

# SHALOM *y'all*

A PUBLICATION OF THE GOLDRING/WOLDENBERG INSTITUTE OF SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE



## WE'RE LISTENING

**LISTENING TOURS:  
COMING TO YOUR  
COMMUNITY**

p.7

**ONCE A FELLOW,  
ALWAYS  
A FELLOW**

p.10

**HEARING JEWISH  
STORIES, SEEING  
JEWISH SITES**

p.14



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# CONTENTS

Leadership Messages.....	4
Rabbinical Services.....	6
Education.....	8
Focus on FAN .....	10
History .....	12
Heritage & Interpretation .....	14
Cultural Programming.....	16
Community Engagement.....	18
Gifts & Gratitude .....	20

# Sh'ma, Y'all

**Sh'ma.** The word is small, but powerful. It means *hear*, but in the active and imperative sense. It reminds us to *listen*.

Throughout this issue of *Shalom Y'all* and throughout 2019, we're focusing in on the concept of active listening. The entire board and staff of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) is tuning in to the idea of listening as an imperative; of heeding others' words and insights as our primary call to action.

One of the ways we're doing this is through a series of Listening Tours, which you'll learn more about in the following pages. Over the course of the year, we'll visit at least one community in each of the thirteen states we serve, and take notes on the conversations community members have while we're in the room. We'll pose questions about what's on their minds now, what's on their radar next, and yes, of course—we'll provide the bagels.

As we go to publication for this issue, we've already conducted our first few tours. One thing we've already heard at each event:

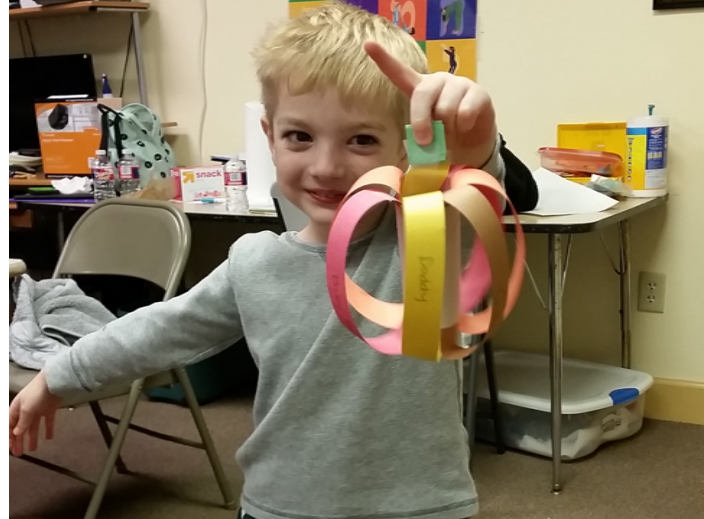
**"Thank you for listening."**

It's so simple, but so profound, to truly feel heard.

It is our humbling honor to get to listen to what our communities have to say. The Southern Jewish experience is unique and universal in its complexities. We don't want to assume or overlook anything as we plan for the ISJL's future, working in partnership with the communities we serve. We want to hear what you have to say. We want to be good listeners, who take what we hear and help apply it to the solutions and strategies we develop, together.

**Thank you for talking with us**, and here's to all of the conversations and cultivation of community ahead.

**Shalom, y'all –  
and sh'ma, y'all!**



# CEO MESSAGE



**Michele Schipper**  
ISJL CEO

IN EXODUS, THE Israelites hear a whole lot about how much they'll have to take on in order to be God's partners. When asked if they agreed to take on this mantle, the response from our ancestors is one that has inspired a lot of interpretation, study, debate, and even poetry: "Na'aseh v'nishma"—"We will do and we will listen" (Ex. 24:7).

When they made this declaration, our people had already heard some of the obligations that would be incumbent upon them; knowing that more requirements were still to come, they nevertheless responded that they would do, and they would listen.

The work was about to begin—and the listening would never end.

This aligns with the ISJL's approach to Jewish life, historically and in this specific moment. Having heard what some of the needs of this region were, we began to do the work of supporting, celebrating,

and connecting Jewish life in the South. But even though the work is now well underway, we know we must continue listening.

We have conducted needs assessments and regional field studies before. In the past, we hired field representatives to hit the road and gather insights on our behalf. We know it's important to periodically have an outside expert weigh in

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WHEN THEY MADE THIS DECLARATION, OUR PEOPLE HAD ALREADY HEARD SOME OF THE OBLIGATIONS THAT WOULD BE INCUMBENT UPON THEM

on our work, and listen to what folks throughout our region have to say. But this time around, it's our own senior staff hitting the road to hear what's on the minds of the folks in the communities we serve. We decided that it was important for our senior staff members—the ones who do the work, day in

and day out—to do the listening.

So much of the ISJL's work involves outreach. We travel to communities and bring our programs and resources directly to the individuals and organizations with which we partner. I am proud of how far we have traveled today and know that these listening tours will help inform the work of tomorrow.

When the ISJL was in our earliest years, there were supporters – many of you among them – who took a chance on the idea of the ISJL, after hearing the vision of what the ISJL could be. It was a big dream: an organization that would preserve and enrich Jewish life throughout the South. Recently, one of our long-term donors shared why he became one of those early supporters. He said he listened as our founders explained how the ISJL would provide resources to communities large and small. Today he continues to listen as we share updates; he reads the stories from staff and program participants throughout the pages of this magazine and sees the proof that what was once a “big idea” is now an actual dream come true. He said that's why

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WHEN THE ISJL WAS IN OUR EARLIEST YEARS, THERE WERE SUPPORTERS - MANY OF YOU AMONG THEM - WHO TOOK A CHANCE ON THE IDEA OF THE ISJL, AFTER HEARING THE VISION OF WHAT THE ISJL COULD BE.

he continues to support the ISJL today.

I am thankful that he took the time to listen. I hope that you will too. And as CEO, I promise that we, too, will continue to listen to your ideas, concerns, and hopes for Jewish life in the South.

*Michele Schipper*





**Rachel Reagler Schulman**  
ISJL Board Chair

RIGHT OUT OF LAW school, I served as a law clerk to Chief Judge John D. Schwartz of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Illinois in Chicago. I was excited, nervous and just plain scared to death. I didn't know what to expect or what exactly was expected of me; all I knew was that this tall, loud, white-haired man needed me to research the law and write memos for him.

Little did I know how this one-year clerkship would change my life forever – not only because of the experience I gained, but also because of an important life lesson I learned.

When I began the job, I was at the very beginning of my career. I didn't think Judge Schwartz would actually ask for my opinion or listen to what I had to say about the legal matters at hand. After all, he was the expert in bankruptcy law, and I was just a recent law school graduate.

Judge Schwartz quickly

informed me that he did want to know what I had to say. He wanted to know what I thought about the law and how I interpreted the Bankruptcy Code. He wanted me to speak up, because, as he reminded me, that was a major part of my job.

I learned under his leadership that my voice was important. Judge Schwartz listened to his law clerks over the many years he faithfully served as a bankruptcy judge. I'm not the only one who benefited from his



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mentoring and listening. Although there was never any doubt during my time working for him that Judge Schwartz was The Judge and I was The Law Clerk, I, too, had

# BOARD CHAIR MESSAGE

an important role. I was proud to be his law clerk and part of his team.

At the ISJL, we work in teams as well. We refer to the communities we serve as our “partners,” and we want to listen to and learn from their voices. Throughout the coming year, members of the ISJL team will travel around our 13-state region to conduct Listening Tours. We will have at least one tour in each state. Believe it or not, a Listening Tour is just what it sounds like: ISJL team members will listen to what you have to say!

And what will be the subject of the Listening Tours? What will the ISJL be listening to? We want to understand what is on your mind regarding the future of YOUR Jewish community. What you say will be heard. What you say, is important to the ISJL. I invite you to join the conversation because your voice does matter. Moreover, it is a great feeling to be an active member of the team.

We thank you for being part of our team! The board and staff of the ISJL appreciate the power of all of our partnerships. By donating to the ISJL, you are another type of partner with the ISJL in the work we do.



I INVITE YOU TO JOIN THE CONVERSATION, BECAUSE YOUR VOICE DOES MATTER. MOREOVER, IT IS A GREAT FEELING TO BE AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE TEAM.

*Rachel R. Schulman*



*A great example of engaging programming. For their seder during last year's Passover Pilgrimage, the community in Greenwood, MS, met at the Viking Cooking School!*

## Rabbinical Services

# FROM TORAH ON TAP TO RUNNING WITH THE RABBI: LISTEN TO WHAT GETS YOUR COMMUNITY EXCITED

**By Rabbi Aaron Rozovsky**  
*ISJL Director of Rabbinical Services*

I HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF conducting one of the ISJL's very first Listening Tours—a great opportunity to hear what people in the region have to say. One of my main takeaways from that experience, as well as from my regular visits to our partner congregations, is the anguish that communities large and small feel over the considerable number of disaffected and disengaged Jews in their midst.

Why have so many individuals separated themselves from synagogues, and from organized Jewish life in general? The reasons may vary. Some are empty nesters,

who feel that now that their kids have left home, the synagogue can't offer them anything. Others feel that their synagogues are first and foremost (and perhaps only) a place for organized prayer and nothing else. Maybe they had a negative experience with a Jewish leader. Maybe no one has invited them to participate recently. There are also those who, in the words of one rabbi, "were looking for an excuse their entire lives to stop coming to shul and being Jewish, and once they found it, they latched on to it, and held on for dear life."

Getting people back into

the building isn't easy. It can be an uphill struggle, but one that is certainly winnable—and worthwhile! So how do we begin to tap in to what might excite and re-engage our congregants?

The first step is to listen. Reach out to former and inactive members and ask them why their participation has waned, and what it would take for them to return to the synagogue. Take their responses and input seriously. Respect the fact that their Judaism might not be your Judaism. We have to remember that being Jewish is far more than just *tefilah* (prayer) and *da'at*

(religion). Judaism is about music, cuisine, movies, TV shows, dance, discussion, social justice, debate and learning, culture, peoplehood, community, lifecycle events, social gatherings, and history... it's everything! From community members input, create and tailor unique programs that address their wants and needs.

Next, allow for creativity and innovation. In the *siddur Mishkan Tefilah*, we implore God during Friday night services: "Wake us, O God, and shake us from...half-forgotten melodies and rubric prayers of yesteryears." Instead of just reciting these words, let's take them to heart and live by them. Make new memories, and find new ways to bring prayer alive. Maybe this means adding a family Shabbat, a concert Shabbat, or a meditative Shabbat into the mix. The sky's the limit!

Finally, publicize everything that your community has going on, and carefully target your audience. If people don't know you're out there, and don't know about the amazing programs you're offering, they won't know to show up. Make sure to publicize in ways old and new. Newsletters and flyers are still important; active and inviting Facebook pages, Twitter profiles, Instagram accounts, and websites are also crucial to promoting your community and demonstrating that you are relatable across the generational spectrum.

Bottom line: if your synagogue isn't relevant, people simply won't come. In the ISJL, you have a committed partner that not only wants you to succeed, but will also work tirelessly with you to ensure that you and your congregation thrive. Whenever you want to talk about how to get people more involved in your local community, we're here to listen—and to help.

To connect with Rabbi Rozovsky,  
email [arozovsky@isjl.org](mailto:arozovsky@isjl.org).

# LISTENING TOURS: Coming to a Community Near You

**The ISJL puts staff on the road all the time – Education Fellows spend weekends in education partner communities, Rabbis on the Road puts clergy into small towns for Shabbat and holidays, Community Engagement staff travel to lead ASK module experiences; but this year, in addition to the usual reasons we hit the road, senior staff will be adding another kind of trip to their itineraries.**

We're calling these visits Listening Tours. The Listening Tour will cover our entire thirteen-state southern region. Senior staff will visit communities with which we already partner, as well as communities we have not served in some time or where we have yet to bring any programming.

As we look ahead to 2020, which will mark the ISJL's twentieth year, and plan for many more years of service, we want to be sure that the resources and programs we provide align with your current and emerging needs. The goal of the Listening Tour is not for us to pitch programs or make the case for the ISJL. It's for us to listen to the communities across our service area and facilitate community conversations around the issues that matter most in the Southern Jewish community.

We want these tours to be

engaging, meaningful, and enjoyable. To set a positive tone, the ISJL staff member conducting the tour shows up early, brings snacks, asks questions, and takes notes while community members do the talking. We're looking forward to candid conversations about current and emerging needs, gathering individuals' thoughts on the issues specific to their communities and across the spectrum of Jewish life.

At the conclusion of the year of Listening Tours, we'll outline our findings (maintaining confidentiality as needed). The lessons learned from the Listening Tours will become the framework for our board and staff to begin planning for 2020 and beyond, ensuring that the needs expressed are the ones we're working to address.

See you soon at a Listening Tour near you!





## Education

# YOU GOT SERVED: FELLOWS & COMMUNITIES

By Rabbi Matt Dreffin, MAJE

*ISJL Director of Education*

WE MAKE A LOT OF PROMISES in the ISJL Education Department. We make commitments not only to the communities with which we partner, but also to the staff we hire. We promise to give Fellows the experience of a lifetime, enabling them to grow and develop over the course of two years.

Of course, we also promise our communities a lot in terms of what we will deliver—a comprehensive Curriculum, Community Support including visits from Fellows, and an amazing annual Conference (our 3 C approach to Jewish education). Sometimes, because we're so focused on one aspect of our job

or another, we forget to check in to see if we are fulfilling said promises. That's why it's important to never stop listening.

As the Fellows' supervisor and mentor, I can't be in every community they visit or debrief with every single school director each week—but I can invite continued feedback and conversations through evaluations. After each Fellow visits their community in-person, we send a digital evaluation to find out how the Fellow did before their visit, during their trip, and during follow-ups with the community. This helps us understand if we're serving

the Fellows themselves while also serving our communities. The following quotes, taken from actual evaluations of Fellow visits, illustrate the ways in which we are fulfilling our promises.

*"[The Fellow] followed my request for a very musical focus and it was great; people asked for a repeat in spring."*

One of the things we advertise is that we'll help build up Fellows' service-leading skills. This sort of hands-on training enables them to serve far into the future—either as clergy or as lay leaders—in a variety of congregational settings. For the communities, it allows them to



think big about what their prayerful moments can look like (even when the Fellow is not leading). It's always a good sign that we've fulfilled expectations when we're asked for a repeat experience.

*"[The Fellow] gave a well prepared and interesting d'var [Torah], and they did a warm and age-appropriate Havdalah with our little ones."*

Writing and delivering a d'var Torah is, for most people, a weird and unnerving enterprise. It requires public speaking, a knowledge of the text, and the ability to convey a message. Some Fellows come to us with more experience than others, but we work with all of them to improve this area of delivery. Furthermore, we're constantly looking at every activity to make sure we're meeting the needs of all the learners involved. In this case, it looks like we hit the nail on the head with age appropriateness — whew! We spend time throughout the year discussing programs that run well and activities that are best suited for different ages.

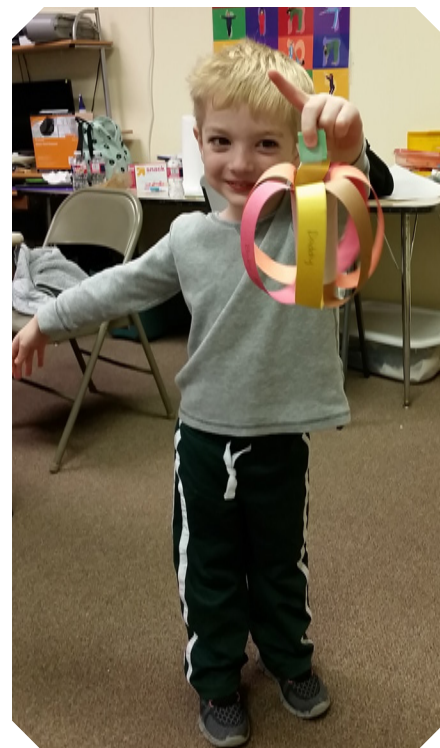
*"[The Fellow] ran a scavenger hunt around camp and just became part of our congregation. They had to be 'on' the entire weekend and it seemed effortless."*

It always warms our hearts to hear that not only did the Fellow do a good job of executing their programs, but they also connected with the community. We offer a wide variety of experiences across geographical and denominational lines, saying that "Fellows really get to know the communities." The previous quote shows how, even

over the course of just three visits, the Fellow and the community really bonded. I always love hearing how Fellows even stay in touch with community members long after their Fellowship; every now and then someone gets invited to a wedding!

*"The way [the Fellow] spoke to and about anti-Semitism was unreal. They got the older kids to talk and share. Their quiet leadership and kind, gentle way of speaking is so welcoming."*

When we recruit new community partners, we almost always tell them how we are available to write programs for a variety of topics and events. Sometimes, however, the Fellows are not experts in that area; they may need to research the topic and confer with the rest of our team. In the instance of the above quote, I know the Fellow was intimidated at first about the request, essentially stating, "I'm not exactly sure how to help in this situation." But through thorough investigation and a good amount of teamwork, the Fellow was able to provide exactly what the congregation needed at that time. And, now that they have that experience, they're ready to tackle the next topic area that is new to them.



*This page: Humble, TX, students pose with Gratitude Pumpkins. Opposite page: Education Fellow Mackenzie Haun at Beth Israel in Houston.*

A little listening goes a long way, but only if it inspires informed action. Any time our communities have feedback—in an evaluation, or when they want to call to talk something through, or when they endorse a program by requesting a repeat of it—we're all ears. After all, it helps us honor a whole lot of promises—improving our service to communities and improving the experience of our Fellows.



To connect with Rabbi Dreffin, email [mdreffin@isjl.org](mailto:mdreffin@isjl.org).

## Education

# FOCUS ON FAN: ONCE A FELLOW, ALWAYS A FELLOW

THERE'S A PHRASE WE HEAR FORMER ISJL FELLOWS SAY MORE THAN any other: "Once a Fellow, always a Fellow!"


Any time former ISJL Community Engagement or Education Fellows run into each other in the wild—at conferences, on campuses, at celebratory events—they connect over their shared experience. And nine times out of ten, they take a picture, tag us on social media, and proudly declare #onceafellowalwaysafellow.

So for this issue's focus on the Fellow Alumni Network (FAN), we're sharing what we've heard and seen from our fine FAN folks lately. Enjoy!



 **Lauren Fredman**  
Reunited with Shelly in Izl! #Fab5 #OnceAFellowAlwaysAFellow — with Michelle Blumenthal in Jerusalem, Israel.




 **Missy Goldstein Gleisser**  
This wonderful photo of our cohort just surfaced from Lex's wedding last year. Happy anniversary!! It was the first time we've all been together since we left Jackson. — with Alachua Haskins Nazarenko and 5 others.




 **Molly Levy**  
My first day as a fellow vs visiting my sister at work 8 years later!! #onceafellowalwaysafellow #idorvdor — with Rachel Savannah Glazer at Goldring / Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.




 **Missy Goldstein Gleisser**  
Best friend FAN stack #onceafellowalwaysafellow @thisisjil — with Sam Kahan Strakes, Bethany Berger and Alachua Haskins Nazarenko



 **Claire Avins Solomon Nisen**  
#fab5 missing you, @lfredman!!!! #dreamteam #thisisjil #onceafellowalwaysafellow @mnswick @sarasilverman18 @michelle\_blumenthal — with Mark Swick, Sara Edelman and Michelle Blumenthal.



 **Benjamin Chaidell**  
! #onceafellowalwaysafellow



# WHERE THERE'S A WILL

THERE'S A WAY TO SUPPORT SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE



**Legacy is more than what we leave behind—it's what we send ahead to those we love. It's how we impact the future, starting today.**

### ***What is a "legacy gift" or "planned giving"?***

A planned gift is a charitable gift that you decide now to make at some time in the future as part of your estate planning. A planned gift can benefit you and loved ones that you name. At the same time, it stands as a lasting reminder to your children and succeeding generations of the values and charitable works that are most important to you. Wills, trusts, and endowments are all examples of planned giving and legacy gifts.

### ***How can the ISJL help?***

Whether it's preserving Southern Jewish stories, putting rabbis on the road to small towns, furthering Jewish education or making our world a better place through literacy and life-changing community engagement initiatives—whatever touches your heart and resonates with your legacy will shape the conversation of how together, we can plan for a meaningful future.

**The ISJL's Legacy Giving program can help you meet your planned giving goals. To learn more, visit [www.isjl.org/planned-giving](http://www.isjl.org/planned-giving) or email us at [kander@isjl.org](mailto:kander@isjl.org).**

# HEARING HISTORY

By Dr. Josh Parshall

*ISJL Director of History*

WHILE THE ISJL'S VARIOUS senior staff members have been conducting Listening Tours in communities across our region, the History Department has been hearing from folks who are the most-directly-linked to the ISJL—longtime partners, board members, and former employees. As part of our 2018 Chai Celebration, we collected a small set of oral history interviews that tell the story of the ISJL itself, from the people who have made it what it is today.

Listening to these pioneering staff and partners has been informative and illuminating; hearing firsthand stories of the ISJL's history gives a personal touch to our institutional history. The interviews have been transcribed and are a great addition to our Oral History Program—stay tuned for opportunities to hear some of those intriguing interviews soon!

I'm also hoping to hear from some of you, our *Shalom Y'all* readers. When I wrote last fall about conducting research in North

Florida, I received a letter from a South Florida reader who was concerned that we wouldn't be addressing Jewish history there. Rest assured that the Florida section of the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities will include entries on South Florida, Key West, Tampa, and several other cities below Ocala. Additionally, when the new essays go live, I look forward to hearing what you think about our work! Feel free to send any Florida insights my way, and check our website for the encyclopedia additions in the year ahead.

We've also been hearing a lot from others interested in Southern Jewish history. We continue to receive interesting research queries. In December, Heather Akers at the Highlands Museum and Discovery Center in Ashland, Kentucky, contacted me about materials related to Ashland's two former synagogues, House of Israel and Agudath Achim. She was developing an exhibit about

local religious congregations and wanted to make sure not to omit the synagogues. I shared a number of photographs that we collected for our encyclopedia entry on Ashland and for a set of short oral history videos that we created about the local Jewish community.

As summer quickly approaches, the History Department and Heritage and Interpretation Department are getting ready to welcome a new set of interns. Based on feedback from last summer's excellent crew, we plan to formalize some of the learning that happens during the internship with the introduction of a weekly seminar. The ISJL's Director of Heritage and Interpretation, Nora Katz, and I will organize a series of discussions based on a variety of readings on public history, digital humanities, southern Jewish history, Civil Rights history, and other pertinent topics. We heard from the interns that they want more of that content and we're eager to respond to that interest.

## HEAR THE HISTORIAN



If you're in or near Frederick, Maryland, you'll have the chance to listen to Dr. Josh Parshall on the evening of Thursday, April 4, when he speaks on Southern Jews and the Civil Rights Movement at Beth Sholom Congregation. Interested in bringing Dr. Parshall to your community? Email Ann Zivitz Kientz: [akientz@isjl.org](mailto:akientz@isjl.org)



Want to learn more about Southern Jewish history? Have something you'd like to share?  
Email Dr. Parshall: [jparshall@isjl.org](mailto:jparshall@isjl.org).





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# SAVE **THE** DATE

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*April*  
**6**  
**2019**

*to celebrate Macy B. Hart!*

We'll gather in Jackson in honor of Macy's retirement, and thank him for his five decades of service to the Jewish community and beyond.

Event sponsorship opportunities are still available. Contributions honoring Macy will be used to establish the Susan and Macy B. Hart Fund for the ISJL. For more information and to make your gift or RSVP for the event, visit [www.isjl.org/celebrating-macy](http://www.isjl.org/celebrating-macy).





Students from Kehillah High in Houston on an Alternative Winter Break trip in New Orleans – pictured in front of Touro Synagogue.

## Heritage & Interpretation

# HEARING JEWISH STORIES, SEEING SOUTHERN SITES

By Nora Katz

*ISJL Director of Heritage & Interpretation*

IMAGINE VISITING THE BURIAL site of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. You've just spent a few hours on a tour of the Breman Jewish Heritage Museum of Atlanta with a Holocaust survivor. Then you drive to nearby Birmingham, Alabama, to enjoy Shabbat services and dinner with members of the city's Jewish community. You talk to your friend about the lecture you heard earlier about Jewish immigration to the American South beginning in the 17th century. You catch up to your guide to ask a question about the history of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina, one of the oldest Jewish congregations in the United States.

A few days later, you're at Temple

Mishkan Israel in Selma, Alabama, exploring the relationships between southern Jewish congregations and black churches in the Civil Rights Movement. You consider what it would have been like to live in Selma on Bloody Sunday in 1965. Later tonight, you'll attend a play about Nina Simone at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and chat with your guide about the intersection between Jewish music and the blues. Your guide mentions Mississippi natives B.B. King and Muddy Waters and describes an exhibit you'll soon see at the Stax Museum in Memphis.

Imagine that your trip takes you to Jackson, Mississippi; to Little Rock, Arkansas; to Tulsa, Oklahoma.

These hotbeds of activism in the Civil Rights Movement are also hubs of southern Jewish life. You discuss Jewish immigration in Savannah, Georgia; Galveston, Texas; and New Orleans, Louisiana. You ponder issues of food insecurity on a farm in the Mississippi Delta and read books with students at the ISJL's Literacy Achievement Bonanza in Jackson.

Imagine that you're doing all of this with your congregation, your Hillel, your community group, or your friends and family. Imagine the complex conversations and challenging discussions you'll have on the bus, walking between sites, and standing in museum galleries. Imagine that you're part



*Top: Yale Hillel students getting ready to help clean out the Isaiah T. Montgomery House in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, on their 2018 Alternative Spring Break trip. Mid: Preparing barrels for transformation into sustainable backyard rain catchment systems with Green Light New Orleans. Bottom: Trip participants from Congregation Beth Torah (Richardson, Texas) on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama.*

of a large network of people who have taken trips like this in the past, and who will be traveling on life-changing journeys through the Jewish South all year long.

This spring, hundreds of people won't need to imagine these experiences. They'll be living them. We listened to what people wanted when it comes to Southern Jewish Heritage Tours, enhanced our itineraries, and as a result we'll be welcoming more groups than ever to join us for these trips in 2019.



**Here are the experiences that Southern Jewish Heritage Tour groups will have this spring:**

- Learning about running a kosher restaurant – while enjoying a delicious meal – in New Orleans
- Collecting soil from the site of a lynching in Port Jervis, New York, and bringing it to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama
- Performing an a capella Shabbat service in Metairie, Louisiana
- Crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama
- Visiting historic Jewish communities in Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama; Atlanta, Georgia; Cleveland, Greenville, Greenwood, Vicksburg, Natchez, and Jackson, Mississippi; and Lafayette and New Orleans, Louisiana
- Dancing to southern music at Preservation Hall in New Orleans; the B.B. King Museum in Indianola, Mississippi; and Sun Studio in Memphis
- Learning about Rabbi Perry Nussbaum's activism at the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum
- Preparing sustainable water catchment systems for low-income New Orleans residents
- Attending plays at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival
- Reflecting on legacies of enslavement in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana
- Exploring their faith in a new context, and gaining a deeper appreciation for the diversity of the American Jewish story



These itinerary items aren't all simply designed by us; they're directly informed by the questions and requests we get from prospective tour participants. What's on your southern Jewish bucket list? We're listening! Get in touch so we can make it happen.

**Contact ISJL Director of Heritage and Interpretation Nora Katz at [nkatz@isjl.org](mailto:nkatz@isjl.org).**





## Cultural Programming

# YES, WE DO THAT!

**By Ann Zivitz Kientz**

*ISJL Director of Programming*

LIKE MOST ISJL STAFF, I'M often asked what exactly the ISJL does. When I answer the question, explaining our philosophy of service and the extent of our programmatic reach, the most common thing I hear is simply: "Wow, I had no idea!"

I never get tired of hearing that, especially because that response always lets me know that we at the ISJL now have a new friend.

The Cultural Programming department is best known for having a variety of terrific presenters available for any congregation in the Southern region. What many people don't know is that we also work with Jewish Community Centers, universities, day schools, churches, and other organizations; we want all of our programs to be as inclusive and relevant as possible. We do all the heavy lifting for the programs, for communities large and small—because time and again, we've heard how helpful that can be.

The Jewish community of Greenville, South Carolina is having their first-ever Jewish film festival this month. Their plans were already well underway, but the coordinator

of the festival contacted me, hoping I could connect them with a presenter who could provide context for each film before the showing and do a question and answer segment at the end. I heard their needs and was delighted to be able to reply with the perfect person—one of the presenters on our roster. Dr. Eric Goldman, film educator, critic and historian, will be filling that role. And while he's in the area, he will be speaking at a local university as well as traveling to Beth Shalom in Columbia, South Carolina!

Risa Strauss, the Director of Education at Beth Shalom, commented, "I was so happy that ISJL and Ann Kientz [recommended] Dr. Eric Goldman. Ann has helped us with publicity, the program, and all arrangements. She is fun to work with and I would love to get to know her! We look forward to working with the ISJL again, and very much look forward to Dr. Goldman's visit."

Another example of hearing and meeting a need through cultural programming: Temple Emanu-El in Dothan, Alabama was working on

their second annual congregational retreat and contacted me to assist with finding just the right song-leader to add that extra sparkle to their weekend. In no time, we found him—Leo Henkin, a former New Yorker now living in New Orleans with exactly the skill set they sought.

Dothan's Religious School Director Stephanie Butler said, "We love the ISJL! The programming department has been wonderful in helping Dothan's Temple Emanu-El find talented Jewish professionals that match our needs and budget perfectly. They take the time to listen to the unique needs of our community."

Taking the time to listen is what it's all about. Being contacted about a specific need, interest, or area of opportunity is one of my favorite parts of my job. I am always delighted to hear from you—so whether you need a speaker, song-leader, or full-on theatrical production, call or email me. Because if you're wondering if we can help with your Jewish programming need... the answer is probably "Yes, we can do that!"

To learn more about the ISJL Programming Department, email Ann: [akientz@isjl.org](mailto:akientz@isjl.org).



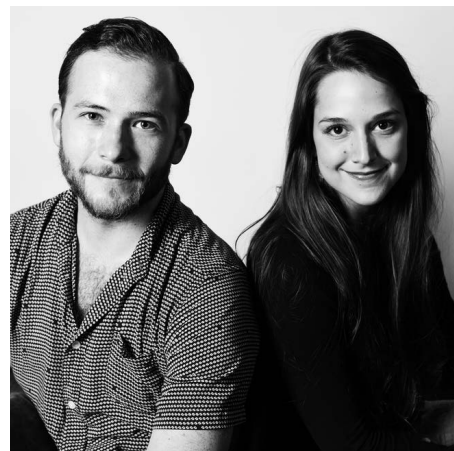
## AMAZING JEWISH TALENT



**THE BIBLE PLAYERS**



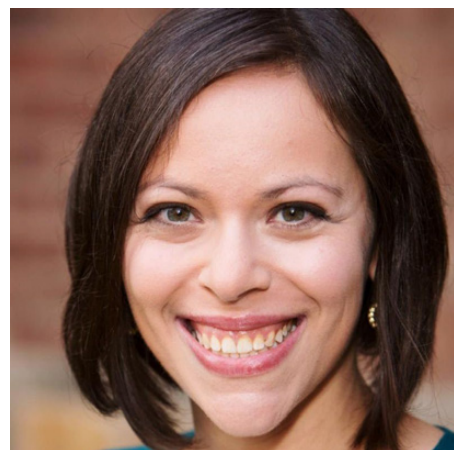
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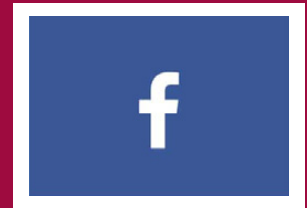


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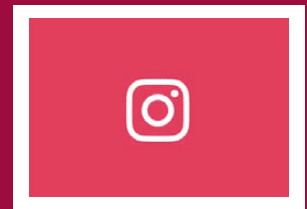


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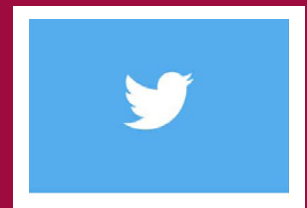
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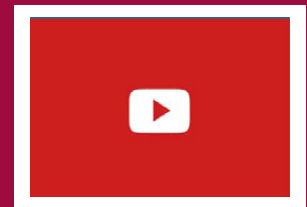
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## Community Engagement

# WE CAN ONLY ENGAGE WHEN WE LISTEN

By Dave Miller

*ISJL Director of Community Engagement*

THE OPPORTUNITY TO LISTEN to our partners is built into the framework of the ISJL's Community Engagement department; in fact, it's one of the most meaningful aspects of our work. Sometimes it occurs intentionally during the course of a program. Other times it comes during the interactions with participants and partners outside of a structured setting.

This is why we often incorporate breaking bread into our programs (that, and there is nothing better than homemade challah, latkes, matzo ball soup, and kugel). The more you listen and deepen your relationships, the more people are

willing to share. Sometimes sharing a meal and some conversation really is the first step to repairing the world.

The Community Engagement team cherishes each interaction and appreciates how some conversations can touch on sensitive topics that define how people approach life, parenting, their values, and their faith. Listening to the communities we serve helps us become better allies, advocates, and partners. What have we been hearing recently?

In a conversation with our most recent cohort of Our Reading Family (a literacy program that involves

the entire nuclear family), parents shared how they feel as though schools are making important strides, but need to improve their parent engagement efforts.

We hear over and over again from middle school students in our peer mediation program, TAP, express that they want more opportunities to be leaders at their schools and in their communities; similarly, our high school TAP participants tell us their wishes for safer neighborhoods—and the seniors cite these wishes as their impetus to pursue career paths that will teach them how to be a part of the solution.

To learn more about the ISJL's Community Engagement work, email Dave: [dmiller@isjl.org](mailto:dmiller@isjl.org).



# TWO JEWISH LEADERS ONE INCREDIBLE WEEKEND

Leaders in the Jewish community tell us they want to find meaningful ways to engage with young people to ensure that synagogues and religious centers thrive.

Those involved in Jewish social justice work tell us they're seeking more opportunities to bring people together to build relationships.

Most of all, we hear countless voices across all demographics and faiths echoing fundamental values of respect, peace, and love.

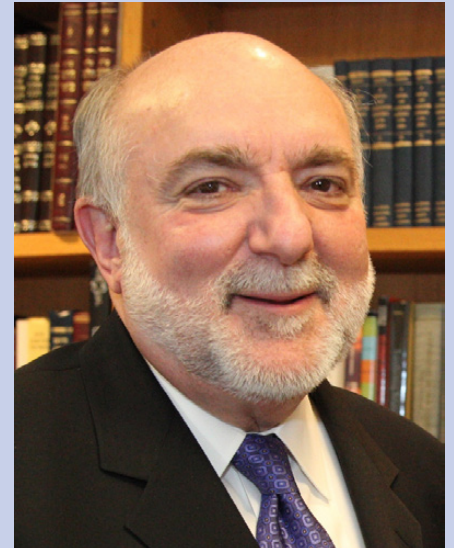
Listening constantly to partners committed to bettering the world, I want to find the themes and patterns within the sentiments expressed. When I think about what achieving greater respect, peace, and love would take, what would have to be said, and what I am listening for, I've come to realize that above all, it's "yes."

Yes to breaking bread with those who are different from you. Yes to inviting others to a program and looking at building partnerships even if you don't share the same denomination. Yes to thinking outside the box and creative solutions, even if they may make people nervous. Yes to showing up, to making a difference, to truly engaging.

We are commanded to ask questions and seek understanding; it is so fundamental to who we are that it is built into our holidays, our traditions, and even our jokes. But that is only half of the equation. The response you receive to questions is just as important as the questions themselves. One of the lessons I have learned in this work is that if you are trying to move a mountain, talk to people, listen, build relationships, and then ask them to pick up a rock. Before you know it, pebble by pebble, you will get there together.

All year, and always, we're listening. We look forward to hearing from you, and responding to communal needs with you.

## **"THOUGHTS ON THE JEWISH FUTURE" MARCH 15 & 16, 2019 | HOUSTON, TEXAS**



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### **FRIDAY, MARCH 15**

Erev Shabbat Services followed by dinner at Congregation Beth Israel (Topic: "The State of Our Union: Jews & Judaism in America Today").

### **SATURDAY, MARCH 16**

Shabbat morning services followed by luncheon at Congregation Beth Yeshurun (Topic: "The Future of American Judaism"). Later that day, Havdallah and discussion at Congregation Beth Yeshurun (Topic: "Who We Are, What We Stand For, How We Lead").

**RSVP TODAY AT  
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