

# **Elana Nemitoff, MAHL, MAJE**

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**Summary of Qualifications** Assistant Rabbi or Rabbi/Educator who facilitates development of the personal and communal expressions of Judaism inclusive of children, teens and adults, exploration of spiritual connection, and use of text to ground people in their Judaism.

## **Skills**

- *Leadership skills* in organizing people and projects, including creating and managing live performances
- Experience in diverse *denominations of Judaism*
- Strong understanding of text with the *strong ability to teach texts to others*
- *Adept curriculum writer* for religious school and information education
- Experience guiding congregant through trauma
- *Inspired service leader* with deep connection to prayer
- *Skilled staff manager and teen and faculty mentor*
- *Knowledgeable about adaptive learning* for different student populations

## **Education**

### **Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), Los Angeles, CA**

Rabbinic Ordination (anticipated May 2019)

Rabbinic Text Immersion: *A Rabbinic Guide to the Marriage Ceremony*

Masters of Jewish Education (2017)

Curriculum Guide: *God: A Profile*, for students on the Autism spectrum

Masters of Hebrew Letters (2016)

The Harry Shapiro Memorial Prize for Service to Jews with Special Needs (2015)

### **Bachelor of Arts, Washington University in St. Louis, MO (2012)**

Major: Psychology, Minors: Jewish Studies and Tech Theater, Dean's List 5 Semesters

**College Study Abroad, Czech Republic:** Jewish studies with focus on Holocaust

## **Leadership Experience**

- AIPAC Leffell Fellowship
- HUC-JIR Spirituality Retreat Coordinator
- iCenter Masters Concentration in Israel Education
- HUC-JIR Community Organizing Intensive
- Intersem (Interseminary Retreat) Planning Team
- Beit T'shuvah: 5-day immersion in Jewish addiction counseling
- T'ruah Rabbinic Intern
- CLAL: Rabbis Without Borders Retreat
- HUC-JIR Gabbai for campus Tefillah and Torah reading
- Beit Midrash participant learning Talmud and Tanach

## **Rabbinic Professional Experience**

**Congregation Or Ami**, 360 Family Units Calabasas, CA  
*Rabbinic Intern, Teen Mental Health and Wellness Project Manager* 2017 - Present  
*Faculty, Jr Youth Group Advisor* 2014 - 2016

Participating in prayer leading, teaching in Mensch-ify and Mishpacha, family religious school programs.

- Created parenting series, “What Your Teens Want You to Know”. Designed and facilitated Teen Mental Health and Wellness Summit with Dr. Wendy Mogel. Trained faculty and staff for front line intervention. Result: more informed and healthier relationships.
- Planned and implemented weekly wellness moments for students from K-12th grade, helping students learn to better self-regulate within a Jewish lens.
- Co-managed \$18,000 grant from Federation.
- Planned and implemented communal teen wellness retreat.
- Motivated teens to remain active in synagogue life after Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

**Temple Beth El**, 55 Family Units Salinas, CA  
*High Holy Day Rabbi* 2017, 2018

Partnered with part-time cantor, delivered sermons, read Torah, and led holiday celebrations.

**Temple Kol Tikvah**, 240 Family Units Woodland Hills, CA  
*Rabbinic Intern* 2017 - 2018

Created learner’s minyan, conducted adult education classes, participated in Shabbat prayer on the bimah, and administrated religious school. Taught 5<sup>th</sup> graders a lifecycle curriculum, during which students determined areas of their lives where they wanted to incorporate Judaism.

**Congregation Beth Aaron**, 55 Family Units Billings, MT  
*Student Rabbi* 2014 - 2016

Performed all rabbinic roles for the congregation: led worship, conducted a weekly text study, ran the religious school, and visited congregants.

**Research Medical Center** Kansas City, MO  
*Pastoral Care Intern* Summer 2015

Ministered to patients in the Emergency Department, Rehabilitation floors, and ICU. Processed personal and patient emotional interactions through group and individual reflection to better serve patients/congregants in the future.

**Congregation B’nai Jehudah**, 1,050 Family Units Overland Park, KS  
*Rabbinic Intern* Summer 2014

Taught remedial prayer-book Hebrew, led a seminar on the subject of Jewish time, visited house-bound and hospitalized congregants, assisted during worship, and taught weekly Torah study.

## **Educational Professional Experience**

### **University of Southern California**

Los Angeles, CA

*Teacher's Assistant, JS211: The Holocaust*

2017 - 2018

Taught 3 sections of 24 college students on how to analyze primary source documents related to the larger class, *The Holocaust*.

### **Shalom Institute**

Malibu, CA

*Jewish Program Director*

Summer 2017

*Educational Intern*

2016 - 2017

Supervised the writing and implementation of Jewish programming in individual unit and specific programming areas. Wrote and implemented Jewish programming for an informal camp setting, for religious school retreats and family camps, and for 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> graders quarterly.

- Facilitated conversations about how to integrate Jewish content throughout all the areas of weekend camping.
- Coordinated and implemented Shabbat experiences for all campers and staff, including age appropriate learning based on the week's Torah reading (*parsha*).
- Supervised all-camp programs, including Israel Day and Color War (*Maccabiah*).

### **IKAR**

Los Angeles, CA

*4th Grade Religious School Teacher/Hebrew teacher*

2016 - 2017

Wrote and taught 2 half-year curricula on God and Israel for 4th graders and taught weekly Modern Hebrew to a mixed group of 3rd-6th graders.

### **Beit Issie Shapiro**

Ra'anana, Israel

*Classroom Aide*

2013 - 2014

Aided children 1-on-1, aged 7-10, with special needs. Taught a 9-year old boy how to drive a wheelchair and how to walk with assistance.

## **Community Experience**

### **Goldman Union Camp Institute**

Zionsville, IN

*Shores Unit Head, Tefillah Coordinator, Counselor*

Summer 2011 - 2013

Oversaw and implemented all programming for campers in 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grades, while managing a staff of 20+ counselors. Previously conducted counseling and programming for campers in 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades, and created and implemented daily Tefillah for cabins.

### **Heart to Heart International**

Port au Prince, Haiti

Volunteered in medical clinic pharmacy to respond to the 2010 earthquake, learned basic Creole to give patients their prescribed medications and explained schedule.

*References Available Upon Request*

## **Personal Statement**

**I seek out the divine spark in each person while trying to understand their unique talents and contributions to our world.**

I walked into the hospital room, where a man lay actively dying. His breathing was ragged. Amidst the noises of the ICU equipment, I slipped in with the gathered family members. From the doctors, I knew the prognosis was poor. The patient's mom asked for a prayer. The family desperately wanted a cure, to see him wake up. I knew that my obligation lay in offering salve, not salvation, so I offered these words: "*Eloheinu v'elohei avoteinu v'imoteinu*, our God and God of our fathers and mothers, please protect this man in his fragile state. Please guide his doctors and nurses to provide the best possible care at this moment. Please grant them the ability to use the tools at their disposal to manage his pain. And please provide his family with the vision to see how to best support him."

My prayer reflected a belief that rather than acting directly in the world, God acts through the divine spark in each of us. God gives to doctors the wisdom to know which medical intervention is best, to nurses the instinct to offer care at just the right moments, and me as the chaplain the ability to offer space for grief, pain and loss. Although this family was in deep pain, I wanted to reflect to them that each of us has an ability to strive toward God, but that God does not solve the problems of the world: we do. The divinity in each of us provides us with the ability to connect on a deeper level, to fortify a relationship or to offer comfort to someone in need of healing. The divine spark within me encourages me to seek a rabbinate where I encounter people to whom I can offer comfort, healing, and connection.

**I thrive when the rich narrative of our tradition intersects with today's Jewish landscape.**

"I don't believe in God!" my 10-year-old student announced to me as I began our lesson. I paused and asked: "What do you mean?" It turned out that this student felt connected to Reform Judaism, but to him the fact that he did not believe in any sort of God meant he could not become a Bar Mitzvah. I heard my 10-year-old self similarly saying that I could not be Jewish because God could not exist. We entered the sanctuary and opened the Torah to the Ten Commandments. I read aloud and translated, asking if these were the things in which he did not believe. He nodded. I suggested that he replace the word God with community. After a few minutes

of silence, he looked up at me with a gleam in his eye and smiled. “I need to think about it,” he told me. Four years later, this same student approached me, explaining that our lesson still sits with him each time he feels discouraged by Judaism’s beliefs.

The Jewish tradition provides a deep well of rich sources from which to draw meaning. I thrive on engaging with Talmudic (legal) debates, discovering the juicy *midrashim* (interpretations), and exploring *Halacha* (Jewish law), but more than anything, I love translating our tradition into a modern language that comes alive for individuals of all ages. The power of Judaism is that it speaks to a spectrum of individuals, offering something for each person to delve into and explore. My rabbinate focuses on illuminating the depth of Judaism and Jewish text, while ensuring that our conversations are firmly grounded in today’s world.

**I believe in the power of *kehillah kedoshah* (holy community) as a means to confront the challenges of the day.**

My rabbinic mentor and I left the smoke and fires raging through the communities we served to drive to a wedding relocated because of the fires. In the hotel lobby, we engaged other Jewish leaders in conversations about how to organize the various congregations impacted by the fires in the San Fernando Valley. We monitored the process of calling all congregants to ascertain their safety and needs. We drafted a letter to the broader Jewish community outlining how to help. Then we walked outside for the wedding. As we stood looking at the *chuppah*, I marveled at the fact that this wedding was a small *tikkun* (repair) of the brokenness of the moment. The *chuppah*, open on four sides, represents our home and our Jewish community. The couple, then unsure whether or not their home still stood, welcomed their loved ones into this temporary home to witness their love. They shined as a beacon of light to the world, demonstrating that even in unstable times, the light and love permeating the world continues to shine.

*Kehillah* thrives when diverse people come together. For this wedding, our purpose was uniting two women in love. With the fires raging close by, our greater Jewish community, despite denominational differences, came together to ensure that each congregational partner was accounted for and supported. At that moment, I committed to take these purposes and make them the leading principles of my rabbinate: uniting people in love and reaching out to all. My rabbinate will be a *tikkun* of brokenness by bringing people together. We must be a community with differences, united by our common belief in the sanctity of love and togetherness.