | Marlton, NJ



Rabbi Erin Hirsh
RRC '00 | Glenside, PA



Rabbi Margery Jacobs
RRC '00 | Berkeley, CA



Rabbi Joshua Lesser
RRC '99 | Atlanta, GA



Rabbi Fredi Cooper
RRC '00 | Wyndmoor, PA



**Rabbi Mychal
Heather Copeland**
RRC '00 | San Francisco, CA



Rabbi Jennifer Feldman
RRC '00 | Chapel Hill, NC



Rabbi Gerald Fox
RRC '00 | Abington, PA



**Rabbi Jonathan
Malamy**
RRC '00 | New York, NY



**Rabbi David
Leipziger Teva**
RRC '00 | Middletown, CT



**Rabbi Elyse
Wechterman**
RRC '00 | Abington, PA

Tekes Hatarat Hora'ah טקס התרת הוראה

CONFERRING THE TITLE OF RABBI AND THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN HEBREW LETTERS

With this ceremony, we proclaim that these individuals are *mukhanim* — prepared and ready — to fulfill the sacred functions of a rabbi. May their work multiply and amplify Torah, *kedushah* (holiness) and *tzedek* (justice) in the world.

Kabbalat Hatarat Hora'ah קבלת התרת הוראה

RABBIS' RESPONSE

It is customary when finishing a book of Torah to recite the words below.

As we complete this chapter and another begins, we offer these words of strength to you and then invite you to offer them in return.

חֲזַק חֲזַק וְנִתְחַזַּק!

Hazak, hazak, v'nithazek!

(Be strong, be strong, and may
we strengthen one another!)

Life Stories and Wisdom Statements of the 2025 Graduating Class

Our students arrive with many gifts and life experiences. During their time at the College, they build on those gifts through study, reflection and practice. We gain strength and guidance from their life stories and the wisdom they offer.





B Epstein

איזהו חכם? הלומד מכל אדם שנאמר מכל מלמדיי השכלתי

*“Who is wise? One who learns from every person,
as it is said: ‘From all who taught me have I
gained understanding ...’” (Tehillim 119:99)*

— Pirkei Avot 4:1

איזהו חכם? הלומד מכל ענינים שעברו על האדם

*“Who is wise? One who learns from
everything that happens to them.”*

— Eliezer Tzvi Safrin of Komarno on Pirkei Avot 4:1

B Epstein grew up in Lincoln, Mass., on Nipmuc and Wampanoag land. During their time at RRC, B served as the rabbinic intern at Haverford College, Lions Gate Continuing Care Retirement Community and Reconstructionist affiliated Congregation Dorshei Tzedek. Prior to rabbinical school, B worked for more than 10 years in LGBTQ community mental health on issues ranging from domestic violence and sexual assault, to primary care medicine and aging and older adult community. B received their B.A. in Religious Studies from Pomona College.

בכל מקום שגלו שכינה עמה

*“Every place to which they were exiled,
shekhinah went with them.”*

— Megillah 29a

Somewhere on the outskirts of *halakhic* practice, where the stone wall of what our ancestors built becomes less legible, more piecemeal, overgrown by the meadow that surrounds it, you can find B’s Judaism. Embodying a mix of *frum*-at-heart, *queer art of failure* and *זורם לתשובה* (taking on obligation gradually rather than all at once), their flavor of *galus* sensibility is one that yearns for *Tzion*, even as it affirms the dignity of Diaspora. B’s Judaism also bears the indelible marks of their East Coast transcendentalist upbringing, and the Irish Celtic sense of magic and mischief that they get from their mother’s side.

*“Do I contradict myself? Very well then.
I am large, I contain Multitudes.”*

— Walt Whitman

As a rabbi, B’s *avodah* lies in supporting the transmission of Judaism *l’dor v’dor*, as our peoples’ ancient and sacred practice for cultivating our sense of Mystery, stewarding its presence in our lives and honoring the sacred connection it offers between all of creation, and all that lies beyond.

B is deeply grateful for their friends, family, *hevrutahs* and teachers whose loving support has brought them to this moment. They are especially grateful to their family, Pat O’Malley, Arnold Epstein; their teacher, Reb Karen Redgreene; their partner, Batya Levine; and, of course, their dog, Me’od.

To my fellow graduates, I offer you this Jewish twist on an Irish blessing:

*“May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields,
And until we meet again,
May HaShem hold you in the hollow of Their hand.”*





Larry Adam Ginsburg

Larry's journey to the rabbinate began in his hometown, Albany, N.Y., as a seventh-generation Albanian. Larry grew up in a small but dedicated Jewish community with many beloved institutions at its core. He grew up attending Hebrew Academy of the Capital District and spending summers at Camp Givah. These institutions and the people who supported them showed Larry what it meant to be a dedicated community leader. It was here where Larry first knew that he would be making a life of Jewish communal service.

Larry attended University of Albany, where he studied anthropology and Judaic studies. His involvement in Hillel and Chabad anchored his college years, strengthening his identity as an educator. Larry went to graduate school at New York University and soon after began his career in the Hillel movement. Hillel provided Larry exactly what he wanted as a teacher; he thrived at Hillel and is grateful to the movement for fostering his growth. Soon after, Larry became the senior Jewish educator at Capital Camps and

Retreat Center, and loved being back at camp.

After his father passed away, Larry took a look at his life and realized a long-forgotten dream of the rabbinate should be back on the table. RRC gave Larry the ability to pursue the rabbinate in a way that felt right to him, and so he took the leap of faith and began the journey.

Larry couldn't have reached this day without the love and support of so many. First, the love of his life, Adina, who made the journey the whole way with him — not just physically relocating with him, but emotionally and spiritually. Larry is grateful for the love and support from his many family members and friends, all of whom have lifted him up on his journey to the rabbinate. He wants to especially thank his mom, siblings and in-laws, without whom he would not be the man he is today. He also wants to thank the many mentors and teachers who have guided him throughout his journey.

Larry marks this moment in honor of his father, who catapulted Larry to the rabbinate and who himself would have made a fantastic rabbi.

Larry dedicates his rabbinate to all those who uplift him; he hopes to make them proud!

“For the Jew must always focus on the inner intelligence of every matter, and bind themselves to the wisdom and inner intelligence that is to be found in each thing. This, so that the intelligence which is in each thing may enlighten them, that they may draw closer to God through that thing. For the inner intelligence is a great light that shines for a person in all their ways.”

— Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, Likutei Moharan



Kanaan D. Goldstein

Krisanne Klein and Gary Goldstein worked hard to build a strong Jewish foundation for Kanaan and her sister, Edaan. She is grateful for their dedication to Jewish life and for instilling in her a love for Torah and deep connection to Israel.

At 17, Kanaan joined the U.S. Navy as a fire controlman. While deployed on the *USS Wasp*, she became the Jewish lay leader, creating sacred space for community and reflection — an experience that first called her to the rabbinate. In a setting where open flames were prohibited, she embraced *menuchat hanefesh* (“rest for the soul”) and symbolically drew flames to “light” Shabbat candles, shaping her approach to reconstructing tradition.

After six years of active duty, Kanaan transitioned to the Reserves and pursued a B.A. in psychology and Judaic and Israel studies at the University of Oklahoma. She later worked for three Hillels, serving Jewish communities at the University of Oklahoma, Goucher College and Syracuse University.

Today, Kanaan is a chaplain for the Oklahoma City Police Department, providing spiritual and pastoral care to officers and their families. Passionate about supporting underserved communities, she was recently commissioned as a Navy chaplain and is honored to continue serving both her country and her community.

A meaningful part of her journey has been working alongside her sister, Edaan Eidelbaum, a Jewish professional with the Maccabee Task Force. Since attending AIPAC together in 2020, they have sought opportunities to stand as Zionist sisters, working to protect Israel and uphold Jewish values. Kanaan is eager to continue this mission in her rabbinate.

The saying, “A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor,” speaks to the idea that true growth is forged through challenge and adversity. This lesson is deeply connected to the journey of becoming a rabbi. A rabbi is not simply someone who studies texts and leads services; a rabbi is a guide, a source of strength and a beacon in joyful and turbulent times. Just as sailors learn to navigate rough waters, a rabbi must learn to navigate the

complexities of faith, community and human experience. The struggles are not obstacles but essential parts of the journey that shape a rabbi. Becoming a rabbi is not about avoiding the storm; it’s about learning to steer through it.

Kanaan is deeply grateful for her friends and family, whose support has guided her path. Most of all, she is grateful for her fiancé, Curtis, a petroleum engineer who has stood by her side, believed in her and provided her with stability and unwavering love. They are set to marry this October, and she is looking forward to their life filled with love, growth and shared purpose.



Sam Kates-Goldman

Sam brings to his rabbinate a deep love of text and distrust of certainty. He relies on imagination and generative dissent to surface new meanings, believing that when we do so we tend the growth of the Tree we call Torah. A close reader and careful listener, Sam cultivates spaces where others learn to trust their personal resonances with Jewish ritual and text. Recognizing that the secrets buried in the text may be beyond words, he also celebrates our capacity to surface these mysteries in song, movement, art and the transcendent moments of life.

Growing up in Bangor, Maine, a small town with a small Jewish population, Sam learned Jewish community as a relational project where we are each responsible for shaping the Jewish world we need. He has deep gratitude for his family, who demonstrated the many ways of being Jewish in the world, especially his parents and grandparents, and the many community organizers and activists who nurtured his love of justice.

Sam weaves ecological awareness into his spiritual practice, drawing on his love of the mountains and oceans of the Pacific Northwest, where he lived for 20 years, and on his studies of environmental science. He offers gratitude to the friends and mentors he met there who inspired him to deepen into creative forms of Jewish inquiry, including Rabbi Seth Goldstein, Zann Jacobbrown and Sam Schrager. Sam developed his skills as a service leader with Rabbi Arik Labowitz at Congregation Eitz Or, where he later served as spiritual leader.

He has benefited immensely from the guidance and support of Rabbi Alanna Sklover and Rabbi Erin Hirsh at Or Hadash: A Reconstructionist Congregation. Last, but not least, his work with Rabbi Mira Wasserman at the Center for Jewish Ethics at RRC consistently anchors his understanding of his work as rabbi.

הַרְבֵּה תוֹרָה לְמַדְתִּי וְלֹא חֲסָרְתִּי מִרְבּוֹתֶי
אֶפִּילּוּ בְּכֶלֶב הַמֵּלָקֶק מִן הַיָּם

“I have learned much Torah, and I have not taken away from my teachers even like a dog lapping from the sea.”

— Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 68a

“The symbol does not express anything, does not mean anything. ... Each symbol is an experience, a radical change that has to be lived, a leap that has to be made. There is no such thing as a symbol, only a symbolic experience.”

— Maurice Blanchot, *The Secret of the Gollum*

“Tell Him that I cling. We cling. He made us, He can never shake us off. We will always find Him out. Promise Him that. We will always find Him, no matter how few there are, tell Him we will find Him. To deliver our complaint.”

— S. Ansky, *The Dybbuk*



Alex Malanych

Alex Malanych hails from the very middle of Connecticut, where not one but two major highways intersect. Growing up in the Pentecostal tradition, Alex discovered Judaism just out of high school as a music counselor at Camp Kingswood in rural Maine. The power and joy of that first camp Shabbat would prompt a delightfully circuitous 16-year journey to rabbinical school, and now, the chance to continue serving the community (Jewish and otherwise) beyond ordination.

Before coming to rabbinical school, Alex intended to enter academia but couldn't help working as a K-12 educator for Jewish camps, synagogues and nonprofits, including NFTY, BBYO and Emma Kaufmann Camp. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in English at Southern Connecticut State University, Alex went on to earn a master's degree in English at the University of Vermont before moving to Pittsburgh to pursue doctoral work at the University of Pittsburgh, where they realized teaching was where their passion was most alive. After earning a master's degree in Jewish

education from Gratz College, Alex worked for the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh's Teen Department before being selected as a Wexner Graduate Fellow/ Davidson Scholar and enrolling at RRC in 2021.

At RRC, Alex has served as the rabbinic intern at West Chester University Hillel and, for the past three years, as the student rabbi and education director at Congregation Am Haskalah, the Lehigh Valley's Reconstructionist Congregation and Congregation Keneseth Israel in the Lehigh Valley. Alex has also nurtured a continued passion for Jewish summer camp with four amazing years as the Jewish education director at Camp Havaya, the Reconstructionist movement's only overnight camp. With the end of rabbinical school, they are excited to continue the journey in higher education as the assistant director of religious and spiritual life and campus rabbi at Lafayette College in Easton, Pa.

This journey would not have been possible without the incredible love and support of so many people. To my family, for your patience and your belief that I could do this (and so many other things), thank you. To the communities at Am Haskalah,

Keneseth Israel and my Wexner Class 33 cohort who have helped me develop so many skills with humor and kindness, thank you. To my teachers, advisors and friends at RRC who have helped me to trust both my mind *and* my heart in the work, thank you. To Isaac, Josh, Sara and Jacob, who have seen me from the start of this process and kept me grounded in the wisdom of summer, thank you.

“Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? The one who learns from everyone ...”

בן זומא אומר, איזהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם.
— Pirkei Avot 4:1

“The most important reason for going from one place to another is to see what's in between.”

— Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*



Molly Paul

Molly lives to create opportunities for individuals to connect more deeply with themselves, with others, with their communities and with the natural world. Molly is an experienced community-builder and network-weaver who understands how essential connections are not only to a meaningful spiritual life but also to our physical and material survival. As a rabbi, Molly sees herself first as a lifelong learner and second as a teacher. She believes that effective educators are both open to learning the wisdom inside of each of their students and curious to the growth potential that lives within themselves.

Molly was born and remains rooted in Lenapehoking, the land of the Lenni-Lenape, and has been shaped by the traditions of their Ashkenazi Jewish and Lutheran family. Molly reveres their rabbinic ancestors for equipping them with the spiritual technologies of Shabbat, text study, *shakla vetarya* (the back and forth), *nigunim* and the land-based year-cycle. Molly both cherishes and is challenged by the ways Judaism dances between the

cerebral and the embodied. She loves to find a balance between emphasizing the written word and the exchange of ideas, with Jewish connection to land, the natural rhythms of our world, and the magic that lives in our plants and our waters.

Molly is committed to the Bund's principle of *doikayt* — “here-ness” — and embracing diaspora as opportunity rather than punishment. She has traveled across the global Jewish world, witnessing the beauty and multiplicity of practice that Diaspora inspires and the resilience of Jewish culture that has survived from Babylon to Eastern Europe and Spain, to India and Argentina and beyond. Molly believes that diasporism is not a temporary status to run away from but rather the spark that ignites our creativity in the fight for justice.

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנִשׁוּבָה חֲדָשׁ יִמִּינוּ בְּקֶדֶם:

“Return us, The One Who Is
Always Becoming, to You
And let us return; Renew our days as of old!”

— Eicha 5:21

Molly offers gratitude to the community that anchors them — to the beloveds, family, mentors, teachers, *hevrutot*, classmates and dear friends who have journeyed with them on their path. To the spiritual practices that sustain her — to singing wherever, whenever and with whomever will sing along, to *mikvehs* in the Schuylkill and the Bay, and to *hitbodedut* in the Wissahickon and among the Redwoods. And to the Ultimate Source, *Ribbono Shel Olam*, who reminds her that we are all connected and that Her presence is everywhere.

קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ ה' צְבָאוֹת מֶלֶאךָ הָאָרֶץ בְּבֹדָו:

“Holy, holy, holy, is The One Who
Is Always Becoming;
The whole earth is filled with Her presence.”

— Isaiah 6:3



Lesley Marlene Pearl

Lesley first heard the whisper of the Divine calling her to rabbinical school when she was 25. It spoke in her own voice, when she mused aloud, “I’m not sure I’d be a very good *rebbe*, but I’d be a great rabbi.” The words were so surprising it would take her another 25 years to answer them.

Prior to rabbinical school, Lesley worked as a newspaper reporter and writer, a massage therapist and a conversational English teacher in Madrid. Deep listening was, and is, the foundation of all of her work.

Lesley believes deeply in prayer and in community.

She insists that doubt need not be a barrier to prayer. “To Whom It May Concern” is a fine way to address the Divine. “Help” and “Thank You” are holy words. It is her experience that God often speaks through others.

Lesley learned the *mitzvah* of *Hachnasat Orchim* (“welcoming guests”) from her parents at an early age, and that there is always room for one more. As an adult, she found true belonging at 12-step

recovery meetings in church basements.

As a rabbi, Lesley seeks to connect individuals to Jewish texts, practices and traditions; the Divine; and each other. She believes in radical hospitality and obligation (with a soft “o.”) That everyone wants to be invited, but more than that, everyone wants to be needed. And the secret to creating and sustaining community is giving everyone a job and a phone list.

Lesley is grateful for tearful breakthroughs in Talmud class and *hevruta* — learning partners — who truly sharpened her mind. She offers thanks to all of her teachers, both inside and outside of the classroom, but most especially to Rabbi Alan Lew (z”l); Rabbi Brant Rosen; her cousin Diane Polasky (z”l), who stoked the fires of her religious curiosity; and Paul Muller Ortega, Ph.D., who tended and directed those fires.

“Does God need our prayers? No, we do.”

— Rabbi Rami Shapiro

וקנה לך חבר כיצד? מלמד שיקנה האדם חבר לעצמו
שיאכל עמו, וישתה עמו, ויקרא עמו, וישנה עמו, וישן
עמו, ויגלה לו כל סתריו סתר תורה וסתר דרך ארץ

“And acquire for yourself a friend. How so?
This teaches that a person should acquire a friend who will eat with them, and drink with them, and study Scripture and Mishnah with them, and go to sleep with them, and reveal to them all their secrets, both secrets of the Torah and secrets of the ways of the world.”

— Avot d’Rabbi Natan



Shira Pearl Singelenberg

Shira (she/her), a proud native of Bethesda, Md., grew up immersed in the vibrant community of Ohr Kodesh Congregation. Her passion for history took root early, eventually leading her to earn a bachelor's degree in history with a minor in medieval and early modern studies from the University of Maryland-Baltimore County. Fascinated by sacred spaces and the ways people move through the world through architecture, she developed a particular focus on architectural history.

Throughout her time at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Shira has engaged with diverse Jewish communities, always centering her work on fostering deep connections. She has guided students at Hillel of West Chester University, enriched the lives of residents at Lions Gate, an assisted-living facility in Voorhees, N.J., and most recently, stepped into new spiritual terrain as a chaplain intern at St. Mary Medical Center in Langhorne, Pa., providing multifaith spiritual care.

Shira relocated to St. Louis to serve as the rabbinic intern for Shir Hadash Reconstructionist Community and will become their rabbi upon graduation. She leads services that weave together tradition and innovation, offers compassionate pastoral care and supports congregants on their Jewish journeys. Dedicated to deepening spiritual connections, facilitating learning and building meaningful relationships, she strives to create a space where everyone can explore and celebrate their Jewish identity.

One of Shira's greatest joys is chanting Torah, where she finds her spiritual voice and helps others connect to the living history of our tradition. She is excited to continue her journey of bringing people into a meaningful relationship with both their spiritual heritage and the sacred texts that shape it.

She is profoundly grateful for her family — Ida, Maarten and Becca — whose unwavering support and belief in her have sustained her every step of the way. Shira offers gratitude to all the mentors, guides, teachers, *hevrutahs*,

friends and family that have created spaces for learning and growing on this journey.

כִּי־קִרְוָב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מֵאֵד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ:

“No, the thing [Torah] is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.”

— Deuteronomy 30:14

עֵץ־חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחֲזִיקִים בָּהּ וְתֹמְכֶיהָ מֵאֲשָׁר:

“She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, and whoever holds on to her is happy.”

— Proverbs 3:18



Louisa Rachel Solomon

“If the concept of G-d has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer and more loving.”

— James Baldwin

Louisa Rachel Solomon is building an antiauthoritarian rabbinate to serve liberation movements and marginalized Jewish communities, and help shepherd a Judaism that will outlive Zionism. She lovingly credits Rabbi Benay Lappe with inspiring these aspirations 20 years ago. Louisa is a proud member of the Jewish Voice for Peace Rabbinical Council and was lucky to receive mentorship from elders in Jews Against the Occupation-NYC and the International Solidarity Movement when she was young. Before school, Louisa was the lead singer of The Shondes, with whom she toured internationally and released five albums. Her political and creative work is anchored and inspired by community, *yirat Hashem* (awe of G-d) and Torah.

הַעֲדִידֹתִי בָכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים
וְהַמָּוֶת נִתְּתִי לִפְנֵיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְלָלָה וְיִבְחָרְךָ בְּחַיִּים

“I call heaven and earth to witness you today: I put before

you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life.”

— Deuteronomy 30:19

Louisa co-founded Jewish Liberation Learning NYC, a radical intergenerational community rooted in intersectional anti-oppression values. JLL’s Hebrew school was immediately over-enrolled, and they are excited to expand. Louisa is committed to making our tradition accessible to all, especially those who have endured harm in Jewish spaces due to structural oppression and coercion. She honors queer/trans experience as a profound theological resource and believes in a G-d who helps us protect life and resist objectification and extractionism.

“By its very nature, the Eternal You cannot become an It.”

— Martin Buber

Louisa served as The New School’s first student rabbi and was moved to glimpse *olam haba* (the world that is coming) at their Gaza solidarity encampment. Her chaplaincy at Mount Sinai was another highlight of her training, thanks to Rabbi Jo Hirschman. She is deeply grateful to the mentors who inspired her devotion to ethical close reading, a practice that serves her well. Louisa also loves officiating *simchas*, especially non-

circumcising brides and non-state weddings.

אֶסְרֶה־נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הַמִּרְאָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֶּה

“I must turn aside so I can see this amazing sight.”

— Exodus 3:3

Louisa makes home in the Catskills and New York City (Lenapehoking) with her brilliant *kinderlekh* Rosie Sher and Reuben Ziv/ia, and her *bashert* Miller Wolf. She is the proud descendent of Yiddish-speaking secularists, Abraham Lincoln Brigade fighters, SNCC members and public school teachers. Louisa’s beloved grandparents, Moishe and Millie Solomon (z”l), supported her staunchly despite their *einikel*’s bewildering priorities: direct action, punk rock and the rabbinate. Amid rising fascism, Louisa is comforted by the certainty that they would be *kvelling* today.

“Being human means throwing your whole life on the scales of destiny when need be, all the while rejoicing in every sunny day and every beautiful cloud.”

— Rosa Luxemburg

“I believe that we will win.”

— Rabbi May Ye



Chloe Simcha Zelkha

Chloe Zelkha's earliest spiritual practice was watching her parents transform their home into a place where people could land — family from Iran, her father's closest friends and many others gathering around the dinner table.

She was fortunate to attend schools with creative, transformative pedagogies — from Ohlone Elementary School to The Mountain School in Vermont — communities that showed her what education could be. At Carleton College, she graduated *summa cum laude* with a B.A. in Religion.

These early experiences led Chloe to The Food Project in Boston and Urban Adamah in Berkeley, Calif., where she designed immersive programs connecting young adults to the earth, to Jewish wisdom and to each other. Her interest in transformative learning brought her to Harvard University, where she earned a master's degree in education.

Grief has been a profound teacher on her path. After a season of personal loss, Chloe completed a chaplaincy

residency at UCSF Medical Center, offering spiritual care to pediatric and adult patients and their families. When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, she co-founded the Covid Grief Network, building a national support system for people grieving loved ones. Through the Fellowship for Rabbinic Entrepreneurs at Atra: Center for Rabbinic Innovation, she developed and led grief retreats for those in mourning, and authored *Being with Grief*, a creative workbook for loss.

More than most things, Chloe trusts in the Torah of song and silence. A dedicated meditation practitioner, Chloe has sat over 150 nights on retreat and regularly teaches classes, retreats, contemplative song and prayer for organizations around the country.

During her time at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College as a Wexner Graduate Fellow, Chloe has served as director of community learning at Eden Village Camp; created innovative programs as a rabbinic intern with The Center for Small Town Jewish Life; studied at the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem; and offered spiritual leadership at Centre College

and Dayenu: A Jewish Call to Climate Action. She is particularly grateful to Reconstructionist affiliated Congregation Kehilat Shalom, where she was lucky to serve as sabbatical rabbi.

Chloe is profoundly grateful for her teachers, mentors and loved ones who have supported her path to *semicha*. She especially thanks her dad (z"l), who taught her the Torah of beauty and wild love; and her forever *hevrutah*, Jesse.

“This is the Torah: a person.” זאת התורה: אדם
— Me'or Eynayim on Numbers 19:14

כָּל שֹׂאֵינוּ בְּהַסְתֵּר פָּנִים אִינוּ מֵהֶם
“Anyone who doesn't experience G-d's hiddenness isn't from among them [the Jewish people].”
— Talmud, Hagiga 5a

“Look, I don't understand a thing at all, Hallelujah! That's the only moment that we live here fully as human beings.”
— Leonard Cohen

“My cup overflows.” בּוֹסֵי רוֹץ
— Psalms 23:5



Welcoming New Rabbis

Into the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association



The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association congratulates this year's graduates:

Rabbi B Epstein, Rabbi Larry Ginsburg, Rabbi Kanaan Goldstein, Rabbi Sam Kates-Goldman, Rabbi Alex Malanych, Rabbi Molly Paul, Rabbi Lesley Pearl, Rabbi Shira Singelenberg, Rabbi Louisa Solomon and Rabbi Chloe Zelkha. We welcome the new rabbis who stand before us today as colleagues to join us in building the Jewish future.

The RRA seeks to be a source of strength, nurturance, leadership and collegiality for all its members throughout their careers — from rabbinical school through retirement. In building relationships among colleagues, we learn from one another as we support each other in our rabbinic work and in navigating the holy domain of teaching, tending and transforming the Jewish people.

Our association is a living example of the beauty and complexity of living in a covenantal community. Each of our new rabbis will contribute to the work of those who came before, bringing their unique skills and visions to strengthen the RRA and the Reconstructionist movement, and carrying the wisdom of our *hevre*h to the communities we serve. We look forward to formally welcoming and learning from you at the next RRA Convention in Philadelphia in March 2026.

As we learn from *Pirkei Avot*, *Aseh lecha rav u'kneh lecha haver*: “Make for yourself a teacher, acquire for yourself a friend.” At the RRA, we look forward to you joining us as teachers and becoming our friends.

Hazak hazak v'nitkhazek! May we go from strength to strength!

Rabbi Renee Bauer
President

Rabbi Barbara Penzner
Interim CEO

In Memoriam

Milton Bienenfeld	Joan Greenberg	Rhonda Medoff	Rose Polasky	Millie Solomon
Maureen Blitman	Rose and Samuel Kahn	Helene Miller	David Prager	Sherry Solomon
Marshall Block	Barbara Kamesar	Adina Newberg	Robert Schiff	Sidney Solomon
Pearl Carlessi	Leah Kamionkowski	Iris Newman	Beverly Schwadron	Hilda Tobin
Eugene Epstein	Eleanor Clare Kates	Mark Oberman	Irving Schwadron	Dr. William Tuffiash
Leah Epstein	Robert William Kates	Ahavah Oblak	Robert Schwartzman	Leonard Welch
Marilyn Fishman	Audrey E. Kaufman	Maril O'Malley	Myrna Seidman	Nora Welch
Linda Franchell	Norman Ivan Klein	Robert O'Malley	Cornelia Singelenberg	Fannie Wicentowski
Alan Ginsburg	William "Bill" Klein	Lee S. Parker	Herman Singelenberg	Sidney Wicentowski
Esther Ginsburg	Donna Krichiver	Elma Paul	Peter Singelenberg	Elias Zekha
Berek Israel Goldman	Marvin H. Kraus	Lillian Pearl	Marianne Smith	Naamat Zekha
Helen Goldman	Daniel Levin	S. Ben Pearl	Chaim Solomon	Simcha Zekha
Babs Goldstein	Avi Lir MacDonald	Casey Phillips	Henry Solomon	Marylyn Maria Zerbarini
Barry Goldstein	Ira P. May	Paul Phillips	Lillian Solomon	Robert Zerbarini
Norman Goldstein	Gloria Medoff	Henry Plotkin	Moishe Solomon	
Juan Gomez Castañeda		Diane Polasky		
Andy Gordon		Frank Polasky		
		Harry Polasky		



2025/5785

Class Gift

We believe our community is strongest when every member has access to the resources and support they need to thrive.

The safety of trans people (along with that of many others) is currently under attack and it is incumbent upon us as future rabbis to affirm that trans people are a vital, beloved part of our community.

Therefore, as members of the graduating class of 5785, we are proud to jointly establish a fund to be administered by our peers, to provide unrestricted financial assistance to trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming students whose healthcare and livelihood is being threatened on a national stage. We hope to demonstrate that by ensuring the safety of trans students we strengthen the fabric of our community – our safety is bound together – and affirm the Jewish values of *k'vod ha-briyot* (honoring the dignity of all life) and *pikuach nefesh* (saving and sustaining life).

