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# Celebrating 100 Years of the Rabbinical Assembly

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בן-זומא אומר: איזוהו חכם הלומד מכל-אדם.  
שנאמר: מכל-מלמדי השכלתי.  
(*Pirkei Avot* 4:1)

## Part Two: Seminary Years

In 1938, while I was still a student at the Seminary, one of my professors, Louis Finkelstein, ז"ל, and his wife, Carmel, surprisingly invited me to be their family's house guest for their entire summer vacation, in Littleton, New Hampshire. I accepted readily and happily! Why? The year before, I had been invited to their Manhattan apartment for an afternoon. With Hadassah, Ezra and Emunah, their beautiful, bright children, we all had a jolly good time.

That same mood reigned during the entire summer at the secluded Chaffee's Cottage, on a hill overlooking the lake. There was boating, hiking, discussing—sometimes even debating, reading and learning. The alert youth, Ezra, even joined me in Mishnah study.

Almost every evening, my professor and I would walk down to the lake and talk about every conceivable subject. With my graduation just one year away, I would bring up the subject of rabbis and congregations. Sometimes, I would ask him questions about the subject, "Freedom of Will in Tanaitic Literature," which he had assigned to the class, and to which I had submitted 60 pages of response. In turn, he wanted to know more about the thesis I had written in 1937 for the Philosophy Department of Columbia University, on "John Dewey and Woodbridge on Tradition." It consisted of their views on the traditions of philosophy, education and religion, and was based on an earlier paper I had written on the general subject of "Tradition and Change."

All in all, it was a summer of friendship, enjoyment, learning and inspiration.

Early in 1939, the year of my June graduation, Professor Finkelstein called

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me to his office and asked me a favor. In the coming academic year of 1939–40, he needed help on three projects. If he could find funds for a modest fellowship for me, would I remain at the Seminary an extra year, assisting him, rather than leave for a full-time position in a congregation?

What would my duties be?

1. Teach Talmud five days a week to six excellent Seminary applicants who were deficient in Talmud, and who had agreed to wait to become regular students the following year.

2. Assist some 30 refugee rabbis, whom the Seminary wished to help, by orienting them to American life, American Jewish history and to the American approach of Jewish organizations and Congregations. I was to organize weekly sessions, lead the discussions and invite a leading New York rabbi or other personality to conclude each weekly session by welcoming them and addressing them.

3. Promote a new brochure being prepared for publication by the Inter-Denominational Luncheons at the Seminary. I was to make appointments at the City's Denominational Headquarters, visit them and present a copy of the brochure, and encourage them to call Ms. Jessica Feingold for questions and suggestions.

Would I remain to assist him? Of course I would. What an excellent opportunity to be helpful, and to have an exciting experience in personal growth with the attendant inspiration that would surely derive.

That summer, I spent my vacation at the Seminary, preparing for the duties that I had accepted. Professor Finkelstein was off on vacation. Knowing that I had the use of the Columbia University Library, he requested that I research a few items and mail them to him. He graciously acknowledged this help by listing my name, along with several others, in the first footnote of his book, *The Religions of Democracy*. (This book was reprinted and incorporated in Louis Finkelstein's two-volume work, *The Jews*, where the footnote appears on page 1388 as Note 1.)

A few months into the academic year, I felt very fortunate for having accepted the modest fellowship and for being in New York that year. The payoff was threefold, and more:

1. The Talmud students were progressing rapidly. The refugee rabbis appreciated the help that I and the Seminary were giving them, and the cordiality of the guest rabbis and other speakers who welcomed and addressed them was genuine and infectious. The City Denominational Headquarters appreciated the personal touch with which they were being kept informed.

2. I was beginning to formulate my personal philosophy for leading a congregation, based on my three projects, and on the numerous discussions that I had with Professor Finkelstein. Here it is:

*Continue to learn and teach Talmud and the Pharisaic Tradition. Orient yourself and participate in the cultural and civic interests of the general community. By all means, be interdenominational so you can relate Judaism to all those who yearn for faith and hope.*

3. Above all, I was thankful to Professor Finkelstein for causing me to be in New York City that year. Otherwise, I might never have met the love of my life, Miss Annette Krongel of Jeffersonville, New York. We were married by Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser in January, 1941.

During the ensuing years, Professor Finkelstein continued to influence and inspire me in my positions of congregational leadership. His approach to setting goals and implementing them, both in direct and indirect ways, led me to what I consider my most important achievement in congregational life.

In 1957 I requested the Placement Commission to find a beginning congregation for me in a growing area, no matter what the salary, because I wanted to prove to myself that teenagers could be kept in the congregational education program all through their public senior high school years. How this was achieved and the fine Jewish leaders they became, among them two rabbis and two cantors, we reported to our congregation, Temple Beth Emet of Anaheim, California, in a three-part series called: "The Success of a Congregation."

The last time that I saw my revered professor was on February 6, 1972, when he came to Los Angeles for a Convocation of the University of Judaism at Temple Sinai. There, he conferred on me the Doctor of Divinity Degree. I, in turn, had the privilege of presenting him with his portrait, a work which we had commissioned. (I received this pleasant duty as the then president of the Southwest Region of the Rabbinical Assembly.)

His beloved memory comes to me from time to time, most often when I am reminded of the precious story he told me on one of our walks during that vacation of 1938 in Littleton, New Hampshire. His darling, Mooney, when she was very young, asked to stay up till midnight on Shavuot Eve, to see the heavens open.

*"But you are still too young to stay up that late. When you get older, you will be able to stay up then."*

*"Yes, Daddy, but then I won't believe it any more!"*

We both enjoyed the story, as indeed anyone should.

AARON J. TOFIELD  
ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA  
(JTS, 1939)

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No one who studied with Louis Ginzberg can ever forget his brilliant lectures. He would come to class, glance around the room and record in his mind those present and the absentees. He would then take a scrap of paper on which, presumably, he had jotted down a few notes. The notes, of course, were never referred to, and the lecture would pour forth in perfect order and clarity. His wife, Adele, often attended our class and did not hesitate to offer her questions and criticisms (particularly the year—1942?—that Ginzberg concentrated on the role of women). Frequently, Ginzberg directed a few

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barbs at Kaplan, but we students came to accept these as part of his rhetoric and as an indication that intellectual debate characterized our teachers.

When we were fortunate enough to be invited to the Ginzberg home for Shabbat afternoon, we were treated to a relaxed, genial Ginzberg. After kiddush, he would remove his kippah and throw it into a cabinet. When we students continued to wear our kippot, Adele would turn to us with the remark, "You needn't be more holy than the pope."

JACK J. COHEN  
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL  
(JTS, 1943)

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I was admitted to the Seminary in 1939, the year of the outbreak of World War II. Our class of ten was distinguished by its small size and by the fact that it was among the first to study on an accelerated basis in order to provide rabbis that would later be drafted to serve in the chaplaincy.

Several memorable days punctuated our student years. Foremost among them was December 8, 1941, the day after Pearl Harbor and the day the U.S. declared war. Classes were not dismissed, though each professor put aside his usual regimen to offer his reaction to the attack and to our entrance in the war, an event with painful implications for the two Polish students who were in the Seminary on student visas.

The now nightly blackouts attracted many of us to ascend to the Seminary rooftop to view the eerie sight of the normally brilliantly illuminated streets along Broadway, now blanketed in impenetrable darkness. The only visible light was the reflection of the moon on the nearby Hudson River, silhouetting the profiles of the tankers, freighters, and troop ships assembled in a line for the next convoy to the battle fields.

The war years at the Seminary have been adequately covered by the remarkable volumes, *Tradition Renewed*, published by the Seminary and edited by Jack Wertheimer. By contrast, let me focus on some of the lighter moments which otherwise might be forgotten.

An event of sufficient significance to interrupt each professor's lesson plan, was the publication of the *New Haggadah* by the Reconstructionist Press in the spring of 1941. It wasn't planned by the professor, but in response to carefully scripted questioning from a student, each one, in turn, voiced his displeasure with the volume and several exhibited their hostility to Dr. Kaplan for his role in its publication. Prof. Finkelstein's critique was more measured. He suggested that if we disapprove of a new haggadah, we should publish our own which he said was long overdue. The result was the publication of another version of the haggadah edited by Maurice Samuel, a close friend of Dr. Finkelstein.

For rabbinical students, sheltered by the Seminary, it was a golden era. Each student enjoyed a private bedroom and adjacent study, sharing an

adjoining bath with one other student housed in similar comfort. In the Seminary's restaurant, we were provided with menus offering multiple choices of cuisine, politely served by white-coated waiters. Cyrus Adler had insisted that America's future rabbis be properly trained in the etiquette of English gentlemen and had arranged to serve them accordingly. And to help rid them of any possible carryover of a foreign accent which some indeed had retained, if not from Europe, then from the streets of New York, he added Prof. Arleigh Williamson of Columbia University to the faculty to instruct students in proper elocution and "how to breathe" properly. It is quite likely that more than one rabbi may owe his success in the rabbinate to the little appreciated influence of Arleigh Williamson.

The ratio of students to professors was idyllic so that there were many opportunities for social interaction between student and professor. We were frequently invited to their homes on Sabbath Eve or Day. After the Motzi, Dr. Ginzberg, a frequent host with Mrs. Ginzberg, would throw the challah to his guests. And it is not meant to be disrespectful to recall that after the Motzi, he would remove his skullcap for the remainder of the meal until Birkat Hamazon.

We celebrated the professors' birthdays with class-sponsored luncheons. At the 70th birthday luncheon for Dr. Ginzberg, he was introduced by Dr. Finkelstein who stated "Most of the articles in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* are signed 'L.G.' I have the feeling that many of the unsigned articles should also be marked 'L.G.'" Dr. Ginzberg responded, "No, they are n.g."

In honoring Dr. Alexander Marx on one of his birthdays, Marx responded to the toastmaster's observation that the distinguished professor was seen sleeping during the student sermon on Sabbath morning, by admitting that "I slept during the lectures of my professors, I slept during the lectures of my colleagues, and I will sleep during the lectures of my students."

Dr. Finkelstein launched his Institute for Religious and Social Studies soon after he ascended to the presidency of the Seminary. Every Tuesday Christian ministers from all parts of New York City and beyond came to the Seminary for lectures and lunch. On that one day, students were dislocated, but not enough to disrupt classes. One winter Monday night, a massive snow storm blanketed the city. In the dead of night, while the Seminary slept, a few students, knowledgeable in the art of handling such matters, borrowed a ten-foot step ladder from the custodian's quarters, and with it as a scaffold, from the white virginal snow in the open quadrangle, they constructed a huge snowman with arms outstretched and bearing a strange similarity to Christ of the Andes. When Dr. Finkelstein arrived the following morning, who can say whether he was amused or not? He was heard to mutter something about "those crazy midwesterners" as he called on Mr. Smuelson, the Swedish custodian, to remove the "object." Mr. Smuelson, evidently an art lover, managed to delay the demolition as long as possible to make certain that it had received the widest possible audience before the arrival of the Christian ministers.

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Another event which could have disrupted my career even before it had begun deserves to be in someone's archives. Soon after my arrival at the Seminary and shortly after the beginning of the school year, Moshe Davis and I were invited to the home of Professor and Mrs. Alexander Marx for Sabbath Eve dinner. Other guests included such distinguished scholars as Ismar Elbogen, Theodore Gaster, their wives, and Anna Kleban, assistant to Dr. Marx. There may have been others. It was an awesome assembly, properly overwhelming to a couple of young Seminary students. We stood around the dining room table in solemn reverence as Dr. Marx prepared to recite the kidush. Suddenly, I heard what can be best described as a loud bellowing coming from the head of the table, vocalizing sounds that appeared to be Hebrew, "Va-ye-chow-loo ha-ow-retz v'chow! tzvow-aum etc." Coming from a relatively unsophisticated city in Iowa, I had never heard a German-accented Hebrew before and certainly not in that strange vocalization. The sounds uttered in Marx's loud and guttural voice seemed so ludicrous to me that all I could do was to keep from bursting out in laughter. I bit my lip; I felt the perspiration roll down my back as I struggled to control myself. I managed to stay in control until Moshe Davis, standing next to me, evidently undergoing the same struggle to contain his emotions, suddenly let forth the slight hint of a laugh, a hissing sound emerging from between his lips. It was all that I needed to lose restraint. I burst forth in uncontrollable laughter, which of course triggered a similar outburst from Moshe, so that in the midst of this august assembly at this solemn moment here were two insignificant students convulsed in laughter and punching each other in a vain attempt to cover the cause for their laughter which persisted for the duration of the kidush. We were humbled and humiliated. It took great effort to gird ourselves for what we knew we could expect from the sound of the *birkat ha mazon* which was yet to come. We both expected to be called to the faculty office on Monday morning. Nothing more was ever said by anyone.

I look back fondly on those formative years at the Seminary and remain grateful for the inspiration and kindness of those who taught us much more than the text, foremost among them Professors Louis Finkelstein, Mordecai Kaplan, Alexander Marx, Saul Lieberman, Simon Greenberg, Robert Gordis, H. L. Ginsberg, and Hillel Bavli. They each became friends. Their influence will continue to be reflected in their students.

STANLEY RABINOWITZ  
WASHINGTON, DC  
(JTS, 1943)

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I entered the Seminary in the fall of 1941 and was ordained three years later. This was the accelerated program made necessary by World War II and the military's need for Jewish chaplains.

I will soon describe the three-year program, but what stands out in my mind was the entrance examination which included a personal interview

before a committee of the Seminary's luminaries. I knew I did well on the textual exams but I went in to the interview with an uncontrollable dread.

"They'll ask you questions from out in left field and they'll judge you not on your replies but how you react," was the warning I got from several sources.

After the formal introductions, Dr. Louis Finkelstein asked, "I notice from your Yeshiva College transcript that you took many courses in chemistry. Why are you coming to the Seminary?"

Instead of explaining that I had begun my college studies as a chemistry major but was forced to switch to liberal arts, I quipped, "I want to solve the problem of science versus religion."

No one laughed. No one asked for an explanation. I immediately felt that I had put my foot in my mouth.

The reason for relating the above episode is what happened three years later, when on October 22, 1944, our class was lined up in the quadrangle about to march up for our ordination. Dr. Finkelstein turned to me and asked, "Abramowitz, did you solve your problem?"

"Which problem?" I asked.

"The science versus religion which originally brought you to the Seminary," he replied.

"I sure did," I replied. "There is no problem between science and religion."

I was awed by his amazing memory and his personal interest in me and probably in all other Seminary students.

The accelerated program meant that we would forego summer vacation and that in our junior year we were to serve as weekend rabbis in a pulpit of a rabbi serving as a military chaplain.

The entire student body, then, consisted of less than fifty students and we met together in class. It took me quite a while to get used to sitting with senior students who, in my mind, were already accomplished theologians often challenging the *gedolei hador*—Mordecai Kaplan, Louis Finkelstein and Louis Ginzberg.

Two incidents stand out in my mind, resulting from this accelerated program. First, was the Seminary's response to several students who requested leave from the Seminary to enlist in the army. In our second year we knew about the mass murder of Jews in Europe. The Seminary sponsored "Intercession" sessions, at which we would meet with other groups to pray to God to intercede and bring an end to the slaughter of Jews. To me and probably to others, these sessions were both meaningless and aggravating, proving only our total helplessness toward Jewish suffering.

Second, an army general was also invited to address the student body. He emphasized the importance of military chaplains in the armed forces. Whether it was the general's appeal to us or my desire to get to Germany, becoming an army chaplain was now my mission by studying for the rabbinate.

But, for me, the road to becoming a rabbi was quite challenging. Up until the time I entered the Seminary, my years were spent in *yeshivot*. Imagine my

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shock, sitting in my first class and hearing Dr. H. L. Ginzberg announce, "The three verses we are about to study in the Book of Proverbs were taken from ancient Egyptian Wisdom Literature." Similarly, hearing Dr. Mordecai Kaplan state, "One ought to be wary of emotion in religion for it may lead to idolatry."

My mind was assaulted but was put together when our student body sponsored a debate between Rabbi Milton Steinberg, representing Dr. Kaplan's views, and Dr. Robert Gordis, representing Finkelstein's ideas. I could now choose sides, so to speak, between the professors.

Probably my most memorable relationship with a Seminary professor was with Dr. Saul Lieberman. His manner of teaching was resented by many, but I found him to be the most inspiring Talmud teacher. I recall the time I had to submit an essay comparing certain passages in the Bavli, Tosefta, and the Yerushalmi. Because of my yeshiva background, I could handle the first two. But I had never studied the Yerushalmi. Professor Lieberman privately taught me its Aramaic text and enabled me to complete my paper. Those private sessions were always in his office and always lasted past midnight.

Another meaningful rapport was with Prof. Alexander Marx, the eminent historian. We were given an assignment to prepare essays on specific topics. From the list, I chose "References in the Mordechai" (a commentary on the Talmud). Dr. Marx was the supervising professor.

"Do you read German or French?" Dr. Marx asked when I presented myself in his office.

"No," I replied.

"Latin?" he asked.

"No," I replied.

"Do you have enough time to give to work on this assignment?"

"Yes," I replied with confidence. "We're staying in the Seminary during the summer and by September I should be ready."

The professor burst into a hearty laugh and came around the desk to my side, saying, "Come, I will show you."

He took me to the Reading Room of the Library, up one flight of stairs and led me to the Seminary's Manuscript Room where he showed me various original manuscripts, including Maimonides, Ibn Ezra and the Mordechai.

I looked about the room, listening to the professor describing how these manuscripts came into the Seminary's possession and the enormous historical value these represented. I was awestruck. I doubt if any other Seminary student had the *z'chut* to be taken on such a tour of the Seminary's Manuscript Room. As we left the room, Dr. Marx put his hand on my shoulders saying, we give three years to work on this assignment.

My years at the Seminary, sitting at the feet of greatness, can only be described as years of awe, wonder, and amazement.

Within a year of my ordination, I became chaplain in Germany and Austria, deeply involved with the fate the Holocaust survivors and working with the Bricah. I stayed on in Europe three additional years, serving with the JDC in Italy as Chief Emigration Officer, where I helped to liquidate the

very DP Camps I had helped to establish. It was Prof. Lieberman who brought me back to the United States.

On his way to Israel in the summer of 1950, he invited me to visit him aboard his ship which docked in Naples.

"Why aren't you returning to the rabbinate?" he asked.

"I can't decide whether to make Israel my future. I was born there and I long for the Land."

He lectured me on the importance of serving the American Jewish community, especially in view of the Seminary's "investment" in my education there (which at the time was free). He also congratulated me on my contributions to the survivors but stressed that I have a responsibility to return to serve as a rabbi in America.

As I took leave of the ship, Prof. Lieberman quipped, "It's better to be in America and long for Israel than to be in Israel and long for America."

MAYER ABRAMOWITZ  
NEW YORK, NY  
(JTS, 1944)

My most memorable teacher was Shalom Spiegel. He was an unforgettable teacher and impacted enormously on me. For example: Shalom Spiegel came from Vienna. His brother was S. P. Eagle, the producer and I think director of the film, "Bridge on the River Kwai." Shalom Spiegel, too, was an artist. He would come to class dressed in a sport jacket and a black or gray pair of pants, always immaculate and giving the impression of a continental. He could never understand, and he expressed it in public, why it was that when he walked into the classroom, the student body didn't stand and click heels as the students did in Vienna. At least, he said, let them stand as a sign of *derech erez*.

We once traveled with him on the subway to a Zionist meeting. Coming back, we were all seated, as was he, when a young girl got on at one of the stations. There were no vacant seats. Before we had a chance to do anything, he stood up, pointed to his seat, which was now vacant, and said to her, "Young lady, please, my seat," which he did with a flourish. This was Shalom Spiegel, the Viennese; Shalom Spiegel, the artist, the poet, and, of course, the great scholar.

When Professor Mordecai Kaplan took two weeks off from his course in homiletics, Shalom Spiegel was assigned to teach it. When we came to his class that first time, it was a different Shalom Spiegel, and I didn't recognize him. He was dressed in a black suit and a homburg, the epitome of how a rabbi should dress. His voice was different; his whole style of communication was different. Shalom Spiegel had disappeared and in his place was Rabbi Spiegel, the professor of Homiletics. He was transformed. It was no longer the Viennese young man who stood in front of us; it was a sage who was transmitting to his *talmidim* the art of being a rabbi.

Shalom Spiegel was a master linguist. When, for example, he would use

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five words to express a particular action, you could rest assured that if you looked in a dictionary, he would have used them in the proper sequence or gradation from the most specific to the most general—a fantastic scholar and a wonderful, interesting human being. That was Shalom Spiegel.

ALBERT L. LEWIS  
CHERRY HILL, NJ  
(JTS, 1948)

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My most memorable classes at the Seminary were with Abraham Joshua Heschel and Saul Lieberman. Heschel awakened in me an appreciation of the inner beauty of Jewish life, and Lieberman instilled in me a love for Talmud study which has continued all my life. In a way one might say that they represented the poetry and prose of Judaism.

JOSHUA STAMPFER  
PORTLAND, OR  
(JTS, 1949)

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The most memorable teacher during my days at the Seminary (1945–1949) was Professor Saul Lieberman.

To all of us he was the role model of the authentic scholar. One of the great talmudists of the last century, his study on the fifth floor was crammed with thousands of volumes of books. A true matmid, he would study at his desk day and night. With the aroma of fine cigar smoke in the air, he would discuss Talmud with those of us fortunate to be invited to his office.

He was a master pedagogue and a tremendous disciplinarian. His students will tell you that in his class we were filled with trepidation, lest he would call on us, even though we were well prepared.

A handsome white-haired gentleman with piercing blue eyes, his favorite ploy was to query in his beautiful accent, “Silveerman, are you prepared?” “Yes, Professor,” I would answer very cautiously. “Then reed you, Epshtein” he would exclaim with a twinkle in his eye.

It was a game! On occasion we would answer this query, “Yes, Professor, more or less.” His inevitable reply would be, “Moore or less?”

The first year in his class he taught Nedarim with the Ran. Happily, I was one of his favorites, not that I was so astute in Talmud, but fortunately he conducted the class *ivrit b'ivrit*. Since I spoke Hebrew fluently, I was able to interpret the Ran in a very rapid Hebrew, often times not quite understanding what I was saying. But my Hebrew did impress him.

My most unforgettable memory of this great scholar and teacher was in 1948. Two classmates, Pesach Krauss, Joshua Stampfer, and I received permission from him as the first students in Seminary history to spend our junior year in Israel and receive credit for it. Before we left in May of 1947, he admonished us: “I don’t care how many courses you take at the Hebrew

University, but you must study Talmud at the Harry Fishel Institute. If you do this, you will receive credit and may enter the senior class."

Three weeks into our studies that fall the War of Independence began. The Hebrew University closed its doors. Like most of the Americans there at the time, I joined the Haganah and participated in the battles in and around Jerusalem.

I returned to New York that summer and approached Professor Lieberman. "I hope that you will give me credit for my junior year so that I may enter the senior class in September."

"Silveerman, did you study Talmud?"

"No, Professor. The war broke out and I spent all my time fighting in the Haganah with a First World War water-cooled machine gun."

"That's veery nice, Silveerman. However, I cannot give you credit for your junior year if you did not study Talmud."

After much negotiation, he made me a proposition: "Learn 50 *blatt* Gemorrah with Rashi and Tosefot. If you pass my examination then you can enter the senior class."

I dedicated that entire summer to a study of Kiddushin.

Saturday night before my Sunday examination, I was studying until the early hours of the morning in my dormitory room on the fourth floor. In traditional talmudic singsong, I was chanting the Talmud at the top of my lungs. I finished studying at 2:00 AM and prepared for bed. To my horror, there was a loud knock on my door. There stood Professor Lieberman!

I was distraught. "Forgive me Professor, I must have disturbed you. I completely forgot that your study on the fifth floor was directly above my dormitory room."

"No, Silveerman, I heard you studying and then you stopped. I thought perhaps you had a problem with the text!"

"No, no, Professor, I finished my studies and was preparing for bed. I'm terribly sorry that I disturbed you." I thought to myself, there goes my examination the next morning. To my great happiness, I was examined, passed and entered the senior class on schedule.

However, there is a fascinating sequel to this story. I heard this from my uncle, Rabbi Herman Hailperin, who served a congregation in Pennsylvania. He told me that soon after this episode Professor Lieberman lectured to his congregation in Pittsburgh and related this story. He concluded: "I can't believe that here was a young man, born in the United States, parents also born in this country, on a late Saturday night, rather than attend a play, or frolic on Broadway in Times Square, was in his Seminary dormitory room singing aloud in traditional Gemorrah "sing-song" as he studied the Talmud. And when his voice reached me on the fifth floor, it occurred to me that when the voices of the students on the fourth floor blend with the voices of the professors on the fifth floor, then there is a future for Judaism in the United States."

I have never, never forgotten this experience.

HILLEL E. SILVERMAN  
GREENWICH, CT  
(JTS, 1949)

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My most memorable classes were with Mordecai Kaplan. In a way, each class was a “happening” through Professor Kaplan’s challenging philosophical lectures, reflecting depth of analysis and testing the security of our faith. Kaplan was not a charismatic leader in the popular sense but his aristocratic personality, his original creativity, dealing with the issues and questions that troubled American Jewry and the debates that ensued, gave each class a dramatic atmosphere.

I don’t believe that a particular class influenced me most, but I was affected by the tone and the depth of Professor Kaplan’s sessions. “Think, think” was his ever recurring admonition. In fact, Kaplan’s classes were “happening” with the depth and intensity of the exchange between professor and students creating a sense of drama.

Although Professor Kaplan’s demeanor was stern and analytic following strict intellectual criteria, his passionate creative ideas for the reconstruction of American Judaism gave his session an emotional force. As his student, one felt a partnership in making Jewish history.

A totally different style made up Robert Gordis’ Bible classes. Here one felt the temperament and activity of the busy congregational rabbi and outstanding scholar. “Machine-gun Gordis,” as he was often referred to by the students, pointing to his remarkable easy flow of words and phrases.

He often spoke of the importance for the rabbi to organize his time tightly. He himself assigned a specific time frame in minutes for each of his appointments. “A congregation gets the rabbi it deserves,” he often commented. During the early years of my rabbinate I almost became the assistant rabbi of his synagogue.

Dr. Moshe Davis, one of the younger builders of Conservative Judaism, was the faculty member I had written to from overseas. He was a man with a fantastic sense of humor who possessed the ability to have a new idea almost each moment, and was responsible for many new programs of the Seminary. I had no classes with him but attended weekly meetings at his home on behalf of the Hebrew Arts Foundation.

The week’s class studies ended with the charismatic Seminary Chancellor Louis Finkelstein speaking on Jewish theology. He conducted his session not just on the text, but shared with the class reports from some of the high level meetings he attended during the week. At the same time, he acquainted us with the lives of important personalities in American Judaism and American public life.

I remember him speaking of his meetings with the famous conductor Serge Koussevitsky of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, who was searching for spiritual answers from Judaism. One day he asked Dr. Finkelstein how a man of his scholarship could follow the laws of *kashrut*, granting the role of the biblical ethical and moral values. The chancellor began his reply by asking the maestro how many notes made up a symphony. “Of course, thousands,” he said. “What would you think of omitting a few bars or a section?” contin-

ued Dr. Finkelstein. "That is impossible, such omission would fracture the symphony and make it incomplete," Koussevitsky continued. "Well, *kashrut* is part of the symphony of the Torah," concluded Dr. Finkelstein.

SOL LANDAU  
CORAL GABLES, FL  
(JTS, 1951)

At the Jewish Theological Seminary, I found myself. It began in Mordecai Kaplan's class. He urged us to focus on the new facts of Jewish existence.

The lessons of the Holocaust in 1945–46 were obvious. European Jewry, the crown in our people's universe, was in shambles. Yet, we knew, "*Netzakh Yisrael lo yishaker*," the eternity that is Israel shall never be denied, forgotten, or dismissed from the human scene. He said we, the students training to be the rabbinic leadership of tomorrow, must saturate ourselves with the facts of Jewish history, the essence of our people's longstanding love affair with the realm of ideas. I studied with him for five years, and during that time we covered the realm of ideas, the biblical, the post-biblical, the period of the *anshei kneset hagedolah*, the period of the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha, the earliest *midrashim*, the earliest *mishnayot* and *braitot*, the Talmud, the mystical literature, the kabbalah, the period of the Gaonim, the Tosafot; early and late Medieval, the Shabtai Zevi and Rubeni movements; the more recent Kabbalah of Itzhak Luria; Hasidim, the Reform movements, the enlightenment, Zionism, and, above all, the experience of the revival of Jewish life in the post-Inquisition expulsion period from the 13th to the 20th centuries. He saw the Holocaust as the final hurrah of an embittered world.

In 1946, I met my first displaced persons, survivors of the Nazi concentration camps. I became involved in their settlement in the U.S. To this day, I keep track of those I met at Rosenblum's Restaurant on Broadway and 100th Street and at the Hotel Marseille on 103rd and Broadway.

Mordecai Kaplan's erudition, his challenges to think, to revise, to reconstruct, to save the burning embers so we may live again, inspired me and my classmates.

HARRY Z. SKY  
FALMOUTH, ME  
(JTS, 1951)

The memory I wish to indulge goes back to October 1948, when I entered JTS after five years at Yeshiva, first in the High School and then at the College, and all five years in the Talmud program. The baggage I brought with me to the Seminary included happy and satisfying years of study at Y.U., but mostly stray passages of Tanakh and Talmud, unfused and inchoate. There was a strong will to continue learning and to serve. I had not the foggiest notion where it would take me.

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Classes at the Seminary proceeded more or less as anticipated. One of them was with a man whose name I had barely heard before and knew virtually nothing about. Mordecai M. Kaplan's class in the Philosophy of Judaism proved to be an eye-opener. He was intent on probing with us the deepest recesses and definitions of our mind and heart. Inadvertently I believe, Kaplan sent shivers up the spines of at least this freshman. A philosophy major at Yeshiva University and always interested in theology, I would say that those classes with Kaplan were the most stimulating periods of the week.

At one point or another in my four years at the Seminary, I studied many subjects with Kaplan, including midrash, philosophy, theology, mysticism and homiletics. No matter what the course of study, Kaplan was pushing his own agenda. I am sure the curriculum for the course would look impressive, but it was in the best sense a primer in Kaplanian civilization and oftentimes in Reconstructionism. I cannot say I bought it all but it certainly was fascinating to hear it from the master.

Prof. Kaplan, with Lithuanian persistence, probed the definition of words and ideas we daily used. To his analytical ear came the desire to hear what God, Torah, Israel, chosenness, covenant, vocation all meant specifically to us. For each, there was only one definition that was considered correct. To find that was like putting the pieces of a puzzle together. Success was exhilarating, anything less deflating.

At that time Mordecai Kaplan was the reigning influence at the Seminary. I remember when copies of *The Reconstructionist* magazine would arrive biweekly to the Students Lounge, which was then on the first floor of the Schiff Building. It seemed the bearer of those magazines was burdened down heavily with a copy for each student in the Rabbinical School. Articles were read and argued, but I am afraid that through it all our professor felt you were either with him or against him. There was not much of the middle ground such as the Rambam had advocated.

The rest of the Seminary faculty was alternately competent or brilliant, but mostly detached. That is one thing Kaplan was not. His influence derived from his intelligence, candor, and commitment, and from his deep interest in convincing his students. His agenda for American Jewry seemed right on target. They were my goals as well—then.

It must be recorded that it was Mordecai Kaplan alone, of all the Seminary instructors, who insisted that we read chapter by chapter the basic work then in Jewish mysticism by Gershon Scholom. I for one have been ever grateful for the sweat that was poured into *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, because without it I would not have had the faintest notion of Zohar, kabbalah or mysticism in general. And while I hear nowadays that some of our younger scholars like Danny Matt and David Ariel (both of whom were friends in their early years of our son Jonathan) have gone beyond and revised Scholom, like Moshe Idel, at that time it was conscience-raising material that I have often returned to. I am sure no one will ever contradict Scholom's last chapter of Hasidism as popular kabbalah gone public.

One day toward the end of my Seminary stay, Kaplan approached me as our class concluded and asked if I would meet him in his office shortly thereafter. I was excited, but also worried. I hoped that he was not going to lower the boom.

In his small office, Kaplan was most gracious. He offered me half of his luncheon sandwich. Knowing that if I accepted I would probably choke on it, I declined with gratitude. He told me he had been watching me, listening to me in class, and reading my papers, and wondered if I would like to join the Editorial Board of the *The Reconstructionist* magazine. I reacted calmly, but internally I felt as though I had just been nominated to the presidency of the United States:

I did join the Board and served for a number of years. Biweekly we would meet at the SAJ on 86th Street and discuss editorial policy and the general direction of the magazine. Kaplan was always present and was prepared with ideas affecting the Jewish world. He entered into the discussions with his usual vigor and enthusiasm. That was an interesting period in my life and prepared me for a number of similar assignments in later years, including a stint as editor of *Conservative Judaism*.

It also led ultimately to the writing of my first article ever to be published. It appeared in *The Reconstructionist* in the 1953–54 period and was a report of a trial against Conde McGinley for defamation by Joachim Prinz of Newark, who was then my boss at Temple Bnai Abraham. I am sorry to say that I don't even have a copy of that article, but I do recall that I received more reaction to it than almost anything that I have ever written.

What I am describing is Mordecai Kaplan as my lightning rod in bringing together some of the passion and commitment I had to the Jewish future in America. My arrival at the Seminary coincided with the rise of the State of Israel and of course that played a significant part in Kaplan's and in all of our thinking. But before long a black cloud appeared on the horizon. I realized that I could no longer accept the precise theological definitions that Kaplan had for God, Torah and Israel. It seemed more suited to Matthew Arnold's world than to mine.

That dissatisfaction was fed by many sources. My beliefs were fashioned at the Yeshiva of Flatbush from which I graduated, that is to say the elementary school, for there was as yet no high school, and at the Young Israel of Flatbush where, I was a bar mitzvah. Young Israel incidentally, which has not gone in a different direction, was then the spiritual home of many progressive observant Jews, of which Mordecai Kaplan himself was a founder. My father, of blessed memory, told me that he became part of that Young Israel of Flatbush as did other members of our family (my late aunt, Anna Fenster, was the first Secretary of the Young Israel) because they included the younger, more modern Jews, interested in integrating tradition with the contemporary. Sounds familiar!

In my second year at the Seminary, I became the student-rabbi of the Mt. Kisco Jewish Center in Westchester County. After a short while of commuting, Ricky and I and our young daughter Elissa moved to Mt. Kisco. My predecessor in that position had been Wolfe Kelman, of blessed memory, who

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had introduced me to the search committee in a memorable trip that we made together in my car one weekday afternoon in October 1949. My practice at that time was to give a brief *dvar torah* at the late Friday night service and then we would sip a cup of tea together at the Oneg Shabbat and discuss what had been said. On this one particular evening, under the impact of Kaplan and echoing my master, I had apparently said something about getting rid of the notion of God as a “bearded grandfather in the sky.” Later I was to learn that this was a line that Kaplan often used but which originated with Sigmund Freud. In any case, I can see the face of this kindly gray-haired lovely woman who said to me: “Rabbi, I am a simple Jew from Vilna. I am not a philosopher. What I learned about Judaism entered my *neschama* as a child in my parents’ home. What I saw and what I learned I have never forgotten. If I believed what you have said here tonight, I would stop coming to shul.” It was not said with anger or as an idle threat, but as a simple statement of faith. I felt shattered.

Within the period of time then, the lightning rod which Kaplan had been for me began to splinter. I came increasingly under the influence of the writings and outlook of Milton Steinberg, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig—none of whom I ever met—and later of Abraham Joshua Heschel.

The fall from Kaplanian grace was neither easy nor comfortable. I recorded it in an open letter to *The Reconstructionist* which Kaplan reprinted together with his response in his book, *Questions Jews Ask*. Reading it today, I am not embarrassed by a single line. I pointed out that the God of our sidur and of our Tanakh calls for more awe, mystery and grandeur than the “power that makes for human fulfillment.” I accused the Reconstructionist definition of forcing many of us to stand “head inside but heart out,” unchallenged by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and of Jewish history and destiny. (Today I would have added the names of the matriarchs as well.)

My debt to my teacher is ongoing and abiding. It was above all, his dedication to the future of the American Jew that endeared him to me. It hurt to part company with him, but I also learned how important it was to say what you believe and to believe what you say.

Mordecai M. Kaplan was for me a prod to relevancy, discovery and honesty. I am not sure that he would subscribe to where I have ended up, but he is as much responsible for my getting there as anyone.

MYRON M. FENSTER  
ROSLYN, NY  
(JTS, 1952)

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I was green behind the ears, unlettered and untutored, during my Seminary years ('49-'53). Among my instructors were the late Rabbis Finkelstein, Greenberg, Arzt, Heschel, Marx, Lieberman, Bavli, Gordis, Levinthal, Cohen, all of blessed memory. More than class content, I admired those ‘greats,’ their scholarship, their personalities, their commitment. Most, but

not all, entered the classroom unprepared. Some of my notebooks left the class heavy with notes, others contained my doodling.

The late Max Arzt was our Practical Rabbinics professor. One class session was devoted to the marriage ceremony. Rabbi Arzt instructed us to ask three mandatory questions to the prospective bride and groom. After detailing the first two questions, the hour for dismissal arrived. The class never learned the third question. Experience taught us to ask more than three questions.

I believe it was Rabbi Gordis, who laid the foundation for my appreciation of Bible studies. His insights were incisive. He revealed intent and meaning of the text. I owe my love of text study to his teaching style.

JACOB SHTULL  
PEPPER PIKE, OH  
(JTS, 1953)

There is a charming story involving my wife, Sora, and Dr. Hillel Bavli. Sora also studied at the Seminary. One of her teachers was Hillel Bavli. At the first class, when he learned that Sora was the daughter of Dr. Azriel Eisenberg, he said, "I borrowed a book from your father twenty-five years ago and have not returned it. I will bring it next session for you to give to your father." And he did.

When studying with Mordecai Kaplan, you could not remain uninvolved. He challenged your thinking and preconceptions. I recall his assigning us a book that dealt with a number of primitive cultures and their evolution. Dr. Kaplan extrapolated from this book and applied its lessons to Judaism. I had read the introduction in which the author said its finding could apply only to the cultures he had studied and should not be generalized to other cultures. When I called this statement of the author to Dr. Kaplan's attention, he stormed out of class. It was certainly not my intention to offend him or anger him. I went to his office, apologized for any hurt that I may have caused him, and he returned to class.

I married Sora Eisenberg in my junior year at the Seminary and her senior year at Queens College. There were no apartments available across the street from the Seminary, so Sora and I rented in a building on 110th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam. Because of the location, I would sometimes walk home with Dr. Heschel. His warmth, piety and sincerity were contagious. He davened on Shabbat at the Seminary with the students. I will never forget the recurring experience of Dr. Heschel holding his beloved daughter in his arms while reciting the Amidah. He was a model of a loving husband, father and professor to me. I recall going to Schraft's Ice Cream Parlor with Sora and with Dr. Heschel and relaxing with him. Dr. Heschel introduced me to the world of theology, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and to the best of Hasidism, as he interpreted it for the world.

When I entered the United States Navy, I asked both my father and Dr. Saul Lieberman the same question. Each, independently, gave me the same

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answer regarding my riding on Shabbat in situations which were not life threatening or *pikuah nefesh*. Dr. Lieberman, like my father, distinguished between a biblical prohibition and a rabbinic prohibition. The prohibition of driving a car came under the biblical law, "You should not kindle a fire on the Sabbath day" because of the combustion engine. To be a passenger was a rabbinic prohibition. Each advised me to get a non-Jewish driver wherever possible if I had to go somewhere beyond walking distance on the Shabbat or yom tov. I found Dr. Lieberman very understanding and compassionate whenever I approached him with issues of halakhah. Dr. Lieberman's advice served me in good stead in the Navy and in my civilian rabbinate.

My most memorable classes at the Seminary were with Shalom Spiegel. He introduced me to the fascinating world of medieval Hebrew literature. He also taught me to engage in serious study of text. I recall his assigning an essay on the prophet Amos, written in Hebrew by Yehezkel Kaufmann. When we came to class, he asked no questions about the essay, but concentrated his inquiry on Yehezkel Kaufmann's footnotes. I recall the incident thoroughly because I had read all of the footnotes and was one of the few students able to answer his questions. He explained to the class that in good scholarship, we check sources to see if the scholar has interpreted those sources in a reasonable and meaningful way.

Shalom Spiegel assigned us a dialogue by Plato as background for some of the poems that we were going to read. In class, he asked all of us to close our books and to give the platonic argument, step by step, from beginning to end.

At the first class I had with Dr. Spiegel following my marriage, he asked me, "Komatzta on Holamta" in the presence of the class. He was referring to the verse "*matza isha matza tov*" and the verse "*motzei ani et haisha mar mimovet.*" I was caught off guard and would learn with the rest of the class what he had in mind. I will always remember his biting comments when no one in the class knew an answer. "Is there no one who can redeem the honor of the class?"

AARON LANDES  
ELKINS PARK, PA  
(JTS, 1955)

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I was enrolled in a Jewish Theological Seminary graduate school course in Talmud and Midrash taught by Professor Max Kadushin. Earlier I had read his book, *The Rabbinic Mind*, and now I seized the opportunity to study with him. The course began with a review of select passages of *Pirkei Avot* as interpreted in the light of the Kadushin approach of "organic thinking."

I did not comment too much until we reached the fourth chapter of *Avot*. We had just read the passage reminding us not to use the Torah as "a spade to dig with" (4:5; in some editions, 4:7). The usual interpretation here (including Rashi's) is that we should not use our knowledge of the Torah for earning a living. If taken literally, this would rule out the professional rabbinate!

I offered a different interpretation. The mishnaic Hebrew word *kardom*

means an "axe," as well as a "spade." The passage may very well mean that we should not misuse or abuse the Torah as one would misuse an axe if he chose to dig (rather than chop) with it. In other words, an honorable use of the Torah is acceptable; a dishonorable use is prohibited.

Professor Kadushin liked the interpretation. "Where did you learn that?" he asked.

I shrugged. I did not have a reference for it. "From *avi, mori* [my father, my teacher]," I finally said.

As we continued our reading, I soon found occasion to offer another alternative explanation. "That's also a good *drush*," said the professor. "Where did you learn *that*?"

Again, I shrugged and could not offer a written source. "At my father's Shabbos table."

After I had offered a third comment, Professor Kadushin smiled and asked, "Did you learn that from your father, too?"

"Of course."

Professor Kadushin, in front of the class, now gave me a very serious look and said, "You know, you have a wonderful father."

And I answered simply, "I know that, Dr. Kadushin."

MURRAY STADTMAUER  
BAYSIDE, NY  
(JTS, 1955)

I was a rabbinical student at JTS from 1954 through 1959. With a Columbia BA in hand, and having had an extensive Judaic background, including Ramaz, Massad and the Seminary College of Jewish Studies, I entered as a four-year student. I took an extra year, probably due to my ongoing analysis, being single, and wanting to delay a career decision. It was quite fashionable back then to take a year to devote to the "heavy" stuff, during which one studied only Talmud and Bible. I actually had Professor ("Read You, Bloom") Lieberman for Talmud for all five years, which may qualify me for the *Guinness Book of Records*. After a stint as student body president and three summers at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, I became a very minor figure in the Seminary's administrative ranks. I worked for a couple of years as an assistant in the office of the chancellor. I mostly did administrative work, which in the world of Talmud research was a competency not overly valued. It was this combination of humble administrative rank and past presidency of the student body that led to a most serendipitous event.

I was an administrative organizer of the September 1957 Convocation when Chief Justice Earl Warren came to visit the Seminary for a weekend. He had come to "study" talmudic ethics. That certainly was a Finkelstein coup, and a high point in the Professor's (*which is what we always called him, not Rabbi or Doctor, or Moreh, almost never using his last name, or God protect us, Louis*) "bridge building." A photograph of the Chief Justice and the Chan-

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cellor made the front page of *The New York Times*. One of my assignments that Shabbat afternoon involved greeting the limousine in which the former Chief Justice was to arrive at the Seminary. Upon reaching over to open the rear door, I discovered to my surprise and dismay (*it had not been planned for!!!*) that next to the Chief Justice sat former President Harry S. Truman. Legend has it that Chief Justice Warren had said to HST—"Harry, I've been invited uptown for a good Jewish meal—want to come along?" (This of course demonstrates yet again the crucial place *kashrut* has had in determining Jewish destiny.)

I ran to Seymour Fox who was my immediate boss, shouting; "Fox, Fox, Truman's here!! Truman's here!!!!!"

Fox responded; "Bloom, I've got no time for your jokes; Don't bother me, Bloom, I'm busy. Just do your job."

But it was no joke. Truman's presence, a delightful surprise, had a down side. *It upset the seating plan for the luncheon*. Only one seat was left at the lead table. This presented a serious problem. Every bigwig and faculty member coveted that one remaining place. Having a faculty member would have resulted in hurt feelings of other faculty. Choosing a member of the upper administration the same. It was my dumb luck and good fortune that Shabbat to be the perfect solution to a highly politically-sensitive protocol problem. The immediate past president of the student body, who was single and also helping administer the weekend, would do just fine! So it came to pass that I sat down for Shabbat lunch with Professor Louis Finkelstein, Chief Justice Earl Warren, President Harry S. Truman and Professor Saul Lieberman. (Due to Shabbat restrictions there were no photographs, so my children and grandchildren will no doubt refer to this tale as one of the stories I told in my dotage.) I watched in some horror as professor Lieberman sucked his tea through a sugar cube (*mah yomru hagoyim?*), and heard President Truman, clearly oblivious to Professor Lieberman's indiscretion, praise Professor Shalom Spiegel's magnificent speech, "Amos vs. Amaziah," (*of which I still have a number of copies*) as being the finest talk he had ever heard. HST sent the following thank-you note on September 17, 1957.

*Dear Mr. Finkelstein,*

*You do not know how very much I appreciated the privilege of being present at luncheon with the Chief Justice of the United States.*

*I more than enjoyed the talk on the chapter of Amos quoting, "Amos, what seest thou?" And I said, "A plumbline."*

*I have known that entire passage word for word for a long time, and I wish you would tell that able and distinguished rabbi that I have never had a more pleasant experience than listening to his lecture.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Harry S. Truman*

JACK H BLOOM  
FAIRFIELD, CT  
(JTS, 1959)

I graduated JTS in 1959 and began the wanderings which would finally transport me to Sweden and a unique career as rabbi of the Stockholm Jewish Community, the last true *Einheitsgemeinde* in Europe. My years at the Seminary were for me, as for most others, a time for studies with mostly orthodox scholars, major researchers, some outstanding classroom teachers but, unfortunately, not a period of spiritual growth. I found no one to guide me. (But Mordecai Kaplan did give me an opportunity to pour out my soul in private.)

The Talmud never moved me but I did find inspiration in the Bible, which spoke to me through Professors Spiegel, Gordis and Ginsberg, though I was never tempted to make its study the center of my professional career. I had, as well, the very infrequent opportunity to take a seminar with Professor Alexander Sperber, of whose existence most Seminary students were unaware. He sat high up in the library stacks and on occasion offered a Bible seminar, a one-on-one meeting.

Professor Sperber was a grammarian and was, at the time, spending hours poring over photographs of the relatively newly discovered Dead Sea Scrolls, especially the Isaiah Scroll. He was not a pedagogue but was very friendly, and patient, considering how little I knew about Biblical Hebrew grammar.

I recall with special pleasure one session that has guided me since 1974, when I was appointed Jewish representative to the parliamentary board responsible for a new translation of the Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha and the Christian Holy Scriptures to modern Swedish. At this unforgettable sitting he summarized the entirety of his findings, the details of which are recorded in his several works.

I have never read the three books that he gave me: *Hebrew Based Upon Biblical Passages in Parallel Transmission* (Cincinnati, 1939—off-print from Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. XIV); *Hebrew Grammar: A New Approach* (JPS, 1943) and *Biblical Exegesis: Prolegomena to a Commentary and Dictionary to the Bible* (JPS, 1945). Two of these works are massive lists of textual variations, and while these can be studied, they are, in truth, unreadable. I have never been able to caterpillar my way through the lists of textual, grammatical, phonetical exceptions. The third work is a sketch of a new grammar that tears down that which previous generations of German Bible experts have built up, but does not provide, at least for me, a new scaffolding to stand upon when building a new grammar.

Sperber proved to me that our ability to read and understand most of the Hebrew Bible is a miracle. What else can it be, when one clearly sees that we have never mastered its grammar. We do not even know how verbal tenses are formed. This came as a great surprise and I asked him at that memorable meeting to distinguish between verbs with a prefix and those with a suffix. My memory conjures up an unforgettable reply (and this has guided me ever since): "I think that Biblical Hebrew was like Chinese. I go today. I go yes-

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terday. I go tomorrow. The verbal forms are dialects. [I cannot recall which was the northern, Israelite, construction and which the southern, Judaeans, form.] They did not indicate perfect, imperfect or otherwise. These texts were later edited into one another and that is why there are so many variations that one cannot really speak of rules.”

Such is my memory. The effects of this memory have been enormous, enabling me to sit with outstanding Hebraists and discuss their solutions for biblical cruxes, some of which I have found to be convincing; others less so. And when I instinctively react against a proposed solution or a radical emendation or a fantasized explanation of one of the many Sperber exceptions, based on some complicated grammatical form with a Latin name for a Hebrew phenomenon, I react: “I am not convinced. Let us admit that we don’t know, apply some principle if we can (Occam’s Razor, maybe), guess, and remain humble before the text and its vocalization.”

It’s a great tribute I pay to this major scholar. He taught me to walk humbly with the text.

MORTON H. NARROWE  
STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN  
(JTS, 1959)

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Salo Baron was famous not only for his grasp of the broad sweep of Jewish (and world) history, but for an incredible mastery of detail: extending, for example, to population statistics, which he could quote from memory—for Jewish communities in Poland in the 17th century—or any other century, or country. His final exams were not written, but were administered as oral exams in his office. We knew going in that it was impossible to be fully prepared for his exams, since Baron would inevitably find some question with which to stump us.

This story is apocryphal, only in the sense that I cannot attest to these details first-hand. It is, however, faithful to the Baron oral exam.

- Baron: “Mr. Horowitz, you recall the Battle of Waterloo?”  
 Horowitz: (to himself: “Waterloo, Waterloo—that was Napoleon and who else? What century was it?”) “Of course, Professor.”  
 Baron: “And you will certainly remember, Mr. Horowitz, that the Rothschilds were vitally interested in knowing which way the battle was going?”  
 Horowitz: “Yes, Professor.”  
 Baron: “So vitally interested that they sent an emissary riding a fast horse to watch the battle from a high hill, and to ride quickly to the Channel as soon as he could tell who was winning?”

- Horowitz: (to himself: "Where's he going with this? Should I know who this emissary was?") "Yes, Professor."  
 Baron: "Tell me, Mr. Horowitz: *what was the name of the horse?*"

DANIEL J. LEVITT  
 BEVERLY HILLS, CA  
 (JTS, 1962)

I studied at the Seminary from 1960–1965. I had the privilege of studying with Professors Louis Finkelstein, Saul Lieberman, Boaz Cohen, Shalom Spiegel, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Abraham Halkin, Salo Baron, H. L. Ginsberg, Simon Greenberg, Bernard Mandelbaum, Gerson Cohen, Nahum Sarna, Max Kadushin, Max Arzt, Shmuel Leiter, Yochanan Muffs, and Seymour Siegel. I was also in the last class which Mordecai Kaplan gave at the Seminary.

One of the most moving experiences which I ever had was when Professor Spiegel acted out the role of Jeremiah the prophet. We all knew that Professor Spiegel's brother was Sam Spiegel who had directed "The Bridge on the River Kwai." We were not aware of the dramatic ability which Professor Spiegel had. As we sat spellbound, Jeremiah came to life through Professor Spiegel. We were with Jeremiah in Jerusalem—we were with the prophet as his head was in the stock, we were with Jeremiah as he pleaded for the exiles to return to Eretz Yisrael. Here was this perfectly dressed individual, Professor Shalom Spiegel, who recited the Hebrew of Jeremiah as if the words were arrows which would pierce our hearts and souls.

My closest relationship was formed with Professor Seymour Siegel. What a great man he was, but alas, he never really had his moment to shine at the Seminary the way he shined at the inauguration of an American president in Washington. Professor Siegel was a master of the English language. I recommend his introduction to the High Holiday season, which was originally written for the new Spanish maḥzor of the South American Jewish community. It is moving and brilliant at the same time. Professor Siegel invited me to his home many times for meals. A bachelor, he did all the preparation and the food was wonderful. What a wonderful person, what a mensch, how very conversant he was with all Hebraic literature; he certainly enters my mind on many occasions.

Lastly, let me speak about Max Kadushin. Professor Kadushin had lived in the shadows for many years before he came to teach at the Seminary in the mid-'60s. His theory of "value concepts" was a most seminal approach to rabbinic literature, but he did not get an invitation to join the Seminary faculty because for the talmudists his theories were too radical. When he finally got a chance to teach, he wanted the walls of the Seminary's buildings to resound with what he was discussing. For a little man he had not only a major intellect but also a very powerful voice. His major intellectual opponent was the discipline of philosophy. When he learned that I was studying

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for a Ph.D. in philosophy, he exploded like a cannon. “Don’t try to be a Maimonides, a Mendelsohn, or a Krochmal because all they did was cause mass religious confusion for the Jewish people. If you want to do something, sir, open up the Talmud and make that work your life. Remember, when Jews were challenged to uphold their faith—they did it by following the commandments and not by spouting philosophy. If you stay on the road you are on, you are lost.” I almost fell off my chair, but I kept my mouth shut tight as I dared not confront him. He might have had a heart attack. After class, he called me over and apologized with a twinkle in his eye. “Just testing you, Mr. Geffen.”

DAVID GEFFEN  
SCRANTON, PA  
(JTS, 1965)

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At the Seminary, I was able to study for a year with Professor Heschel, and while the classes were challenging, I am not sure that I measured up to the quality of student that he demanded. It took us a while to appreciate this giant. I also had the privilege of studying with many of the other great teachers and scholars whom the Seminary had gathered as faculty. In no order of significance, Dr. Louis Finkelstein, Dr. Seymour Siegel, Professor Margoliot, Dr. Gershon Cohen, Dr. Shalom Spiegel, Professor H. L. Ginzberg, Rabbi Simon Greenberg, Dr. Boaz Cohen, and Professor Lieberman, among many others. The work was demanding, but I was excited to be in their presence and learn from them. I felt that I had an intellectual and spiritual home. Our year in Israel was an extraordinary one. Studying with Professor Yigal Yadin at the Hebrew University, Dr. Ernst Simon, Dr. Raphael Posner all challenged our thinking and taught us to appreciate the spirit, as well as the letter, of Judaism—its creativity, contributions, and potential.

Although there are many moments that have had impact on my spiritual and religious development, one of those that stands out is davenning at the Seminary on Shabbat morning. Being in the presence of these great teachers in that atmosphere conveyed a special feeling. It always heightened the davenning experience, and it has created a series of memories, which echo even today.

JEFFREY A. WOHLBERG  
WASHINGTON, DC  
(JTS, 1966)

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. . . I had the privilege of studying at the Jewish Theological Seminary with Rabbi Louis Finkelstein. The title of the course was “Akiba,” the title of one of his books. But the course was really about the thought of Rabbi Finkelstein. The anticipation of that class which met in the winter/spring of 1969 gave me a burst of energy, the sources of which at first I did not compre-

hend. Later I realized that being in the presence of a man whom I regarded to be “great” and whose words left me eager to hear more gave me that added enthusiasm and zest for this class at the Seminary.

Rabbi Finkelstein, the person and the class, was part of a moment in my history which influenced me to see the possibilities of growth and of commitment to the cause of serving God and the Jewish people.

HERBERT YOSKOWITZ  
FARMINGTON HILLS, MI  
(JTS, 1970)

My most memorable classes in the Seminary College-Teachers Institute were Professors Muffs’ and Paul’s Bible courses. Yochanan Muffs showed how biblical ideas mattered and how intellectual perceptions shaped civilizations. Shalom Paul gave life to the prophets in the classroom. We could imagine Jeremiah speaking to the people as our class watched Shalom Paul’s dramatizations of his words. Who could forget him walking out of the classroom. In Rabbinical School, as well as undergraduate classes, Professor Seymour Siegel taught us how to apply the ethics of the rabbis to contemporary issues and political developments. He had the greatest impact on me through the example of his involvement in civil rights, medical ethics, and politics.

RICHARD HAMMERMAN  
TOMS RIVER, NJ  
(JTS, 1973)

One of my most memorable Seminary classes was one in the Book of Jeremiah with Shalom Paul, an extremely dynamic and personable teacher. I shall never forget his final class of the semester. He approached a student sitting in the front row and said in a dramatic loud voice: “You’re all dried up (pause)—you are a dry valley (pause)—that’s what Jeremiah said to God!” Then he slung his trench coat over his shoulder and briskly walked out of the classroom door, slamming it behind him. You can imagine the shock and surprise of the class.

RON ISAACS  
BRIDGEWATER, NJ  
(JTS, 1974)

In the mid-’70s, Rabbinical School wasn’t so much a training institute for working rabbis as much as it was a kind of institutional turnstile through which a few lucky men were permitted to pass every year on their way from the exoteric Jewish world—the world of shiny black yarmulkes, potato latkes and Shabbos candles we mostly all knew and felt at home in—into the

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domain of Jewish esoterica—the world of perforated flowerpots and single-egress courtyards, the secret world in which people worried about the number of handbreadths that separated the walls of their *sukkot* from the ground, and how, precisely, it might be permissible to dispose of the dung of the *shor haniskal* without contravening the prohibition of deriving any benefit from the forbidden feces. Until our final year of study, in fact, no mention at all was made in any of our courses to the actual career upon which most of us were about to embark. Indeed, even with a semester (or was it two?) of practical rabbinics behind us, most of us—myself most certainly included—were ordained without the slightest idea how to execute a *get* or *kasher* an industrial kitchen or build a kosher *mikveh*. I still marvel at how well the daily exigencies of life in the pulpit were kept from us . . . and wonder if it was all part of some complex plot to keep the horrible reality of congregational life from us, or if things were as they were simply because it never occurred to anyone at the Seminary to take pulpit work at all seriously.

The basic message in those days was that working with *ambah* was for rabbis who didn't have the brains or the creativity to make it in academics. I succumbed to that kind of thinking for a while—I earned a Ph.D. in ancient Judaism, won a post-doc at the Hebrew University, took a teaching position in the Institute of Jewish Studies attached to the University of Heidelberg—but my heart remained where it had been all along: in the congregational rabbinate.

MARTIN S. COHEN  
MISSION VIEJO, CA  
(JTS, 1978)

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My most memorable class at the Seminary was with H. L. Ginsberg, ל"ו. It was a class that I could never cut: only four of us enrolled. One particular week, Prof. Ginsberg started his lecture before he even had a foot in the classroom. By the time he got to the doorway, he was already lecturing at ninety miles per hour about Ezra and Nehemiah. It was brilliant! Several times, we tried to interrupt him, but he would just wave us off: "Let me finish!" "I just have one more point to make!" After an hour of sheer genius on Ezra and Nehemiah—I couldn't write fast enough—Ginsberg came up for air. "Professor," we finally broke in. "Professor, this is not the 'Ezra-Nehemiah' class but the 'Patriarchal Narrative' class." Without missing a beat, Dr. Ginsberg began another hour of lecture, equally brilliant, on the patriarchs.

What did I learn from him? Aside from a lot about *both* the Patriarchal Narrative and Ezra-Nehemiah, I learned always to check where you're supposed to be and what your assignment is. And I learned that course descriptions and syllabi can sometimes be set aside for an enriching excursus.

GERSHON SCHWARTZ  
BALDWIN, NY  
(JTS, 1979)

I came to the Seminary in 1977 in a state of "religious transition." Yeshiva educated throughout my life, including having graduated from Yeshiva University, I had also attended Camp Ramah for a number of years, and had recently married a life-long and thoroughly committed Conservative Jew. Who and what I was to become religiously was not at all clear to me, even though attending rabbinical school at the Seminary seemed somehow to be the right thing to do.

Each in his own way, Wolfe Kelman and Simon Greenberg brought me to a great appreciation of the Conservative rabbinate as an honorable and important career choice, and one deserving of my respect.

At the beginning of my Seminary career, I met Simon Greenberg through my early involvement with Garin Nitzan, the *garin aliyah* which would eventually form Kibbutz Hanaton. From the very first time he strode into the student lounge with that remarkable posture of his and spoke to our group about his "junior year abroad" experiences in Palestine in 1929 (now *that* was Zionism!), I knew that I had been introduced to one of the more remarkable people I would ever meet. And Rabbi Greenberg never disappointed me. Genuinely spiritual, strong as a rock in every way, model pastor, master preacher and homiletics teacher who, to this day, speaks to me in my head as I contemplate a sermon and says "But Gerry, what is your proposition?"—of all the great people I met during my years at the Seminary, there is no one else whose warm wisdom and loving understanding I miss more on both good and bad days in the pulpit.

And from Wolfe—who never doubted even for a moment that I had what it took to take on a major responsibility at a young age—I learned how very important it is to trust your instincts in the rabbinate. I know that he is widely regarded as having "professionalized" the Conservative rabbinate, making it a career choice that one could not only survive in, but actually earn a living from. Most true, to be sure. But Wolfe was able to do that because he understood both laity and rabbis far better than most of us could ever hope to, and for him, it was an intuitive process. Behind that ever-present smile and pipe lay one of the most formidable intellects I've ever known, and Wolfe knew exactly how to use it. His insights were invariably on target, and he offered them freely. The consummate political animal, Wolfe worked the phones like James Carville. But at the end of the day, he trusted himself more than anyone else, and he taught me to do the same.

GERALD C. SKOLNIK  
FOREST HILLS, NY  
(JTS, 1981)

The most influential teacher I had during my rabbinic school (Jerusalem 1974–1981) was Prof. Ze'ev Falk. Occasionally, we three rabbinic students

were invited to his home at 10 Harav Berlin Street to discuss the history and the philosophy of halakhah. I was amazed at the liberal-minded outlook of this observant Jew. Once we discussed interfaith dialogue, I said that although Christianity and Islam are considered monotheistic “daughters” of Judaism, I find dialogue with their clergy to be “a dialogue of deaf people.” Falk responded immediately: “Not only should we listen and learn from the way Christians and Moslems view Judaism, but we also have a lot to learn from ‘eastern’ faiths such as Buddhism, and a dialogue with their clergy should be enlightening!”

When the lesson was over, Falk used to escort us, his students, to the door and say: *al tirgzu badarekh* (Gen. 45:24). I asked him once why he uses this Biblical ‘farewell.’ Falk replied that according to Rabbi Eleazer (Ta’anit 10b) Joseph said to his brothers: ‘Do not keep yourself busy with halakhic issues on the way . . .’ Since we learn halakhah together, there is always a danger that a friendly halakhic discourse would turn into an unfriendly argument . . . He realized that, while halakhah could be a most uniting factor among Jews, it has become a major reason for strife and animosity within our people.

GIL NATIV

HAIFA, ISRAEL

(HUC-JERUSALEM, 1981)

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My name is Dario Feiguin. I serve as a rabbi in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The only thing I want to say is that I am a rabbi thanks to Marshall T. Meyer ל"ת. I studied with Scholem, Schweid, T. Friedman and many of *gdolei hador*, but nobody influenced in me like Marshall did.

DARIO FEIGUIN

BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

(SEMINARIO RABINICO LATINOAMERICANO, 1983)

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My years at the Seminary spanned two generations of Seminary culture. When I first arrived in 1976, working on a Masters in Talmud and beyond, I was still at the old Seminary, dominated by the great European master teachers. I had the honor of studying Talmud with some of them.

Women’s unique perspectives were not yet welcome. In fact, I was told by one would-be mentor that my being a woman made absolutely no difference. I needed to know Sura and Pumpeditha like the back of my own hand, he said. Women were present but not yet speaking in our own voices.

At Neve Schechter, I had the good fortune to study intensively with Shamma Friedman, who gave me the gifts of his brilliance and his encouragement. He believed that I, a girl from Philadelphia, could become a serious student of Talmud. Back in New York, I had the privilege of studying with Prof. Weiss Halivni. The Thursday nights of his Talmud seminar were

another world, awesome and timeless, suffused by his extraordinary erudition and profound wisdom.

In 1984, when the first class of women arrived, now welcome in the Rabbinical School, we found ourselves in a new world. Women were now here as full partners. We asked different questions, we studied in different ways, we demanded a level of personal significance in our study, we challenged the culture of skepticism and competitiveness and insisted on studying collaboratively. It was a tumultuous time, full of changing relationships and changing culture at the Seminary. For me, a highlight of that year was a class with Neil Gillman, who helped me to begin to examine my own personal theology. I wasn't yet ready to articulate, as he asked us to, what kind of God I believed in. But it helped enormously that he asked the question, and cared deeply about how we struggled with answers.

Many years later, after ordination, I received a different kind of mentoring when I did my first unit of CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) at a place called Methodist Hospital. (What kind of place was that for a nice Jewish girl?, many people asked.) Frank Ciampa, my first CPE supervisor, was small of build and soft-spoken; pious, gentle, and reflective, while I was skeptical, irreverent, and outspoken. It was with Frank as a mentor that I learned to listen deeply to people's pain without judging, advising or interpreting. It was with Frank that I began to articulate what I felt about God and faith and suffering. It was with Frank that I began to learn how to pray: not just to *daven*, but to pray from the heart. At Methodist Hospital my sense of calling to the rabbinate began to take new form, as I became a chaplain. And for many years afterward, when I would find myself in a difficult pastoral situation, I would ask myself silently, "What would Frank say?"

Eventually, I stopped thinking of myself as mentored by individual men. In our generation, the women needed to mentor each other. I was mentored by circles of women: the women in the first rabbinical school class and our women colleagues at the other seminaries; interfaith circles of women in feminist theology groups; eventually, the women and men of the Jewish healing movement. We were breaking new ground, creating new ways of leading and teaching Judaism, and so we needed to raise ourselves, creating things as we went along, supporting one another, trusting that what we were doing was in the service of God and the Jewish people.

AMY EILBERG  
PALO ALTO, CA  
(JTS, 1985)

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"If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall make his offering a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, for acceptance in his behalf before the Lord" (Leviticus 1:3).

In my final semester of rabbinical school, I had a thrilling experience

studying Jewish mystical prayer with Rabbi Seth Brody ל"י, who tragically died of cancer just two years later. Our seminar focused on the *korbanot* as a paradigm of mystical ascent in Spanish Kabbalah. This was my first introduction to the writings of Yosef Gikitilla, and to the startlingly novel use of biblical and talmudic text for devotional purposes.

The Leviticus text went from being a relic of ancient and foreign worship to a contemporary liturgical challenge. What is the contemplative equivalent of an *'olah*? How can we purify our offerings of prayer? The ambiguity of the word "*lirtzono*" intrigues—who must be satisfied with our worship—the person or God? What can we expect to accomplish through our act of devotion? Are our liturgical ambitions too modest?

Suddenly, familiar verses such as "*Poteah et yadekha umasbia' lekhol hai ratzon*" became portals into another level of Jewish experience (reading *yodkha* yields, "You open Your ten *sefirot*, bringing blessing and love to all of creation"). It's not that I became a mystic; with Rabbi Brody I had the delightful experience of rediscovering the familiar and realizing the potential depth of Torah yet again.

I have been blessed with many wonderful teachers along the way to the rabbinate and since. What is noteworthy in this experience is the importance of revelation within the realm of the familiar. Although I am in only my sixth year as a rabbi, I already feel the urgency of this experience of renewal for myself and for my congregants as well.

DANNY NEVINS  
FARMINGTON HILLS, MI  
(JTS, 1994)