

# The Reform Advocate

Volume XI, Number II: Passover 2020

Rabbi Devon A. Lerner, Editor



## ROOTS OF REFORM JUDAISM

Inspired by the past, embracing today, shaping tomorrow.

### A message from Rabbinic Director Rabbi Ken Kanter



In Psalm 98 we read “Shiru L’Adonai Shir Chadash-Sing to God a new song.” In this issue of the *Advocate*, we not only honor the great music and people of our Reform heritage, we also celebrate the music, musicians, and leaders of our future. As our logo reminds us, we are “inspired by the past, embracing today, and shaping tomorrow.”



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#### **Dear Roots of Reform Judaism Friends and Supporters,**

In just a few days from now, Jews everywhere will be repeating “Mah Nishtanah Halayla Hazeh” —“Why is this night different from every other night.” When we were preparing this “Reform Advocate” none of us had any idea as to how prescient those ancient and familiar words would prove to be.

To answer those traditional words of the *Haggadah*, pretty much everything is different about this night compared to previous seders we remember, joyous multigenerational family gatherings and all those traditional moments we love. This year, those moments will be largely memories of previous years or visions of future seders, but not exactly the same.

Some values and beliefs never change, no matter how many are gathered or what words are spoken—our commitment to Reform Jewish values, our firm support of the prophetic teachings

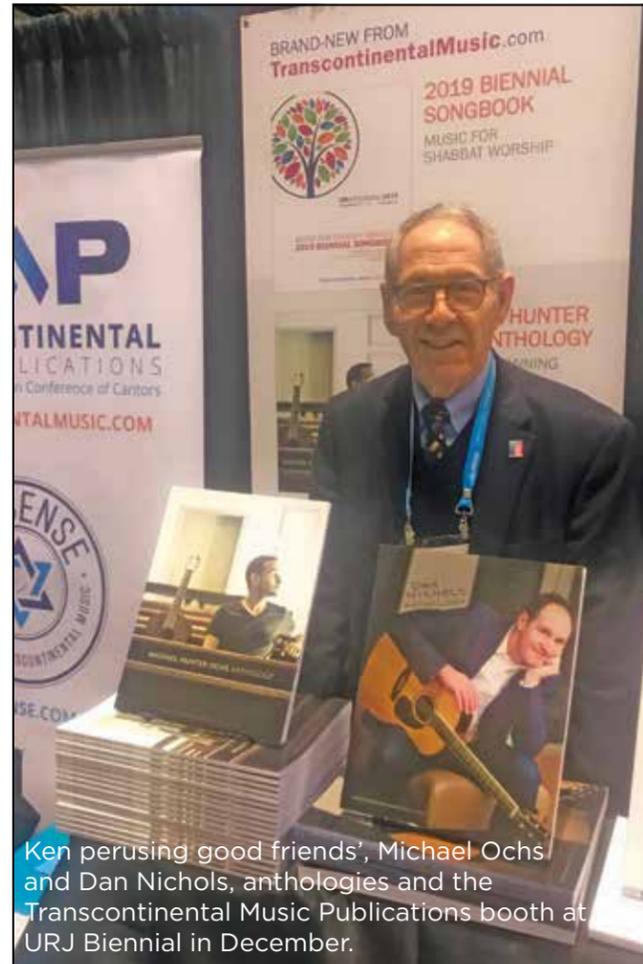
of community, care for the poor and underserved, commitment to God and Israel, our sacred prayers and liturgy that have inspired centuries of our Jewish people, and our music—music that lifts our spirits, inspires us and brings us joy. We chose the topic of Music for this *Reform Advocate* many months ago. You no doubt know that the preparation of a journal such as the “Reform Advocate” takes a long time and a lot of preparation from the many contributors, editors, designers, etc. We had no idea that this issue could also be a source of comfort in a daily topsy-turvy world.

On behalf of all of your Roots of Reform Judaism family, our Board, officers, staff, and fellow supporters, please take care, stay safe, and know that this treasured community has withstood many challenges in the past, and by staying united, will do so now and in the future.

Devotedly,  
Ken

The story is told of the Cohens, who visit a new temple for the first time at the High Holy Days. They walk into the historic sanctuary with its magnificent ark and ritual objects, and even though they are in a new city and congregation, the people all look familiar and they feel they should know them! They sit down in the seats when suddenly, beautiful music pours from the choir and organ, the cantor and congregation. Their eyes light up because it is a song from their home synagogue, and the familiarity of it washes over them like comforting warm water.

Then there are the Goldmans who walk in right after the Cohens. They are a bit late, as usual, but they have been members of the congregation for decades and Mr. Goldman says to his wife “are they going to sing that same hymn? They do it every Yontif.”



Ken perusing good friends, Michael Ochs and Dan Nichols, anthologies and the Transcontinental Music Publications booth at URJ Biennial in December.

And finally, after the service, a visitor comes up to the rabbi and says with a degree of chutzpah, “Rabbi, I think your service is awfully dull and repetitive. Every time I come here the cantor and choir sing the same song.” What do you mean,” says

***We not only honor the great music and people of our Reform heritage, we also celebrate the music, musicians, and leaders of our future.***

the unflappable rabbi. “Well, every time I am here, they sing that Kol Nidrei song. Don’t they know anything else?”

Of course, these are apocryphal stories, but they do illustrate how profoundly the music and liturgy of our services impact us. We are reminded of those with whom we are sitting now -- our spouses, partners, children, and grandchildren, or with whom we once sat-- our grandparents, parents, siblings and friends, when we sang those songs or repeated those sacred words. “Sim Shalom —Grant Us Peace,” “Mi Shebeirach avoteynu v’emoteynu,” (our Prayer for Healing). These beautiful melodies and deeply felt words touch our souls.

We hope that in the pages of this Reform Advocate you will find insightful articles about the music that enriches our Reform Jewish life — be it the grand and inspiring music of two centuries years ago, the compositions from our own lifetimes—new once, but now a central part of our worship experience, or the compelling music that is being written and taught to our future cantors, to our choirs and congregations. We hope you will enjoy the photos of RRJ activities, the stories of our new board members and new friends who share their talents and learning.

Devotedly,

**Rabbi Kenneth A. Kanter**  
Rabbinic Director



**The Reform Advocate**

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**ROOTS OF  
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## ***Grant Us Peace: An American Reform Jewish Classic Prayer***

Rabbi Dr. Lance Sussman  
Senior Scholar, Roots of Reform  
Judaism

For those of us who grew up in the Reform movement or joined it during the course of our adult journey, *Grant Us Peace* is a familiar and much beloved prayer both because of its English language text and its various musical interpretations. What is less known is the surprising history of *Grant Us Peace*. *Grant Us Peace* serves as the final section of the “18 Benedictions” or *Amidah* in the liturgy of the synagogue, appearing just before or as a prelude to the Silent Prayer. Its text, based on two traditional prayers for peace (*Shalom Rav* from the Ashkenazic tradition and *Sim Shalom*), is essentially an original Reform composition combining Judaism’s ancient hope for universal peace with prayers for national wellbeing and personal virtue, the basis of good citizenship.

The origin of the English language text of *Grant Us Peace* is surprising. In fact, it did not appear in the original 1892 *Union Prayer Book I* (UPB I) prepared for the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) by Rabbi Isaac Moses of Chicago. The Conference withdrew Rabbi Moses’ text which they viewed “as a dilution” of Rabbi David Einhorn’s radical German 1858 prayer book *Olat Tamid* which had been translated into English in 1872. However, instead of immediately reworking the Moses prayer book, the CCAR proceeded to publish the UPB II, a High Holy Day prayer book, in 1894. It included the first known version of *Grant Us Peace* before republishing a thoroughly revised UPB I.



Thus, the original text of *Grant Us Peace* appears in an “Evening Service for the New Year” under the Hebrew title of “*Sim Shalom*,” although the actual prayer for the Evening Service is entitled *Shalom Rav*. Because *Grant Us Peace* was originally written for the High Holy Days it included a reference to the “Book of Life,” later dropped when the prayer was added to the Sabbath liturgy.

The first version of *Grant Us Peace*, was originally read by the “Minister” as follows:

*Grant us peace, Thy most precious gift, O Thou eternal source of peace, and enable Israel to be a messenger of peace unto the peoples of the earth. Bless our country that it may ever be a stronghold of peace and be its advocate in the council of nations. May contentment reign within its borders, health, and happiness in its homes. Strengthen the bonds of friendship and fellowship between all the inhabitants of our land. Plant virtue in every soul and may love of Thy name hallow every home and every heart.*

***They harmoniously blend Jewish universalism and particularism, affirm the value of the ethical life, and proclaim peace as the ultimate goal of the Jewish tradition.***

*Inscribe us in the book of life, and grant unto us a year of prosperity and joy. Blessed be Thou, O Lord, Giver of Peace. Amen.*

The UPB series proved to be immensely popular in the Reform movement and within 20 years it was used by over 300 congregations which had purchased over 100,000 copies of the prayer books. The text of *Grant Us Peace* remained essentially stable in subsequent editions of the UPB series. In the 1940

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edition edited by Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof, “all the inhabitants of our land” was broadened to “the inhabitants of all lands.” At the same time, a Hebrew text of *Shalom Rav* was provided by Rabbi Freehof including a request for a blessing on “Your people Israel,” perhaps a veiled Zionist reference, as opposed to the use of the name “Israel” in the original UPB II, employed in the more universalistic theological framework of the “Mission of Israel” as “a light to the nations.” On the other hand, Freehof did not include the “closing blessing” of *Shalom Rav* in his Hebrew text.

In Service V of the 1975 *Gates of Prayer*, additional subtle changes were made. For example, the original “source of peace” was changed to a name of God with capital letters, “O Eternal Source of peace” and the formal “Thou” was dropped. Also, the phrase “advocate in the council of nations” was changed to “advocate among the nations,” perhaps reflecting distrust in the United Nations after its 1975 adoption of Resolution 3379 condemning Zionism as a racist ideology.

The most recent Reform Prayer book, *Mishkan T’filah* (“Sanctuary of Prayer”), published in 2007, includes a version of *Grant Us Peace* as an alternative (left side) reading (v. p. 179), in an apparent attempt to define it out of the mainstream of Reform Judaism. The closing, particularistic Hebrew prayer, “Praised are You, Eternal One, who blesses our people with peace” is included in English, Hebrew, and transliteration. Interestingly, the Hebrew version of *Shalom Rav* (right side, p. 178) includes an insert for *Shabbat Shuvah*, the Sabbath between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in both Hebrew and English, thus restoring the original *Grant Us Peace*’s tie to the High Holy Days.

The enduring popularity of *Grant Us Peace* attracted the attention of one of the leading composers of Reform liturgical music, Canadian born Ben Steinberg (b. 1930) who included a Hebrew version of “Shalom Rav” in his immensely popular 1973 *L’cha Anu Shira: Sabbath Eve Service For Cantor, Choir, Congregation and Organ*. According to Steinberg, “*L’cha Anu Shira* was commissioned by Congregation Emanu-El B’ne Jeshurun, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in memory of Cantor Sol Altschuller (1917-1964). The premiere of the work was performed on November 21, 1969 by Cantor Roy

Garber and the choir of Congregation Emanu-El B’ne Jeshurun under the direction of the composer.” In the musical text, Steinberg notes that an optional text is inserted “for use with the [1967 British] “Service of the Heart” Prayer Book, although the more universalistic Hebrew in the British prayer book actually is not included in Steinberg’s score.

When asked recently by Hazzan David Tillman of Elkins Park, Pennsylvania about his inspiration for his *Shalom Rav*, Steinberg replied that “the text spoke to me in such a meaningful manner that I felt that I was spiritually speaking to God and actually pleading for Peace for the people of Israel. The piece almost ‘wrote itself’ as I studied the text.” (Communicated to author by email, February 28, 2020) In other words, despite its “Classical Reform” musical quality, Steinberg fully restored the text’s ancient particularism. The same particularism was further reinforced in the 1974 post-classical version of *Shalom Rav* by Jeff Klepper and Dan Frelander which along with Steinberg’s version is widely used in contemporary Reform synagogues on Friday night. Indeed, the temporal proximity of the Steinberg and the Klepper-Frelander versions of *Shalom Rav* constitute a cultural border between and mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> century modalities of American Reform Judaism.

Finally, a few observations about Steinberg’s *Shalom Rav* as a musical composition which is deceptively complex and sophisticated work. According to Hazzan Tillman, the composer set the text in G Major, a key that is calming and soothing. The Major tonality is particularly “Western” and “American” in its affect. Interestingly, Steinberg also uses a “triple meter” which is used in a gentle melody for “Dona Nobis Pacem,” Latin for *Grant Us Peace* in the Catholic tradition.

*Shalom Rav* and its English language rendition, “Grant Us Peace,” remain classic prayers in the religious culture of American Reform Judaism. They harmoniously blend Jewish universalism and particularism, affirm the value of the ethical life, and proclaim peace as the ultimate goal of the Jewish tradition. They transcend intradenominational differences and powerfully express what is classic about every expression of American Reform Judaism.

## The Reform Advocate

Volume XI, Number II: Passover 2020

# Balaam Blessing Israel in Potsdam, Germany

Rabbi David H. Aaron, Ph.D  
Professor of Hebrew Bible &  
History of Interpretation, HUC-  
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This is a story of the unimaginable. A Jewish cantata, last heard in Berlin, in 1936, was performed in the Saint Nikolai Church of Potsdam, Germany, on December 19, 2019, with a full orchestra and a massive international chorus, at a largely state funded Jewish music festival. That cantata was composed by my grandfather, Hugo Chaim Adler. In attendance were my parents, Marianne and Ronald Aaron, my mother’s brother, composer Samuel Adler, and his wife, Emily Freeman Brown, who conducted the performance. As unimaginable as all that is, the greatest historical irony is located in the fact that two of Hugo Chaim Adler’s six great-grandchildren were also present—my sons, Joshua and Elisha—who, like their four first cousins, are German citizens, fluent in the language of their great-grandfather, and “at home” in Berlin.

***But there is one remarkable continuity linking these two communities that has transcended their different sociological contexts: synagogue music.***

### Now for the backstory.

Finding clear continuities between the Reform Judaisms of Germany and America during the nineteenth and early twentieth century can prove challenging. The sociological circumstances in America, such as the 19th century’s religious revival and the separateness of “church” and “state”—both unknown in Germany—made Emerson’s transcendental spirit more influential than the Kantian rationalism of Geiger and his fellow

German theologians. To this very day, many divides exist between the

German and American branches of Reform, such as egalitarianism in the rabbinate, mixed seating in the synagogue, and the dominant use of the vernacular in worship services—these are not “givens” in many contemporary liberal German synagogues.

But there is one remarkable continuity linking these two communities that has transcended their different sociological contexts: synagogue

music. German Reform synagogues installed organs, trained large choirs, and integrated instrumental music into services quite early on. For sure, German Jewish composers, like their American counterparts, appropriated the colloquial musical secular tastes of their day without abandoning the traditional tropes known from Judaism’s ancient liturgy and the cantillation of Hebrew Scriptures. Random migrations from Europe to America would periodically introduce 19th century German synagogue musical trends. This flow of artistic influence was abruptly accelerated with the tragic mass migration of Jews from Germany and Austria after 1933. My grandfather, Hugo Chaim Adler (1894-1955), was one of those cantors fortuitous enough to escape Nazi persecution.

While trained by his father, also a cantor, in traditional Jewish learning and liturgy, my grandfather and his brother, Eugene, received formal musical training at leading conservatories in Germany. The Jewish musical scene in Germany encouraged the engagement of first-rate composers and performers. Already in the 1920s, Adler mounted large-scale performances of nineteenth century and newly composed works, including his own cantata, *Licht und Volk* (“Light and People”). In 1934, using the recently published German Torah translation of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig,



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Adler completed *Balak and Balaam*, a lightly veiled polemic against those who “curse Jews,” subtle enough to make it by the cultural censors. The cantata would be performed just twice before the war—once in Mannheim and once in Berlin. Thus, the December 2019 performance was the first time this piece would be heard anywhere in the world, since its last Berlin performance. A year before the war, Adler wrote another cantata, “The Binding of Isaac,” a tragic metaphor for Germany’s Jewry at the time; its orchestral score did not survive.

Adler was part of a large cadre of Jewish composers in southern Germany, some of whom migrated to the United States just before the outbreak of the war (his brother Eugene, also a cantor and composer, as well as his sister, Hulda, were killed in Auschwitz). They introduced into American synagogues their own musical heritage. The context for the Potsdam performance was the ninth annual Louis Lewandowski Festival, dedicated to the celebration of German Jewish music. Anyone raised in American Reform synagogues that valued choral settings of the liturgy are familiar with melodies and arrangements by Lewandowski, as well as the Austrian cantor, Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890). My grandfather published works by Lewandowski that were previously unknown on this side of the Atlantic soon after arriving in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he served at Temple Emanuel until his death in 1955.

During the summer of 2019, Rabbi Kenneth Kanter and I, with our spouses, attended Erev Shabbat services at the Pestalozzistrasse Synagogue in Berlin. There liturgy is chanted with support of a superb cantor, mixed choir, and organ, predominantly according to the liturgical arrangements of Lewandowski. The aesthetic refinement was reminiscent of Germany’s earlier liturgical practices, as well as those of classical Reform synagogues in America. As we strolled along the affluent streets of Charlottenburg that evening, Rabbi Kanter and I reflected on the tragic demise of this musical heritage in American synagogues. This was not an exercise in nostalgia; rather, we reflected on the narrow uniformity of the contemporary Jewish cultural experience. Admittedly, the Pestalozzistrasse Synagogue is as guilty of this rigid standardization as are American synagogues. It should not be framed as an either/or

dilemma. Rather, what is missing there, and here, is the notion that the synagogue can constitute a dynamic preserver and generator of Jewish culture. Reintroducing such dynamism is potentially a task of Roots of Reform Judaism.

That my sons would happen to be living in Berlin when their great-grandfather’s music was performed in Potsdam, constitutes a historical circumstance no one in my family would ever have imagined. The simple truth is, cultures change with time, even countries once intent on the obliteration of many of its own citizens. Those changes result from both happenstance and well-thought out agency. Jewish life in Berlin today surely results from some historical accidents, but active agents are also consciously endeavoring to shape the future. Supporters of the Roots of Reform might look to the Lewandowski Festival and the slow but sure reemergence of Jewish life in Berlin as examples of how agency can lead to a cultural renaissance.

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### The Reform Advocate

Volume XI, Number II: Passover 2020

## New Board Members



**Jennifer Cassell**

When she thinks about her Jewish roots, Jennifer Cassell has fond memories of Shabbat dinners at home, Temple Youth events and OVFTY conclaves, summers at Goldman Union Camp, and two trips through Israel. More recently, she finds her Judaism in both her formal and informal communities. Her formal community is Temple Emanu-El, Dallas, where she has served as a Board Member, Religious School Chair, Youth Engagement Committee Chair, and as a religious school teacher. Growing up with educators as parents, Jennifer believes that Jewish engagement can never start too early. Her special, informal community is a Shabbat Group, a chavurah, of twelve families that has grown from young marrieds with no kids to a three-generation pack.

Jennifer is a solution architect with ADP, the payroll company, crafting service and technology solutions for future clients in the enterprise space. Her job affords her a sales role without the responsibility of cold-calling. Jennifer thrives on the opportunity connect with future clients. And, since she works from home when not on airplanes, she often uses those business trips to catch up with long time camp friends scattered around North America.

Jennifer likes to say “I grew up in Nashville before Nashville was cool.” Today, she resides in Dallas, Texas, where she is learning to play mah-jongg, taking amazing walks with best friends, and discovering the neighborhood around her new home. Jennifer has two sons have followed in her footsteps. Mitch, now at University of Kansas, found his Judaism in the hot summers of Greene Family Camp. Sam, a fully launched Leigh graduate, discovered his community in NFTY-TOR and in the Temple Shalom softball league.



**Barbara Levy**

Barbara Weinstock Levy has been in Atlanta for more than 40 years. She is married to Bertram Louis Levy who is a 5th generation Atlantan. His two sets of great, great grandparents were founding members of The Temple. She has two children, Emily Levy Heimermann and Caroline Levy Limpert, and 4 grandchildren. One set of children live in Atlanta and the other in New York.

Bert was confirmed at The Temple in Atlanta where his grandmother Claire Gershon Fox was sisterhood president and his parents were active congregants. Barbara grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, and was confirmed at Temple Emanuel, built in part by her mother with 9 other strong members around 1959.

Barbara has continued to volunteer in the community with many nonprofits, for decades. She has been president of both NCJW and The Temple Sisterhood. Barbara and her husband are also active supporters of many other causes and nonprofits in Atlanta, with emphasis on the arts, education, health, and the environment.

Barbara also has an extensive education background holding a Masters in Education from the University of Michigan and a BA in elementary education. She and two partners have created an educational consulting firm, Education Connection Advisors. Barbara has taught elementary school as well as junior college courses, directed a parent and child center, and developed the Collaborative Education Partnership, now called Odyssey. She has written workbooks for children, a blog for Huff Post, and children’s books.

Barbara would say that her best accomplishments are her children. She says that she loves gardening, playing tennis, and giving to others.



## New to the “Roots Team”



**Rand Burke**  
Rabbinical Student Intern, Cincinnati

Rand Burke is a third-year rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and a Chaplain Candidate Program Officer in the U.S. Navy. Rand graduated magna cum laude, from Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University with a BA in History and Jewish Studies and is a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

Originally from Scottsdale, Arizona, Rand grew up at Congregation Beth Israel where he learned, taught, and developed meaningful relationships with members of his synagogue community. These relationships instilled in him a deep passion for Jewish education, continuity, and fluency inspiring him to enter rabbinical school. Rand was also an active member of his summer camp community at Camp Daisy and Harry Stein (formerly Camp Charles Pearlstein) where he spent fourteen summers as a camper and staff member.

As I was beginning Shabbat services the other day at Temple Shalom in Lafayette, Louisiana, I asked one of my confirmation students who happened to be there which version of *Hashkiveinu* she wanted. She replied, “the camp version.” I gave her a thumbs up and began Shabbat services. When it came time for *Hashkiveinu*, I realized that I had neither the tune nor the words to the camp version of this prayer. I took a breath, and began to lead the congregation in the camp version of *Hashkiveinu*, and as I looked out into the congregation, my confirmation student was smiling with two thumbs up. I suppose my fourteen summers at Camp Stein in Prescott, Arizona paid off, and I saw firsthand the power of camp, specifically camp music, in creating community.

The importance of music in Reform Judaism transcends the tunes and songs we sing during services and reaches across a wide spectrum of young Jews by way of the Jewish summer camp community. Tunes sung by Debbie Friedman, Rick

Recht, Dan Nichols, and many more resonate with all the campers and staff who have spent their summers at Jewish sleepaway camps across the country. The importance of Jewish music at camp lies with its ability to connect those who have experienced at least one summer at camp because it provides young Jews with stories about our liturgy, traditions, and values through songs that you just can’t seem to get out of your head. Generations of campers turned counselors turned Jewish professionals and lay leaders grew up with this music which shaped their Jewish identities much like it did mine, and this allows me to connect to my students, congregants, and peers through two of the most important gifts our movement has given Judaism: music and summer camp.



**The Reform Advocate**

Volume XI, Number II: Passover 2020

## The Art of Choice HUC-JIR Cincinnati Rabbinical Student Music Training

**Cantor Yvon F. Shore**  
Director of Liturgical Arts, HUC-JIR,  
Cincinnati



Music is subjective. Place Jewish as a starter adjective and aside from inherent controversy, the subjectivity expands. Add Reform to the mix and the challenge to present a cohesive musical approach towards worship and life-cycle has not tripled but multiplied by anyone with an opinion. From this challenging backdrop, HUC-JIR is tasked to help our rabbinical students navigate the ever-increasing world of Jewish liturgical music. In Cincinnati, the approach is broken down into 4 main areas: Building the foundation, Creating effective ritual, Modalities of worship, and *Minhag Hamakom*/Respect for Tradition. Over the course of 4 years, students work with the Director of Liturgical Arts and Music to explore each goal.

### Building the Foundation

Neither music education nor vocal training are prerequisites to rabbinical school. Whereas that statement is obvious, 2nd year rabbinical students may be called on to lead worship and aspects of life-cycle events as part of their student pulpits. Their vital music foundation begins with basic *nusach*. These are melodies and chanted passages that correspond to the needs of the Jewish calendar and life-cycle event. Students also lead multiple services on campus and are presented with musical choices to build their repertoire. This includes well known pieces and composers from within the 19th - 21st century Reform Jewish canon. The goal is to provide enough resources and opportunities for students to demonstrate confidence and competence when facilitating worship as the solo clergy representative.

### Creating Effective Ritual

As Pirkei Avot teaches - *Im ein kemach ein Torah*/Without flour there is no teaching-study. In other words, once the foundation is set, all students can begin to branch out and explore their options. When crafting rituals, students are guided through the liturgy and music to develop meaningful worship and life-cycle experiences. All ritual should bear in mind the person, family, or community they will reach. The music students are given

reflects larger compositional motifs that are specific to the event. If a rabbinical student has a stronger musical background, they have the option to take on more complex musical settings. The *iyyunim*/original prayers students compose also serve to help frame the music.

### Modalities of Worship

**They receive extensive exposure to some of the greatest compositional pieces of the Reform Movement**

Once a student has demonstrated their comfort and proficiency in normative worship - (weekday morning, afternoon, Shabbat evening, morning, holidays, life cycles) they are challenged once again to break from the familiar and acquire even greater skills. The following questions help frame their overall approach: Why do people pray? What draws us to sacred communion? How does worship provide meaning in ways other gatherings do not? In exploring modalities of worship, the music rabbinical students engage with may be highly experimental. Students work with soundscapes, Chassidic music, klezmer, Sephardic, classical composition, instrumental, contemporary, singer songwriter, or any musical style that fits. This is a highly collaborative effort with cantorial guidance.



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## Minhag HaMakon/ Respect for Tradition

Generations of rabbis have experienced Shabbat services as part of HUC-JIR Cincinnati campus life. The heritage of music from A.Z. Idelsohn and Eric Werner to Bonia Shur and Stephen Richards, composed in the Scheuer Chapel aid in the preparation of 4th and 5th year rabbinical students' Shabbat services. They receive extensive exposure to some of the greatest compositional pieces of the Reform Movement. Students are then guided to choose music that will highlight their sermon, iyyunim, and overall Shabbat aesthetic. By the 5th year, students demonstrate their musical sensitivities and knowledge by choosing all musical settings for their Shabbat service.

For those students who not only facilitate worship but dutifully support their friends and colleagues as they seek their own spiritual paths, they are exposed to a treasury of Jewish music throughout their entire HUC-JIR journey. In the end, each future rabbi begins their lifelong consideration and appreciation for the diverse wellspring of music that we as Reform Jews are privileged and charged to purvey. This is the art of choice.



# My First Encounter with Ernest Bloch's Sacred Service:

## The profound spiritual impact of finding belonging and ownership in the Classical Reform music tradition

Isaac Sonett-Assor  
HUC-JIR Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music  
Cantorial Student

I'll never forget the first time I listened to Ernest Bloch's *Sacred Service*. I had just returned home from my first year of cantorial studies on Hebrew Union College's Jerusalem campus, and I was researching Jewish classical music that I might teach to young singers at the Union for Reform Judaism's Creative Arts Academy. I remember hearing Robert Merrill sing the first few words of *Mah Tov* ("How Good It Is"), backed by the New York Philharmonic. It was a transformative moment in my Jewish education. It is difficult to describe the pride that I felt hearing one of the world's finest voices singing the morning liturgy set to music that earnestly captured the grandeur of the synagogue.

For years, before I lived in Jerusalem, I had studied the great mass settings of the classical music tradition. I had such deep admiration for Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* and Bach's *Mass in B Minor*. Masterpieces like these really did (and do) feel sacred, as if these giants were striving to engage with the Divine through music. These works revealed for me music's full capacity to illuminate sacred text and deepen the listener's response to such words. Still, as a Jew, I could never shake the feeling that this music did not *belong* to me. I wished that I could find more classical music that was not only written by composers who shared my heritage but captured the experience, hopes, and despairs of Jews from all around the world. Yes, I took pride in certain classics of the High Holy Days by Max Janowski and Max Helfman, but I had not yet been exposed to the vast catalogue of the great Classical Reform composers and their musical heirs.

That first encounter with *Sacred Service* changed everything for me. It showed me that there can be Jewish art music that is as Jewish as it is artistic.



And my second year of studies on HUC's New York campus has only deepened this belief. Week after week, in Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller's Contemporary Shabbat Workshop and Joyce Rosenzweig's choral repertoire course, we explore diverse and challenging repertoire by masterful 19<sup>th</sup>-, 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century composers. By engaging with this music, we are exposed to a range of Jewish perspectives on our liturgy across time and space. For instance, it has been deeply valuable studying Leonard Bernstein's setting of *Hashkiveinu*, commissioned by Cantor Dr. David Putterman of Park Avenue Synagogue in 1945. So many contemporary settings of our prayer for protection in sleep treat this text with a gentle, lullaby-like quality, and yet Bernstein sets the text "for You are God who guards us and saves us" with an anxious and dissonant imitative figure, as if to suggest that, while we teach these words to our children, they may not always ring true. These historical musical settings of our liturgy are as valuable as our extensive rabbinic literary tradition. Through them, we gain a window into how our forebears were uplifted by and disillusioned with prayer, how they praised God in triumph and cried out when they felt God's absence. Even if such works may not become a

regular feature of our Shabbat services, there is so much to be gained from finding opportunities to share them in our congregations.

As an aspiring composer of liturgical music, I try to keep in mind what I can learn from the Jewish compositional masters of the past, even when my contemporary style differs from the voices that have come before me. Ultimately, certain musical ideas always apply, regardless of genre. Whether we are writing for cantor, organ, and choir or for guitar and congregation, composers must approach every project with something to say. We must consider how we feel about the text and how our personal experience colors this perspective. If we focus only on the catchiness of the melody, I sincerely believe that this appeal of familiarity will not leave a lasting impact on congregants, even if the piece may be initially memorable. It is only those melodies that reveal the true soul of the composer that have the ability to etch themselves into the worshipper's spiritual memory. It is unclear to me whether I have ever succeeded in writing such a piece, but I know that each time I attempt to set

***As an aspiring composer of liturgical music, I try to keep in mind what I can learn from the Jewish compositional masters of the past, even when my contemporary style differs from the voices that have come before me.***

a text, I seek to pray as honestly as possible, and I only hope to continue to remove the barriers to this honest expression. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote that "when we sing, we utter and confess all our thoughts." The masterpieces of the Classical Reform tradition have endured by embodying this principle. And for as long as contemporary composers continue to bring their full selves to our liturgical tradition, this legacy will survive, adapt, and influence future Jewish generations.



## A Modern Composer of Jewish Music

Michael Hunter Ochs is universally recognized as one of the most respected and adored creators of contemporary Jewish music today. He has served as Composer-In-Residence at Congregation Micah in Nashville, TN since 2000 and began a second residency at East End Temple in New York, NY in 2018. Many of his compositions have become essential threads in the fabric of the Reform Jewish movement -- none more so than his "Oseh Shalom". Every Friday evening, congregations around the world rejoice, reflect, and draw closer singing his songs.

In 2016, Michael was commissioned by New York's 92nd Street Y to compose and produce an original Rosh Hashanah song, "A New Year." The song was performed by communities around the world and has amassed over 10 million views on Facebook and YouTube — simply unprecedented in Jewish music. In addition to his success in Jewish music, Michael has quietly established himself as one of the most versatile songwriters in America today. His song "In Her Eyes" was recorded by international superstar Josh Groban. The soul-filled "On My Knees" was awarded Song of The Year honors from both the Gospel Music Association (Dove Award) and the Nashville Songwriters Association International, and spent 14 weeks at #1. Michael's music has appeared on albums with sales exceeding 20 million units and has been attached to numerous feature films and TV shows including *Downsizing* (Matt Damon), *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* (Uma Thurman), *The Terminal* (Steven Spielberg), and *The Simpsons*. He frequently travels around the globe to write for various pop stars and his songs have been recorded by international artists in Norway, Italy, France, the UK, Switzerland, Scotland, and Helene Fischer, the number-one selling artist in Germany. No matter where his travels take him - Michael will always be a suffering New York Mets fan.

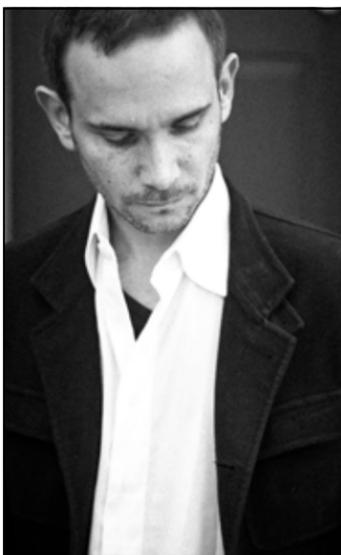
To say I never could have imagined being considered a composer of Jewish music would be quite an understatement.

Growing up just north of New York City, our family belonged to a Conservative/Orthodox synagogue with no instruments allowed. I didn't understand much of the Hebrew and temple seemed to all be a matter of memorization and rote. But the cantor, singing a cappella on the High Holidays -- moved me. He would pound his fist on the podium to emphasize key words or phrases and to keep the rhythm. My brother and I would leave Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur services singing those melodies back and forth to each other...smiling and laughing... feeling more from the music than the worship or the Holy Days themselves. Those melodies stayed with me.

And then there was Shabbat. If I'm being honest, there were times I looked at Shabbat as a hassle. No TV. Lots of prayers delaying the meal. I had to take the stairs up to Grandma's apartment on Tehama Street in Brooklyn instead of the elevator. Lights on timers. It all seemed so restrictive. But it was in that 5th floor apartment in Brooklyn that I listened to my Grandpa Sol humming Niggunim...constantly. Tapping his fingers on the table to keep the beat. I loved it! The music crept its way into my soul.

Though a few of my friends went to Jewish camps - that was not for me. I was more into sports and fishing and internships at recording studios. But I remember hearing a few Debbie Friedman songs at Larchmont Temple and thinking...hmmm, I relate to this in a different way than the way I relate to the Orthodox approach to the liturgy.

I will never forget my parents taking my brother and me to many Broadway shows. My first was *Fiddler on*



*the Roof*. It blew me away. *Chorus Line*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Oliver*. And later *Les Miserables*, *Phantom*, and *Wicked*. Many of the great Jewish Broadway composers actually leaned on those Jewish melodies tucked away in their subconscious while composing for the theatre (after all, only Gershwin could use the nusach for the blessing before reading the Torah as the melody for "It Ain't Necessarily So" from *Porgy and Bess*...)

And then there was the most important influence of them all. My Dad. He had paid his way through law school as a professional musician, accompanying the likes of Zero Mostel on the Catskill Tours. Every night he would come home from work and sit at the piano and I would watch him become one with the notes, with the rests, with the dynamics, and with the spirit of whatever he was playing. Chopin, Mozart, *South Pacific*, *The Sound of Music*, and all the pop hits of the day. And of course at every family gathering he would sit at the piano, me on guitar (or 4 handed piano!) and we would sing and play and jam... there was nothing better.

Through college I was still only writing pop music. Drawing from the likes of James Taylor and Cat Stevens, Peter Gabriel and the Rolling Stones - great songwriters. I remember begging my mom or dad to take me to the

***Psalm 137:4 states (and it's sung in the musical Godspell as well...), "How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?"***

Sam Goody's (remember him - it was a record store) to pick up the new Billy Joel albums the day they came out! I also remember I often had no idea who was actually singing the songs. I was always more concerned and preoccupied with the songs themselves. Figuring out the chord progressions by ear, and freaking out when I stumbled upon a chord I'd never played before! It was like receiving a new toy to play with! I was constantly noticing the differences between perfect and imperfect rhymes and analyzing the structure of the composition. No bridge? Pre-chorus, but only before the first hook! I was instinctively aware of the "rules" of songwriting and was simply fascinated when I stumbled upon songs that broke all the rules!

Eventually I landed in Nashville and signed a pop music publishing deal. Still with no intention of writing for the synagogue. Ironically, my first song to be recorded in Nashville happened to become an influential worship song on Christian radio and became a number one hit! That's when Rabbi Kanter suggested I compose something for Shabbat at Congregation Micah. I think I was a bit reluctant at first. But he nudged me along and eventually the songs I composed at Micah have found their way into synagogues and have landed on hearts around the world.

Today I feel so blessed to be composing Jewish music and pop music side by side. In fact it was while I was attending a URJ Biennial about 10 years ago that I found out that one of my songs was about to be recorded by Josh Groban. It was surreal. Judaism is so much about the journey. And as I look at my musical journey I see those times when I was on one path and the road veered off and took me in another direction. I am grateful that, perhaps by accident or by intention I tend to trust the signs and the guidance that takes me where I need to be.

I debated for a time designing one website for my Jewish music and another for the pop repertoire. However, I am acutely aware that what I write in the Jewish world, seeps into and influences my pop music at times. I can't help but tap into that toolbox of chord changes and melodic influences from my youth. And the pop music of today at times finds its way into one of my liturgical pieces - though I'm very careful and deliberate that my Jewish music always has a

"Hebrew Heartbeat." And...though I cannot say too much about it...there's a "pop song" in production right now that finally and completely brings my pop and Jewish worlds together! I cannot wait to share this one!

Psalm 137:4 states (and it's sung in the musical Godspell as well...) "How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?" To me, the music of those strange lands eventually becomes familiar and seeps into the vernacular of Jewish music. That's why whether in Spain or Poland, Buenos Aires or New York City, Jewish music is constantly evolving, adapting, informing and inspiring. To me, just as the Torah is a living book - Jewish music too, is the breath and source of life.

**Michael Hunter Ochs**  
[www.michaelhunterochs.com](http://www.michaelhunterochs.com)

**The Reform Advocate**

Volume XI, Number II: Passover 2020



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# URJ Biennial, December 2019



Ken with Rabbi Micah Greenstein of Temple Israel, Memphis



Ken and Biennial Chair Alec Harris



Ken and Rabbi Joe Black, Temple Emanuel, Denver, CO



Vicki and award-winning Jewish cooking instructor Tina Wasserman



Scott and Rabbi Fred Guttman of Temple Emanuel in Greensboro



Roots Board President Vicki Samuels and Jason Taylor



Ken, former President World Union of Progressive Judaism Rabbi David Frelander, and Devon



Ken with Leo Baeck College, London, Principal Rabbi Dr. Deborah Kahn-Harris and HUC President Dr. Andrew Rehfeld



Scott and HUC Cincinnati Overseer Bob Mast



Ken and Julie Silver, composer-musician



Ken and CCAR Chief Executive Rabbi Hara Person



Roots Program Director Rabbi Devon Lerner and Administrative Director Jill Silverstein with Jordan Friedman.



Scott, Jodi Kaufman, Director of Congregational Learning at Temple Beth Shalom, Santa Ana, Jewish music star Dan Nichols, Anna-Gene O'Neal, and Ken

## Sing a New Song!



**Scott Kumer**  
Director of Music,  
Chicago Sinai  
Congregation

“Hey, why are you playing that song from my video game?!” The insistent questioner was a young man who approached me while I was at the organ,

practicing Louis Lewandowski’s famous setting from Psalm 92: Tzadik Katamar (see graphic) “The righteous shall flourish like the date palm, and thrive like a cedar in Lebanon...” At first put-off by his question, I quickly decided to maximize a “teachable moment” by explaining the origin and importance of this song which, until then, he had known only as background music to a pleasant, tranquil scene from his video game (I forget its name). I eventually concluded that the video game’s music editor at least had demonstrated good taste, a sense of Jewish musical awareness, and maybe even had done a mitzvah, albeit in a strange sort of way.

Many of us are well-acquainted with Lewandowski’s graceful melody which has been a synagogal favorite for generations. And while this “Tzadik Katamar” melody is widely known, it is fascinating to keep in mind that it represents the very end portion of just one of Lewandowski’s multiple interpretations of Psalm 92, whose singing is a traditional way to welcome the Sabbath. As such, Psalm 92 was a rich source of inspiration for him. He composed at least eight different settings of the complete Psalm: seven for the Sabbath and one for the Festivals, all scored for choir, cantor, and organ.

Psalm 92 is fairly lengthy, and with many contrasting sentiments. We might ponder in wonderment how Lewandowski could envision eight different musical interpretations of this text, totaling about forty-one pages of published music for this Psalm

alone! This remarkable occurrence may shed some light on the exuberant instruction expressed in Psalm 96:1, Psalm 98:1, and Isaiah 42:10 – Sing to the Lord a new song! – because there are an endless number of ways to sing new songs, especially those which are based on sacred texts. Composers have manifested this “newness” throughout the centuries, right up to the present day.

A question to consider might be: Can a song be “new” even if it is an “old” song dating from the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century? I believe the answer is: Yes, it can be for us, if we are experiencing it for the first time! Of Lewandowski’s eight settings of Psalm 92, there are many radiant and inspiring passages – hidden gems perhaps even more beautiful than the famous excerpt referenced here. I would encourage us to become familiar with at least some of these other settings, perhaps by asking your Cantor or Music Director to show you the music, or to sing or play passages from a few of them, or by incorporating them at worship services. These would be wonderful ways to increase our love, awareness, and appreciation for the musical treasure which we have been so fortunate to inherit from a prolific master, all beautifully composed for the praise of God. And so with the rebirth that comes with Springtide, let us sing a new (old) song!



**TMP’s Michael Hunter Ochs Anthology and Dan Nichols Anthology** (both artists are great friends of Roots of Reform Judaism), as well as many other publications, include stunning pieces for both solo performance, choir, and congregational participation. Please support our Jewish composers.



## The Reform Advocate

Volume XI, Number II: Passover 2020



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# Out & About



Roots Board Meeting in Chicago with Rabbi Sam Joseph



Ken at Central Reform Temple, Boston



Ken with Tannus Schlam in Boston



Ken and Roots Senior Scholar Rabbi Lance Sussman at Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia



Scott and Roots Board Member Rabbi Andy Kahn at Temple Emanuel in New York



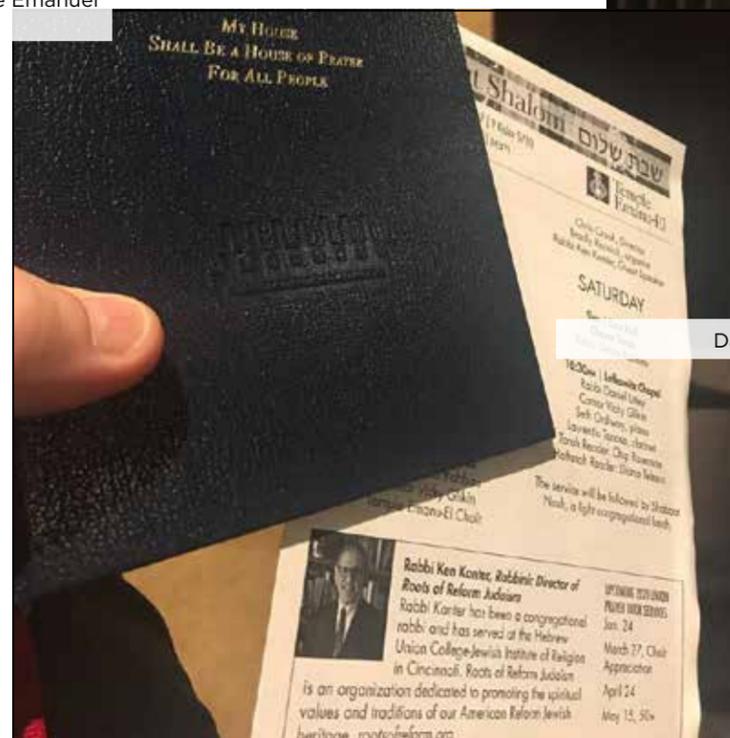
Roots Board Member Rabbi Ben Zeidman, Associate Dean Dr. Madelyn Katz, and Ken at HUC-Los Angeles



Nashville Gathering



Rabbinical Director Ken Kanter and Advancement Director Scott O'Neal ...out and about for Roots of Reform



Dallas



Ken with Roots Board Member Max Tonkon in Dallas



Ken with Rabbi Debra Robbins and Cantor Vicki Glikin at Temple Emanu-El, Dallas

The Reform Advocate

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## RRJ Pamphlet Project



Rabbi Devon Lerner

As Roots of Reform Judaism forges its pathway into a second decade, one of the areas of focus is to offer resources that are accessible and approachable for a wide constituency. Considering audiences of the unserved or underserved among us, we are developing resources that speak to the disenfranchised, the unaffiliated, cultural Jews, and interfaith families seeking to find user-

friendly ways to celebrate observances and festivals at home with family and

**The first four booklets are now available.**

friends. In the language of our time, primarily in English, with Hebrew and transliteration for key prayers, we hope these will offer a way for many to find their way into (or back to) the beauty of our heritage.

The initial booklets will be: A Time to Rest - Sabbath Prayers and Blessings; A Time to Mourn & A Time to Remember – Prayers and Home Service for Mourners; A Time to Rest and Reflect – A Shabbat Evening Service for Today; Home Observances – Festivals, Blessings and Readings; and A Time to Celebrate – Rosh Hashanah Morning Service. Since the CCAR Convention in April 2019, we have had many Rabbis and lay people read and review these booklets, providing us with valuable feedback and thoughtful refinement. The first four booklets are available now. Visit [www.rootsofreform.org](http://www.rootsofreform.org) for more information.



Glass Ark doors, Temple Shalom, Medford, MA by Jeanette Kuvim Oren

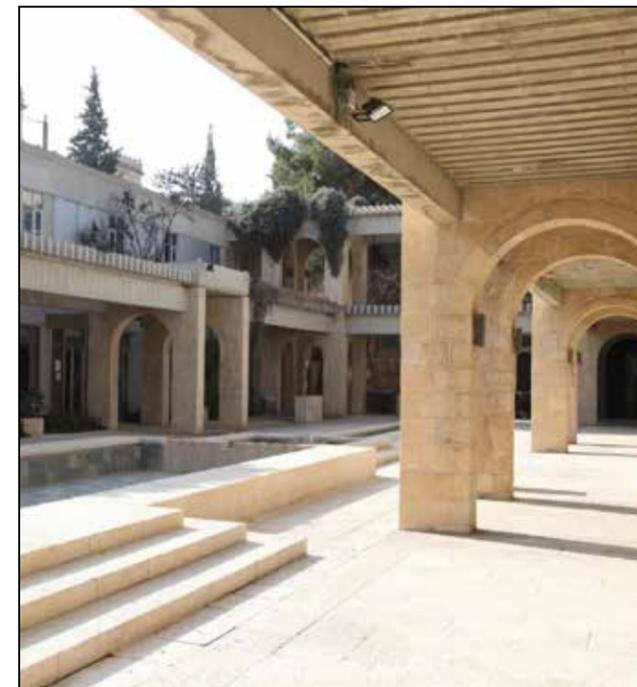
The Reform Advocate

Volume XI, Number II: Passover 2020

## Jerusalem Program

Sometimes even the best laid plans do not work out! For the past eight years, the Society for Classical Reform Judaism, known now by its new name, Roots of Reform Judaism, has sponsored a concert of Jewish music in Israel. Presented in either Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, these concerts have featured great Jewish liturgical music of the nineteenth through the early twenty-first centuries. Sadly, the onset of the Coronavirus around the world forced the cancellation of my trip to Israel to meet with Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion rabbinical, education and cantorial students, faculty, and participating at this concert. Ultimately, it forced the cancellation of the concert itself, when all programming was cancelled on the campuses of HUC-JIR around the world.

I did want to share my remarks of gratitude and tribute for that night, although they were never given!



Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Jerusalem

Dear Friends,

Erev tov lechem—good evening to you all. How deeply sorry I am that I cannot be with you on this important evening of celebration, commemoration and gratitude. Nothing would have kept me away, other than an international pandemic.

Roots of Reform Judaism, known to many of you in its earlier iteration as the Society for Classical Reform Judaism, is an organization dedicated to educating, enlightening and inspiring current and future generations of Jews about the roots of our Reform Jewish heritage; our values, history, worship, our liturgy and especially tonight, our music.

In this profoundly tops-turvy world, where almost everything is unpredictable and unsure, we know we can turn with confidence and comfort to the more than two centuries of inspiring music of our Jewish people.

We of Roots of Reform Judaism are honored to welcome you to this ninth annual concert of great Jewish music. We are so appreciative of Rabbi and Dean Naamah Kelman, Cantor Tamar Havilio, our treasured friends of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem, for hosting this concert, and especially, deepest thanks to the first year cantorial and rabbinic students in Jerusalem who have joined with distinguished chazanim (cantors) from our Israel Progressive Movement, in performing tonight.

We are especially proud to join in this evening to honor the eightieth birthday of Cantor Eliyahu Schliefer, our teacher, mentor, composer, inspiration, and friend. Many generations of students have been edified by Professor Schliefer's scholarship and erudition; far more around the world have been inspired by his compositions and passionate chazzanut (singing). How blessed we are to honor him tonight.

Todah Rabbah lechem, thank you all.

**Rabbi Kenneth A. Kanter**  
Rabbinic Director



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This ePrayerbook was published in 2015 by the Central Conference of American Rabbis Press (CCAR Press), in collaboration with the Society for Classical Reform Judaism (SCRJ). In 2019 the SCRJ changed its name to Roots of Reform Judaism (RRJ). Learn more about our expanded mission that includes a broad range of resources for Reform Jews, interfaith families, and spiritual seekers at...

**[RootsofReformJudaism.org](https://www.RootsofReformJudaism.org)**