GREAT EXPECTATIONS

AN EXPLORATION OF WHAT WE (SHOULD) EXPECT FROM REFORM RABBIS

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Graduate Rabbinical Program

New York, New York

March 2014 / Adar II 5774

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By Adena Blum

In the past eighteen months, a controversial issue has emerged at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: whether or not to remove the clause on the admissions policy prohibiting the acceptance or ordination of a student who is in a committed relationship with a non-Jewish partner. This discussion has raised many questions about the character and values of this academic institution and the Reform movement. One essential question of this conversation is: Should Reform rabbis be held to a different or higher standard than the Jews they lead, and if so, what is that standard? This thesis seeks to explore what Jewish tradition has to say about the role of communal leaders in general and of rabbis in particular, in order to craft a document that articulates the ideal qualities of a Reform rabbi. While this thesis will focus on much more than the religious identity of a prospective or current student's partner, the ongoing debate on this subject has led to this exploration of ethical standards and expectations for Reform rabbis.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first analyzes the phrase *adam hashuv sha'ni*, "an important person is different," that recurs throughout the Babylonian Talmud. The second explores Jewish texts from biblical, rabbinic, halakhic, and Reform Jewish literature that reflect on the nature of Jewish communal leadership. The third proposes ten ethical values to be embodied by Reform rabbis. The fourth applies these values to challenging situations currently facing the Reform Movement.

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INTRODUCTION

In the past eighteen months, a controversial issue has emerged at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR): whether or not to remove the clause on the admissions policy prohibiting the acceptance or ordination of a student who is in a committed relationship with a non-Jewish partner. This discussion has raised many questions about the character and values of this academic institution and the Reform movement. One essential question of this conversation is: Should Reform rabbis be held to a different or higher standard than the Jews they lead, and if so, what is that standard? This thesis seeks to explore what Jewish tradition has to say about the role of communal leaders in general and of rabbis in particular, in order to craft a document that articulates the ideal qualities of a Reform rabbi. While this thesis will focus on much more than the religious identity of a prospective or current student's partner, the ongoing debate on this subject has led to this exploration of ethical standards and expectations for Reform rabbis.

Reform Judaism is caught between two oft-competing values: personal autonomy and tradition. While every Reform Jew, including every rabbi, has the right and responsibility to make religious choices for him or herself, there are communal norms that many Reform Jewish communities uphold. Furthermore, communal norms are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain in a liberal postmodern society characterized by a strong sense of entitlement, moral individualism, and suspicion of institutions. The Chasidic master Reb Zusya taught that we must strive to be ourselves and no one else, but if we forgo communal expectations, the very fabric of our communities is at risk.

Therefore it is imperative to articulate the core values that we hope will guide our leaders, who will in turn lead by example and teach those values to our communities.

The role of today's rabbi is incredibly diverse. Rabbis act as priests in their ritual duties, pastors in moments of counseling, CEOs in organizational and financial matters, preachers from the pulpit, teachers in the classroom, prophets in our commitment to social justice, guides along spiritual journeys, and more. The role of rabbi has also changed and evolved over time. As a result, this thesis will look at what Jewish tradition has said about a variety of Jewish communal leadership positions because they all reflect on the multifarious contemporary rabbinate. Furthermore, while this thesis is intentionally focused on the position of rabbi, its findings apply to cantors as well.

CHAPTER ONE: SHOULD RABBIS BE HELD TO A DIFFERENT STANDARD?

Should rabbis be held to a different standard than other Jews? One recurring phrase in the Bavli can help us to answer this question: *adam hashuv sha'ni* (חשוב שאני אדם)—an important person is different. This phrase appears fourteen times in the Bavli, alone in all rabbinic literature, thereby painting a picture of what the Bavli's authors expect from an important person. The two questions that this Talmudic phrase raises are: who is an important person, and how or why are they different.

One might expect that characters deemed important people would figure prominently throughout the Talmud. This is indeed the case for Rav, the third-century Amora who founded and headed the academy in Sura, whom the Bavli mentions countless times, including in two of the *sugyot* we will analyze below (b. Meg. 22b, b. Mo'ed Qat. 12b).[1] However, there are other men labeled important people who are mentioned far more infrequently. These include Mar the son of Rav Aha, who is called a great man (גברא רבה) as well as an important person (אדם חשוב) despite the fact that he appears in only one *sugya* in the entire Bavli (b. Mo'ed Qat. 11b). Therefore, the title of important person is not dependent on how often we read about that person within the text of the Bavli.

Consequently, a close analysis of several representative examples of *adam hashuv sha'ni* will inform our understanding of this phrase. The Bavli notes fourteen times that an important person is different from other people. There are several ways in which this difference is made manifest. In two cases of *adam hashuv sha'ni*, the rules of *halakhah*

[1] H.L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 11.

are bent on account of an important person. In b. Ber. 19a, the Bavli discusses the matter of burying someone close to the hour of reciting the evening Shema:

> נושאי המטה וחלופיהן. תנו רבנן: אין מוציאין את המת סמוך לקריאת שמע, ואם התחילו אין מפסיקין. איני? והא רב יוסף אפקוהו סמוך לקריאת שמע! אדם חשוב שאני.
>
> "Pallbearers and their replacements" (m. Ber 3:1). The rabbis taught [in a *baraita*]: They do not take out a dead body close to the recitation of Shema, but if they have already begun, they do not stop. Really? Behold, Rav Yosef was taken out close to the recitation of Shema! An important person is different.

This *sugya* seeks to understand how one could make such a ruling about the timing of a burial when Rav Yosef's funeral clearly contradicts it. The Bavli explains the exception of Rav Yosef by indicating that he was an important person and therefore different. The implication is that you may defer the *d'oraita* mitzvah of reciting the Shema because of the social distinction of the deceased who should be buried sooner than later. The values of honor and respect for the important dead take precedence over recitation of the Shema in this specific case.

In b. 'Abod. Zar. 28a, the Bavli recounts a tale in which Rabbi Yohanan seeks medical treatment from a pagan noblewoman for the ailment *tzafdina*. Many halakhic concerns emerge from this *sugya*, but one in particular relates to our subject:

> ורבי יוחנן היכי עביד הכי? והאמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: כל מכה שמחללין עליה את השבת אין מתרפאין מהן! אדם חשוב שאני.
>
> But how could Rabbi Yohanan have done this? Didn't Rabbah bar bar Hanah say in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: For every affliction over which

we desecrate the Sabbath, we may not be treated by them [i.e. pagans]?!

An important person is different.

The issue at the heart of this debate is safety. One may only desecrate the Sabbath to treat afflictions that are life threatening. Clearly there was a concern that pagan healers would take advantage of the ailing Jew's predicament and do more harm than good to their health. The Bavli treats important people differently in this case for one of two possible reasons. Either an important person is protected by his social status, for a pagan healer would not dare to kill someone as well known in the community as Rabbi Yohanan, or it may be worth taking this risk for the sake of saving the *adam hashuv*, since he is so valuable to the community. Although the Bavli goes on to challenge this argument using the example of another important person, Rabbi Abbahu, the importance of Rabbi Yohanan seems to have been enough for him to behave in this more lenient manner if there had not been other extenuating circumstances.

In all other cases of *adam hashuv sha'ni*, an important person is expected to act according to a stricter standard because of his position in the public eye. Most of these cases follow a similar pattern. The important person performs an action that would be acceptable for an average person to do, but the Bavli has a problem with the behavior, citing that an important person is different as proof of his exception to the rule. One such example of this phenomenon can be found in b. Mo'ed Qat. 11b:

מריון בריה דרבין ומר בריה דרב אחא בריה דרבא הוה להו ההוא גמלא דתורא בהדי הדדי,

איתרעא ביה מילתא במר בריה דרב אחא בריה דרבא, ופסקיה לגמליה. אמר רב אשי: גברא

רבה כמר בריה דרב אחא עביד הכי? נהי דלפסידא דידיה לא חייש, אדאחרים לא חייש?

והא תניא: אם היו מושכרין או מוחכרין אצל אחרים הרי אלו יעשו! הוא סבר: אדם חשוב שאני.

> Maryon the son of Ravin and Mar the son of Rav Aha the son of Rava had an arrangement between them to team their oxen for mutual work.[2] Something befell Mar the son of Rav Aha the son of Rava, and he separated his ox from the team. Rav Ashi said: A great man like Mar the son of Rav Aha did this? Let it be admitted that he was not concerned for his loss, but wasn't he concerned for the others? This was taught [in a *baraita*]: If they were hired or rented by others they would be able to do it! He holds: an important person is different.

This *sugya* is one of several Talmudic responses to m. Mo'ed Qat. 2:1, which initially deals with a period of mourning that interrupts one who is in the process of turning over his olives in order to press them. Due to this context, Rashi understands "something befell Mar" to mean that he suddenly came into a period of mourning. This same phrase appears in b. Shabb. 136a where it also refers to an unexpected death. Therefore, this discussion revolves around two competing requirements: to mourn a death and to make a living. Typically mourning trumps working, so in theory one must desist from his labor as soon as he becomes a mourner. However, the Bavli is troubled by mourners whose cessation from labor negatively affects the livelihood of other people. It is one problem for the mourner to lose money because of loss of work, but it is another problem if that loss of work denies income for the mourner's employer, partner, or

[2] "*Gamla'*," Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005) 253.

employees. In this *sugya*, Mar the son of Rav Aha the son of Rava becomes a mourner when he is in the middle of agricultural work, but his ox is tied to that of Maryon the son of Ravin. When this mourner removes his ox in order to stop any work for which he would be responsible, as the laws of mourning demand, Rav Ashi challenges his behavior. Rav Ashi believes that precisely because so many people are dependent upon the success of Mar the son of Rav Aha the son of Rava, he should not have separated his ox. The Bavli then introduces a *baraita* to support Rav Ashi's argument that teaches if other people had hired the mourner's ox, then the ox would be able to continue working. Nevertheless, Mar the son of Rav Aha the son of Rava was of the opinion that his status as an important person required him to uphold the letter of the law.

This *sugya* demonstrates that an important person is different in two distinct ways. First, an important person may have a number of dependents. The affluence of such an important person provides jobs for those who work with and for him. Rav Ashi felt that the important person has a responsibility for the welfare of his subordinates and therefore should act leniently with regard to the laws of mourning, at least in this case. However, Mar the son of Rav Aha the son of Rava felt that his importance placed him in the public eye, and with so many people watching his behavior closely, he chose to act stringently to protect his image and to be a role model for others. Whereas the Bavli debates the gray area of this discussion, Mar the son of Rav Aha the son of Rava sees the matter as black and white: he is an important person, therefore he must do exactly as the law decrees. The prior two instances show that while an important person may cause leniency for others, he may not himself enjoy legal leniencies in the same way.

Although most cases of *adam hashuv sha'ni* argue that an important person must behave more strictly when others could behave more leniently,[3] there is one example in which an important person should *not* do what everyone else is supposed to do. An account in b. Meg. 22b discusses how an important person should behave when leading a congregation in *tahanun*, a series of supplicatory prayers recited in the morning:

> גופא, רב איקלע לבבל בתענית צבור. קם קרא בספרא, פתח בריך, חתם ולא בריך. נפול כולי עלמא אאנפייהו ורב לא נפל על אנפיה. מאי טעמא רב לא נפיל על אפיה? רצפה של אבנים היתה. ותניא: +ויקרא כ"ו+ ואבן משכית לא תתנו בארצכם להשתחות עליה, עליה אי אתה משתחוה בארצכם, אבל אתה משתחוה על אבנים של בית המקדש. כדעולא, דאמר עולא: לא אסרה תורה אלא רצפה של אבנים בלבד. אי הכי מאי איריא רב? אפילו כולהו נמי! קמיה דרב הואי. וליזיל לגבי ציבורא, ולינפול על אפיה! לא בעי למיטרח ציבורא. ואיבעית אימא: רב פישוט ידים ורגלים הוה עביד, וכדעולא, דאמר עולא: לא אסרה תורה אלא פישוט ידים ורגלים בלבד. וליפול על אפיה ולא ליעביד פשוט ידים ורגלים! לא משני ממנהגיה. ואיבעית אימא: אדם חשוב שאני, כדרבי אלעזר, דאמר רבי אלעזר, אין אדם חשוב רשאי ליפול על פניו אלא אם כן נענה כיהושע בן נון, דכתיב +יהושע ז'+ ויאמר ה' אל יהושע קם לך [וגו'].
>
> [Let us now return to] the statement itself: Rav happened to come to Babylonia on a communal fast day. He arose and read from the Book; he opened and blessed; he closed and did not bless. Everyone fell on his face, and Rav did not fall on his face. What is the reason Rav did not fall on his face? It was a stone floor. It was taught [in a *baraita*]: "You shall not place

[3] B. Mo'ed Qat. 12a-b, b. 'Abod. Zar. 48b, b. Shabb. 51a, b. Pesah. 110a, b. B. Meş. 73a.

a figured stone in your land to prostrate upon it" (Lev 26:1).[4] "Upon it" you shall not prostrate "in your land," but you may prostrate upon the stones of the Temple. As per Ulla, for Ulla said: The Torah only prohibited a floor of stones. If so, why is Rav singled out? Even [it should apply to] everyone as well! [The stone floor] was only in front of Rav. So let him go toward the community and there fall on his face! He did not want to trouble the community. If you want, say: Rav spread his arms and legs, as per Ulla. For Ulla said: The Torah only prohibited a floor of stones. So [Rav] should have fallen on his face without spreading his arms and legs! He did not wish to change from his custom. And if you want, say: an important person is different, as per Rabbi Eleazar. For Rabbi Eleazar said: an important person is not permitted to fall on his face unless he will be answered like Joshua ben Nun, as it is written: "The Eternal said to Joshua: Arise! [Why do you lie prostrate?]" (Josh 7:10).

Here the Bavli seeks to determine why Rav did not prostrate himself during *tahanun* as expected. Based on our understanding of important people in the Bavli, Rav should have recognized that all those praying were looking to him for guidance, and therefore he should have modeled the appropriate choreography. This is not how Rabbi Eleazar understands the role of the important person in this case. Instead the act of prostration would be a sign of arrogance and presumption on Rav's part. Rabbi Eleazar believes that only an important person who is very confident that his prayers will be answered by God, as were Joshua ben Nun's, may adopt the same prayer posture as this

[4] All biblical translations are based on the New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) English translation.

biblical figure. And even then, God immediately commanded Joshua to get up from his prostration and threatened to abandon the children of Israel for their sin. If Rabbi Eleazar's understanding of Rav's behavior is accurate, then Rav acted out of humility because of his special status as an important person. This is a theme to which we will return.

Finally, there are two cases of *adam hashuv sha'ni* in the Bavli in which an important person does not act differently and is subsequently criticized for it. Both appear in b. Mo'ed Qat. 12b and discuss which behaviors are and are not permitted on special days of the year, predominantly Hol HaMo'ed (the intermittent days between the beginning and end days of major festivals) and the Sabbath. The second of these consecutive accounts debates whether a particular Amora performed work on the Sabbath:

> רבי יהודה נשיאה נפק בחומרתא דמדושא, ואשתי מיא דאחים קפילא ארמאה. שמע רבי אמי איקפד. אמר רב יוסף: מאי טעמא איקפד? אי משום חומרתא דמדושא הא תניא: השירין הנזמים והטבעות הרי הן ככל הכלים הניטלין בחצר. אי משום דאישתי מיא דאחים קפילא ארמאה הא אמר שמואל בר יצחק אמר רב: כל שנאכל כמות שהוא חי אין בו משום בישולי נכרים! אדם חשוב שאני.
>
> Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah went out with a jeweled signet ring and drank water that was heated by an Aramean cook. Rabbi Ami heard and became angry. Rav Yosef said: For what reason did he become angry? If it was because of the jeweled signet ring, it is taught [in a *baraita*]: bracelets, earrings, and rings are all like the vessels that may be moved in a courtyard. If it was because he drank water heated by an Aramean cook,

thus said Shmuel bar Yişhak in the name of Rav: everything that is consumed raw does not fall within [the category of] Gentile cooking! An important person is different.

According to this *sugya*, Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah performs two questionable acts on the day of rest: transporting apparent *mukşeh* from a private domain to a public domain and drinking water heated by a Gentile. The only person who seems to have a problem with what Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah did is Rabbi Ami. The *gemara* attempts to discover the root of Rabbi Ami's contention. The Bavli introduces a *baraita*, which ultimately supports Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah's ability to bring his ring outside as if it were simply jewelry, and then it cites a *memra*, which allows Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah to drink a substance heated by a Gentile on the Sabbath that is normally consumed unheated. Once both of these points of possible objection are refuted, the Bavli sees only one remaining possibility as Rabbi Ami's problem with Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah: Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah is an important person and therefore should be held to a higher standard of practice.

Here the Bavli's concern is any hint of impropriety on the part of an important person. At the end of the day, Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah did not desecrate the Sabbath, but also he did not behave in a clear-cut manner. The fact that the Bavli debates his actions demonstrates that they were questionable, and it would seem that an important person should leave no room for someone to misinterpret his behavior. If everyone were learned and familiar with the teachings of this *sugya*, then Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah might not have to worry so much about his public appearance. That is not the case, however, therefore Rabbi Ami would like to see him take more care in upholding the letter of the law.

The multiple cases of *adam hashuv sha'ni* in the Bavli suggest that important people are those who are considered important by their community. They are well known, which places them in the limelight and leads to public scrutiny of their behavior. Whether important people may occasionally act more leniently or must regularly act more stringently with regard to the law, the Bavli establishes that expectations for important people are inherently different than expectations for the average Jew. Due to their unique social status and visible position in the public eye, important Talmudic figures either behave differently than other Jews, or they are criticized for not doing so. This is also the case for important people today, from actors and athletes to politicians and communal leaders. Rabbis especially are included in this distinctive category, not only because they are spiritual heirs to the important people of the Talmud, but also because they are endowed with moral authority by their very leadership position. With *adam hashuv sha'ni* as a model, Reform rabbis should be considered "different" and subsequently held to a different, i.e. higher, standard than the Jews they lead.

CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING STANDARDS

If we consider rabbis to be different than those they are leading, then let us explore what those different standards may be. To do so, we will look at a variety of Jewish texts that comment on the role of rabbi and other communal leadership positions such as ruler, teacher, judge, and worship leader. These texts range greatly in time and place, therefore they also vary in scope, perspective, context, and content. This collection of Jewish texts, organized chronologically by genre, can help us to explore possible standards for rabbis as they create a mosaic of Jewish communal leadership.

Tanakh

There are two main types of communal leaders in the Tanakh: political and spiritual. The first category of leaders includes chiefs, judges, and kings, and they are typically elected by people, as opposed to by God. In an oft-quoted biblical passage on the subject of selecting leaders, the Midianite priest Jethro advises his son-in-law Moses on the art of delegation:

> וְאַתָּה תֶחֱזֶה מִכָּל־הָעָם אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל יִרְאֵי אֱלֹהִים אַנְשֵׁי אֱמֶת שֹׂנְאֵי בָצַע וְשַׂמְתָּ עֲלֵהֶם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֲשָׂרֹת. וְשָׁפְטוּ אֶת־הָעָם בְּכָל־עֵת וְהָיָה כָּל־הַדָּבָר הַגָּדֹל יָבִיאוּ אֵלֶיךָ וְכָל־הַדָּבָר הַקָּטֹן יִשְׁפְּטוּ־הֵם...
>
> You shall also seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain. Set these over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and let them judge the people at all times. Have them bring every major dispute to you, but let them decide every minor dispute themselves… (Exod 18:21-22)

Jethro describes to Moses several qualifications the prophet should seek in his leaders. They should be *anshei-hayil*, men of strength. Although the Hebrew word *hayil* is often associated with military strength in the Tanakh,[5] the NJPS translation understands it to mean general ability here.[6] These leaders should also fear God, be men of truth, and despise "ill-gotten gain," meaning that they will not engage in criminal activity for the sake of financial or political benefit. The necessary leaders for Moses are men of faith and integrity, who will put the needs of the community before their own because their job is to serve the community. According to Jethro, the most important qualities of a leader are the abilities he possesses and the values he embodies.

The story of Israel's first few kings also has much to say about the characteristics of a qualified communal leader. The first king of Israel is appointed in the first book of Samuel. Despite the prophet's warnings against an oppressive king, the people request such a ruler so "that we may be like all the other nations: Let our king rule over us (ושפטנו) and go out at our head and fight our battles" (1 Sam 8:20). In the wake of the incompetent leadership of Samuel's sons, the people desire a capable judge (שופט) and general. Ultimately they find Saul, who was "an excellent young man; no one among the Israelites was handsomer than he; he was a head taller than any of the people" (1 Sam 9:2). Samuel further reinforces Saul's distinctiveness during the royal coronation, announcing, "There is none like him among all the people" (1 Sam 10:24). Thus the unique Saul becomes the first Israelite king.

However, Saul's reign as king was brief, only two years long (1 Sam 13:1). Not only does Saul repeatedly lose God's favor for failing to follow divine commandments (1

[5] Several examples include Exod 14:28, Num 31:14, Deut 3:18, and Josh 1:14.
[6] As we also find in Gen 47:6 and Prov 31:10.

Sam 13, 15), but also he loses his sanity (1 Sam 16:14) and ultimately takes his own life (1 Sam 31:4). Therefore it would seem that Saul only looked the part of king. He was tall and handsome, yet he failed to follow the word of God and to keep a clear head under pressure. Here the Tanakh teaches that a leader's value is not measured by what is outside, but what is inside.[7]

Jewish tradition considers the two kings that followed Saul to be the greatest rulers Israel has ever seen.[8] David was a brave warrior and savvy politician who established a large and secure kingdom with the city of Jerusalem at its heart. David did not always behave ethically, however. The most prominent example is that out of lust for Bathsheba, he caused the untimely death of her husband Uriah (2 Sam 11). God punished David for his unethical actions (2 Sam 12ff), predominantly by harming or killing the king's children, thereby enacting the Deuteronomic "principle of divine vicarious punishment:"[9] "For I the Eternal your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me" (Deut 5:9b). Furthermore, God did not allow David to build the Temple despite his desire to do so (2 Sam 7). Although the reasons for this divine decision were unclear at the time it was decreed, by the end of David's narrative, this reader cannot help but ask if the violent nature and moral ambiguity of David's reign as king of Israel may be important factors.

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[7] The Bavli echoes this sentiment in a passage that identifies a true Torah scholar (חכם תלמיד) as one whose inside matches his outside (תוכו כברו, b. Yoma 72b).
[8] The messiah is believed to be a descendent of David, and the kingdom of Israel was never so large, peaceful, or affluent as it was under Solomon.
[9] Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Studies Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 376, note 9 "Visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children."

On the other hand, David's son Solomon was a skilled politician like his father, but he possessed a special gift as well: "God endowed Solomon with wisdom and discernment in great measure, with understanding as vast as the sands on the seashore. … He was the wisest of all men…" (1 Kgs 5:9-11). Solomon exercised his God-given wisdom to further justice and peace throughout his kingdom, for which God rewarded him richly. Not only did God grant Solomon wealth, fame, glory, and a long life (1 Kgs 3:11-14), but also God granted Solomon permission to build the Temple, a centralized permanent dwelling place for God. If Solomon's behavior as king was indeed less egregious than his father's, then that may explain why he was able to fulfill the divine promises made to David.

However, the human king Solomon also fell out of favor with God in the end. For the sake of peace and political relations, Solomon married many wives, thereby transgressing the Torah's prohibition against a king having too many wives out of fear that they will distract him from his purpose (Deut 17:17). Furthermore, a number of Solomon's wives belonged to nations forbidden to the Israelites to marry (Deut 7:1-6). Solomon succumbed to that which the Torah foretold: he built pagan shrines for his various foreign wives, enabling them to continue their idolatrous worship within his kingdom. Consequently God punished Solomon by tearing away half the kingdom from his son, thereby ending the brief period of a united Israel (1 Kgs 11). Apparently Solomon's wisdom, peace, and dedication to justice were not enough to counterbalance his eventual breach of God's covenant.

The Tanakh teaches several lessons about communal leadership through the stories of Israel's first kings. First, the ultimate success of a communal leader is

dependent on ethical behavior as well as general ability. Second, communal leadership is tenuous and requires consistent, not isolated, ethical action. Third, the reward for communal leadership is great, as are the consequences for failing to act in accordance with God's principles and demands. A true and worthy "king of Israel" is therefore one who embodies divine values throughout his tenure as communal leader.

The book of Proverbs further explicates the subject of kings and their qualifications.

קֶסֶם עַל־שִׂפְתֵי־מֶלֶךְ בְּמִשְׁפָּט לֹא יִמְעַל־פִּיו.

פֶּלֶס וּמֹאזְנֵי מִשְׁפָּט לַיהוָה מַעֲשֵׂהוּ כָּל־אַבְנֵי־כִיס.

תּוֹעֲבַת מְלָכִים עֲשׂוֹת רֶשַׁע כִּי בְצֶדֶק יִכּוֹן כִּסֵּא.

רְצוֹן מְלָכִים שִׂפְתֵי־צֶדֶק וְדֹבֵר יְשָׁרִים יֶאֱהָב.

There is magic on the lips of the king;

God cannot err in judgment.

Honest scales and balances are the Eternal's;

All the weights in the bag are God's work.

Wicked deeds are an abomination to kings.

For the throne is established by righteousness.

Truthful speech wins the favor of kings;

They love those who speak honestly. (Prov 16:10-13)

This passage describes an ideal king: one who judges honestly and justly, despising wickedness and favoring righteousness and truth. A number of other verses in this biblical book reinforce the importance of royal justice (20:8, 20:26, 25:5, 29:4, 29:14).

Other important qualities for a king are faithfulness and loyalty (Prov 20:28). This wisdom literature explicitly enumerates the primary values that a king should exemplify.

The second category of communal leaders in the Tanakh generally includes what we would consider to be religious or spiritual leaders, predominantly priests and prophets. These are divinely appointed leaders, and the reason for their appointment is not always clear and hence the fodder of much midrash. What is abundantly clear, however, is the job description of biblical priests. More than an entire book of the Torah is dedicated to elucidating the requirements and responsibilities of Israelite priests. Among the many instructions for the priesthood are several statements regarding the status of these leaders:

> כִּי־קָדֹשׁ הוּא לֵאלֹהָיו. וְקִדַּשְׁתּוֹ כִּי־אֶת־לֶחֶם אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא מַקְרִיב קָדֹשׁ יִהְיֶה־לָּךְ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה מְקַדִּשְׁכֶם.
>
> For they [priests] are holy to their God and you must treat them as holy, since they offer the food of your God; they shall be holy to you, for I the Eternal who sanctify you am holy. (Lev 21:7b-8)

Priests were distinguished from everyone else in Israelite society because of the critical ritual role they had to play. Since they directly served God, they had to emulate God, which meant they must be "holy" (קָדֹשׁ). That which is holy is set apart for particular purposes with particular rules. Because of their designation as holy, priests were prohibited from a whole host of behaviors generally permitted to other Israelites, such as shaving their heads or marrying a divorcee (Lev 21:5,7). The strength and success of the entire ancient Israelite community depended upon the priests' compliance with the many laws detailed in Leviticus and elsewhere in the Tanakh.

Many liberal Jews would argue that the rules pertaining to priests are no longer applicable in our post-Temple, postmodern world. While a literal interpretation and application of these laws is not sensible in Reform Judaism, the principles behind the laws are not irrelevant. Rabbis, in their priestly functions, are not like other professionals and therefore can be held to different standards than their non-clerical contemporaries. The Conservative Movement's commentary on the Torah teaches that unlike priests of the Tanakh,

> Rabbis and cantors are no different from other Jews. They have no special powers; no obligations devolve on them that do not apply to all Jews. "Ten shoemakers can make a *minyan* but nine rabbis can't." Nonetheless, they are considered *k'lei kodesh*—"instruments of holiness"—because, through their knowledge and teaching and by life, character, and commitments they show the way to a life of holiness.[10]

The primary difference between our ancient forbears and ourselves is that biblical priests had no choice about their role in society whereas we do. While a priest 2000 years ago could not leave the priesthood, Reform Jews in a liberal and free society can choose whatever profession they desire. By adopting the mantle of the rabbinate, we agree to abide by what is expected of us in our personal as well as public lives. By choosing to become rabbis, we often put the needs of the community above our own. And the Tanakh teaches that we, as communal leaders, should strive to be capable, God-fearing, wise, trustworthy, honest, righteous, just, and holy.

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[10] David L. Lieber and Jules Harlow, eds., *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001) 718, note 8 "you must treat them as holy."

Rabbinic Literature

Rabbinic literature is a vast genre of Jewish text that spans several centuries and several geographic locations. Its context and content vary greatly from text to text and sometimes within a single text as well. Therefore, below is only a small sampling of texts within this oeuvre that includes Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud, and Midrash. The texts in this section are arranged thematically as opposed to chronologically.

Below are two passages in the Bavli that describe characteristics unbecoming of a leader. The first warns against arrogance:

> ואמר רבי אלעזר: כשהקדוש ברוך הוא פוסק גדולה לאדם פוסק לבניו ולבני בניו עד סוף כל הדורות, שנאמר +איוב ל"ו+ וישיבם לנצח ויגבהו, ואם הגיס דעתו הקדוש ברוך הוא משפילו, שנאמר +איוב ל"ו+ ואם אסורים בזקים וגו'.
>
> Rabbi Eleazar said: When the Holy One of Blessing assigns high office to a person, God assigns it to his children and his children's children until the end of all generations, as it says "God seats them forever, and they are exalted" (Job 36:7). But if that man becomes arrogant, the Holy One of Blessing brings him low, as it says, "If they are bound in shackles…" (Job 36:8). (b. Meg. 13b)

This text argues that leadership can yield a lengthy legacy, but only if the leader remains free from arrogance, echoing the argument seen above in the Tanakh's account of kings. Humility, the opposite of arrogance, is a virtue praised throughout Jewish tradition,[11] and it is among the more challenging virtues to maintain when in a position of power.

[11] The tradition of humble Jewish leaders begins with Moses: "Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth" (Num 12:3).

The second Talmudic passage lists that which disqualifies a person from being a judge or witness (b. Sanh. 24b-25b). People who are ineligible for these important societal roles include those who play with dice, those who lend on interest, pigeon-fliers, and *sheviit*-merchants. These are morally ambiguous occupations. They depend on chance and luck as opposed to skill, they rely on the loss of others to be profitable, they are often associated with corruption, and they bend the rules in such a way as to make the rabbis nervous. At the heart of this debate lies the notion that judges and witnesses have significant power and responsibility, for their decisions and testimonies can lead to financial hardship or even capital punishment for those deemed guilty. Therefore it is imperative that the people in these positions are trustworthy and honorable or else their judgment or testimony is null and void.

Conversely, a passage from the Tosefta sheds light on the positive qualifications necessary to be appointed a judge:

> ומשם היו יושבין ובודקין: כל מי שהו חכם ועניו ושפוי וירא חטא ופרק טוב ורוח הבריות נוחה הימנו עושין אותו דיין בעירו.
>
> From there they would sit and check: Everyone who was wise, humble, contrite, and sin-fearing, and his conduct as a young man was exemplary, and his fellow men considered him trustworthy, they made him a judge in his city. (t. Hag. 2:9)

According to this text, a judge should be a wise scholar who is able to discern from the extensive information he has gleaned to make an appropriate judgment. He should be humble, which may keep him honest and demonstrate the importance of the community's needs over his own. He should be contrite,

meaning he should acknowledge his mistakes and seek to correct them, thereby doing *teshuvah* or repentance. He should fear sin, which is similar to fearing God, for a fear of transgressing God's commandments may dissuade him from doing so. A qualified candidate for judge should also be considered trustworthy by his peers, and his good reputation should extend all the way back to his childhood. Although knowledge of the law is necessary for this position, this text stresses the numerous values that a judge should embody.

Another important communal leader in rabbinic literature is the scholar (חכם), literally one who is wise. The following midrash lists several qualities expected of this particular position:

> אשר ידעת כי הם זקני העם. אתה צריך לידע אם ברורים הן לפני: כי הם זקני העם, מלמד שאין אדם יושב בישיבה של מטה אלא א"כ יושב בישיבה של מעלה עד שהבריות מרננות עליו ואומרות איש פלוני כשר וחסיד ונאה להיות חכם.
>
> "…of whom you have experience as elders and officers of the people…" (Num 11:16). You need to know if they are certain beforehand: When they are elders of the people, it is taught that no one sits in the dwelling-place below but rather in the dwelling-place above until people praise him and say "this person is fit, pious, and suited to be a scholar." (Sifre Num §92)

This text suggests three levels of expectation for scholars. First, a scholar should be fit, pious, and suited for the job, meaning his internal disposition and his external actions should be aligned with the role of scholar. Second, it is not enough for the scholar to feel as if he is qualified; the community needs to recognize his qualifications publicly. This intimates that a scholar is not an isolated figure in his ivory tower but an important

contributing member of society. Third, the success of a scholar has cosmic ramifications. A true scholar can transform the world in which we live into a heavenly abode, bringing his community closer to God. This text illustrates the multilayered importance of the position of scholar. The expectations are high because the role is central to and influential in the community.

Another midrashic text elaborates on what it means for a communal leader to be fit, addressing the nature of authority in the process.

> מה ת"ל לא תשא את שם ה' אלהיך לשוא, שלא תקבל עליך שררה ואין אתה ראוי לשררה
>
> ... אמר רבי אבהו אני נקראתי קדוש ואתה נקראת קדוש הא אם אין בך כל המדות שיש בי לא תקבל עליך שררה.
>
> What does the Torah mean when it says, "You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Eternal your God" (Exod 20:7)? Do not take upon yourself authority when you are not fit for authority. … Rabbi Abbahu said: I am called holy and you shall be called holy. That means if you do not have all of the attributes that I have, you may not take upon yourself authority. (Pesiq. Rab. 22:4)

This text inextricably links communal leaders with God, the ultimate authority (שררה) of Israel (ישראל). The initial argument is that one must not accept authority unless that person is fit to do so, echoing the case above. Trying to fulfill this role when unable to do so is akin to misusing the name of God, a serious transgression. Then Rabbi Abbahu defines what it means to be fit for authority: a person of authority must possess God's attributes (מדות). Rabbi Abbahu does not elaborate any more than this, but Jewish tradition understands God to have thirteen attributes as initially laid out in the Torah:

יְהוָה יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת. נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנַקֵּה...

The Eternal! The Eternal! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin…

(Exod 34:6-7)

These divine attributes were so highly regarded by the rabbis that these exact words were incorporated into the daily liturgy. Numerous narratives in the Tanakh show how difficult it is for God to uphold these values, which means it is an even greater challenge for human beings. However, Rabbi Abbahu makes the daring claim that to accept authority is to distinguish oneself from the masses. While human beings may succumb to pettiness, callousness, and hardheartedness, a person of authority must strive to overcome these tendencies, and by virtue of their divine virtues, such a person who emulates God is qualified to accept authority.

The Mishnaic tractate of Avot has much to say about leadership. One particular mishnah reinforces the notion that leaders should place the needs of the community above their own:

רבן גמליאל בנו של רבי יהודה הנשיא אומר... וכל העמלים עם הצבור יהיו עמלים עמהם לשם שמים שזכות אבותם מסייעתן וצדקתם עומדת לעד ואתם מעלה אני עליכם שכר הרבה כאילו עשיתם.

Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch said… And all who labor with the community should labor with them for Heaven’s sake, that the merit of their ancestors will aid them, and their righteousness will

> stand forever. And you, I will raise over you a great reward as if you had done thus. (m. Avot 2:2)

Again we see that communal leadership can reap a great reward, although new requirements are stipulated for achieving this prize. The job of communal leaders is to work "with" the community, not "for" or "on behalf of" them. The use of this particular preposition suggests a collaborative process between those who lead and those who are led. This means that a communal leader is not an independent agent acting apart from the community, but rather he is a member of the community elected to work with the community to benefit everyone. The goal of that work is one of purpose and meaning: "for Heaven's sake." The implicit argument here is that communal leadership is not about fame, wealth, or power for the leader but about collaboration and cooperation with the community to achieve a shared sacred goal. Yet again, the communal leader is expected to put the community's needs above his own.

These texts from rabbinic literature have expanded our list of preferred qualities for a Jewish communal leader. Such leaders must be fit for the job, which is not an easy one. They must be humble and contrite, checking their ego at the door. They must be pious fearers of sin, abiding by God's commandments. They must walk in God's ways by being compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, kind, faithful, and forgiving. And above all, Jewish communal leaders must be exemplary, distinguishing themselves from others as ethical role models.

Halakhic Literature

Halakhic literature emerged in the Middle Ages as a response to the many questions about Jewish life that biblical and rabbinic literature either could not answer or struggled to answer. Numerous texts were compiled to organize Jewish law by subject in an effort to standardize Jewish practice and to disseminate Jewish learning in a systematic way. Below are texts that reflect on the nature of Jewish leadership from two of the most well known works of halakhic literature.

In his twelfth-century halakhic compendium the Mishneh Torah (MT), Maimonides discusses the qualifications of a student and teacher of Torah in the tractate Talmud Torah:

> אין מלמדין תורה אלא לתלמיד הגון נאה במעשיו, או לתם, אבל אם היה הולך בדרך לא טובה מחזירין אותו למוטב ומנהיגין אותו בדרך ישרה ובודקין אותו ואחר כך מכניסין אותו לבית המדרש ומלמדין אותו, אמרו חכמים כל השונה לתלמיד שאינו הגון כאילו זרק אבן למרקוליס שנאמר כצרור אבן במרגמה כן נותן לכסיל כבוד, אין כבוד אלא תורה שנאמר כבוד חכמים ינחלו, וכן הרב שאינו הולך בדרך טובה אע"פ שחכם גדול הוא וכל העם צריכין לו אין מתלמדין ממנו עד שובו למוטב, שנאמר כי שפתי כהן ישמרו דעת ותורה יבקשו מפיהו כי מלאך ה' צבאות הוא, אמרו חכמים אם הרב דומה למלאך ה' צבאות תורה יבקשו מפיהו אם לאו אל יבקשו תורה מפיהו.
>
> Only teach Torah to a suitable student whose deeds are fitting, or to the innocent. However, if he were to walk on a bad path, return him to good and lead him on a straight path and check him and afterward bring him into the house of study and teach him. The sages said: Everyone who teaches a student that is not suitable it is as if he threw a stone at a pagan

> statue, as it is said, "Like a pebble in a sling, / So is paying honor to a dullard" (Prov 26:8). The only honor is Torah, as it is said, "The wise shall obtain honor" (Prov 3:35). Therefore a teacher (*rav*) who does not walk a good path, even if he is a great scholar and the entire nation needs him, do not learn from him until he returns to good, as it is said, "For the lips of a priest guard knowledge, / And men seek rulings (*torah*) from his mouth; / For he is a messenger of the Eternal of Hosts" (Mal 2:7). The sages said: If the teacher is similar to "a messenger of the Eternal of Hosts," then you may "seek Torah from his mouth." If not, you may not seek Torah from his mouth. (MT Talmud Torah 4:1)

This text teaches several lessons at once. First, a student of Torah must behave in a certain manner. Maimonides does not specify here what constitutes "fitting deeds," but he does argue that bad behavior must be rectified before a potential student may enter the house of study. Second, if such a behavioral requirement exists for students, all the more so does it pertain to teachers. Even if a teacher is very knowledgeable and his skills are greatly needed in the community, he may not serve as teacher unless he behaves appropriately. The underlying assumption is that actions speak louder than words, and a teacher must be a role model as well as a conveyer of information. Third, a teacher should strive to emulate God, for it is the job of both to issue words of Torah. As we saw previously, this communal leader is held to the highest of all standards: divine attributes.

Maimonides describes the ideal teacher in other ways as well. After explaining that teachers should not shame students who cannot grasp the material quickly, only students who will not, Maimonides elaborates on the teacher-student relationship:

לפיכך אין ראוי לרב לנהוג קלות ראש לפני התלמידים ולא לשחוק בפניהם ולא לאכול ולשתות עמהם כדי שתהא אימתו עליהן וילמדו ממנו במהרה.

Therefore, it is not appropriate for a teacher to behave frivolously before his students. He should not amuse himself before them, and he should not eat and drink with them, so that they will fear him and learn from him quickly. (MT Talmud Torah 4:5)

Here Maimonides draws a clear distinction between teacher and student. He argues that learning is best achieved when there is no breach in this hierarchical relationship. Teachers are so important, in fact, that they are elevated above one's parents and again even likened to God (MT Talmud Torah 5:1). Furthermore, students should sit before their teacher as one sits before a king (MT Talmud Torah 5:6). These descriptions do not entirely align with our present-day Reform expectations of a teacher of Torah, for we prefer Jewish educators to be personable and to seek meaningful relationships with their students, not to instill fear in them. Nevertheless, we can agree with Maimonides' point that such an instructor is held to a high standard because of their critical role in transmitting Torah to the next generation.

In his sixteenth-century halakhic code the Shulhan Arukh (SA), Joseph Caro discusses the qualifications of a worship leader, another crucial role in the modern rabbinate:

ש"ץ, צריך שיהיה הגון. ואיזהו הגון, שיהא ריקן מעבירות; ושלא יצא עליו שם רע אפילו בילדותו; ושיהיה עניו ומרוצה לעם; ויש לו נעימה; וקולו ערב; ורגיל לקרות תורה נביאים וכתובים.

> A worship leader[12] needs to be suitable. Who is suitable? One who is free from sin; one for whom nothing evil can be said even in his youth; one who is humble and satisfactory to the people; one who can sing, who has a pleasant voice; and one who regularly reads the Torah, Prophets, and Writings. (SA Orah Hayyim 53:4)

This text clearly articulates what constitutes a suitable worship leader. His capability is judged by the quality of his voice and his familiarity with sacred text, both necessary to lead a Jewish community in meaningful prayer. His character is judged by his humility and absence from sin. Prayer is about communicating with God, not about the performance of one person. Prayer is also a serious undertaking, and the entire community is dependent upon this one person to represent them before God. If the worship leader possesses a blemished character, then the entire community's prayers may be at risk. Finally, the worship leader must have a good reputation in the community, dating all the way back to his childhood. Therefore a suitable worship leader must be a qualified and ethical person on the inside and be recognized as such on the outside.

Although Caro begins with very high expectations for a worship leader, he and Moses Isserles, the Ashkenazic commentator on the SA, acknowledge the possible limitations of reality and concede slightly lower expectations as a bare minimum.

> אם אין מוצאין מי שיהיה בו כל המדות האלו, יבחרו הטוב שבצבור בחכמה ובמעשים טובים. הגה: ואם היה כאן עם הארץ זקן וקולו נעים והעם חפצים בו, ובן י"ג שנה המבין מה שאומר ואין קולו נעים, הקטן הוא קודם (מרדכי ספ"ק דחולין) מי שעבר עבירה בשוגג,

[12] The Hebrew term *shaliah tzibbur* (שליח ציבור or the abbreviated ש"ץ) literally means "emissary of the community" and generally refers to the person leading a congregation in worship, thereby using prayer to serve as an intermediary between the people and God. This role may be filled by a rabbi, cantor, or other learned member of the community.

כגון שהרג הנפש בשגגה וחזר בתשובה, מותר להיות ש"ץ. אבל אם עשה במזיד, לא, דמ"מ יצא עליו שם רע קודם התשובה (תשובת א"ז במסכת ברכות).

If you cannot find someone who has all of these attributes, choose the best from among the community regarding wisdom and good deeds. Gloss: And if there is only an uneducated person with a beard and a pleasant voice and the people desire him. And if he is at least thirteen years old and understands what to say and does not have a pleasant voice, choose the minor first (Mordecai on the last chapter of Hullin). Whoever sins accidentally, such as one who murdered someone unintentionally and repented, he is permitted to be a worship leader. But if he acted on purpose, no, his pervasive evil name takes precedence over the repentance. (SA Orah Hayyim 53:5)

For Caro, the basic requirements for a worship leader are wisdom and good deeds. If such a spotless person as described in the preceding paragraph cannot be found in the entire community, then they should select the wisest person who does the greatest number of good deeds. Capability and character are still important, but not everyone can meet the highest of expectations.

Isserles further explicates this idea by positing several real-life situations in which two less than ideal candidates are available, thereby prioritizing the values Caro listed. For Isserles, a pleasant voice and public opinion are more important than wisdom, and a pleasant voice is more important than biological maturity. However, when it comes to character, Isserles presents a stricter ruling. One who sins accidentally may become a worship leader after repenting, but one who sins on purpose may not. The underlying

assumption is that a person's reputation should not be irrevocably damaged for a sin they did not intend to commit. One who goes out of his way to sin, on the other hand, is not a person to be trusted with the prayers of others, even if he repents his transgressing ways.

These medieval scholars reinforce the view that Jewish communal leaders should be held to a higher standard than the Jews they lead, and they further illustrate the expectations we should have for them. Several qualities we have seen before recur, including a good reputation, capability, wisdom, humility, and Godlike behavior. Several new values we can add to our list. Not only should leaders fear God or sin or both, they should also be free of sin altogether. Given the difficulty of this requirement, there is the possibility that repentance can reinstate leaders who inadvertently fall prey to sin or waywardness. Here we see the tension between idealized leadership and actual leaders.

Reform Jewish Literature

Reform Judaism began in the nineteenth century as a Jewish response to modernity. Leaders of Reform have sought to reconcile thousands of years of Jewish tradition with the challenges of living in an increasingly advanced and predominantly non-Jewish society. As the Reform Movement emerged, organizations were founded to address the needs of this growing community, particularly in the United States. Below are several texts that represent the two North American Reform rabbinic bodies and reflect on the nature of the rabbinate and the preferred qualities of rabbis.

Isaac Mayer Wise established the Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1875 to train rabbis in America. Kaufmann Kohler served as president of HUC from 1903 to 1921, and in this role he addressed students and faculty on many occasions.

Kohler's orations articulate his vision for Reform rabbis, beginning with his inaugural address, "What a Jewish institution of learning should be." Looking to the past, Kohler claimed: "The greatest Rabbinical authorities, therefore, were accordingly bold, independent seekers after truth."[13] Then looking to the future, Kohler outlined his dream for HUC:

> And yet a college for the training of Rabbis stands for something higher still. Greater than all knowledge and wisdom is life itself, with its thousand duties and opportunities. A college that does not prepare its disciples for the great issues, the stern realities of life, by inculcating virtue and ennobling that which is best in man, sentiment, fails of its purpose, whatever it may do for the mind. … For the Reform Jew, life is no less holy because it is vocal with duty, and God is in every joy and grief, in every trial and temptation, to prove his character and manhood.[14]

Kohler had high hopes for the rabbinate. Knowledge and wisdom are necessary, but he placed greater emphasis on the ability to navigate life's duties and opportunities. Kohler argued that virtue and sentiment are the tools required to take on these responsibilities, to be both rabbis and human beings of character and integrity. The curriculum he imagined to accomplish this moral education included piety with a focus on prayer and reverence for authority and tradition.[15]

Yet Kohler did not stop there, for he continued to describe the ideal graduate of HUC in his inaugural address:

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[13] Kaufman Kohler, *Hebrew Union College and Other Addresses* (Cincinnati: Ark Publishing Co., 1916) 21.
[14] Kohler *Hebrew Union College and Other Addresses* 26.
[15] Kohler *Hebrew Union College and Other Addresses* 27.

> But greater than piety and prayer is sincerity, uprightness before God and man. As the ark of the covenant was inlaid with gold from within and without, so, the Rabbis say, should every Jewish scholar or teacher be of pure gold, from within and without, free from all hypocrisy, from time-serving or man-pleasing.[16] Men of character and of courage of opinion, of steadfastness and sincerity of purpose, do we need as leaders and banner-bearers of truth, men whose souls burn with the fire of a holy conviction, so that as "the elect ones of the sons of Israel," they can only be glorified but not consumed by the fire of God, because there is but the pure gold of principle and no dross in their soul. Yes, the Hebrew Union College should not only be a seat of learning but a schoolhouse for religious, social and civic virtue; it must give us not merely wise and intelligent leaders who understand the requirements of the time and supply the needs of the congregation, but men of unbending strength of character and truthfulness, God-fearing men who hate sin and show their inner calling by true self-denial, as well as by dignity and comity.[17]

Kohler grounded his words in tradition, playing on some of the Jewish texts we analyzed above, and he listed many qualities he would like to see in the student body of HUC. His is a litany of moral imperatives including sincerity, uprightness, character, steadfastness, truthfulness, conviction, principle, virtue, self-denial, dignity, and comity. Kohler's

[16] This rabbinic teaching can be found in b. Yoma 72b, the Talmudic passage mentioned in note 7.
[17] Kohler *Hebrew Union College and Other Addresses* 27-28.

rhetoric is lengthy, but his message is succinct: he wants to forge Reform rabbis who are good people as well as good students.

In another address entitled "What the Hebrew Union College stands for: and the prerequisites and opportunities of its students," Kohler further elaborated on this theme.

> We want men of strong convictions, not half-hearted souls, men that halt between two opinions. … We want men of character… We want men of sincerity, of earnestness, of zeal and devotion, ready to bring sacrifice for the cause, not calculating as to a lucrative profession or position. We want men worthy to be priests of God without blemish, men who will stand forth as exemplars of virtue, of integrity and purity in the congregation in which they serve.[18]

Kohler wanted HUC to produce rabbis with strong character, rabbis who stick to their deeply held values despite any possibility of ill-gotten gain. Moreover, Kohler urged his students to embody reverence, loyalty, and honor for God, their teachers, their school, the synagogue, and the Torah.[19] In doing so, he stressed the notion that the role of rabbi is not an isolated position, but one that remains in constant contact with the community and Jewish tradition. Kohler called the students of HUC "to become spokesmen of what is the highest and the best in man" by pressing them to live by the highest human ideals.[20]

After creating a seminary to train American rabbis, Isaac Mayer Wise established the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in 1889 to support American rabbis in their work. The CCAR has given voice to Reform rabbis for over a century through

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[18] Kaufman Kohler, *Studies, Addresses, and Personal Papers* (New York: The Bloch Publishing Co., 1931) 446.
[19] Kohler, *Studies, Addresses, and Personal Papers* 446.
[20] Kohler, *Studies, Addresses, and Personal Papers* 447.

resolutions, responsa, platforms, and other writings. Below is a selection of texts produced by the CCAR that reflects on the nature of the Reform rabbinate. While the overall scope of each text may not be directly applicable to this discussion, each text sheds some light on the kind of rabbi the CCAR hopes its members to be.

Despite the fact that many Reform Jews do not use language of obligation around *halakhah* and instead champion personal autonomy, the movement of Reform Judaism still desires to establish communal norms of practice. Therefore, there is a rich responsa literature that seeks to answer questions posed by contemporary Reform communities. One such responsum, entitled "Who Is a Rabbi?", responds to an inquiry regarding the authority of communal leaders claiming rabbinic ordination from sources other than the Reform seminary. This responsum clearly states that the role of rabbi requires certain qualifications:

> We emphatically do *not* believe that any and every person who is called "rabbi" or who serves some congregation in that capacity necessarily deserves the title. To us, rather, a "rabbi" is someone who is *qualified* for that distinction. It is therefore the widespread *minhag* among our communities, liberal and otherwise, to require that our rabbis receive the "customary ordination" before we engage their services.[23] Like our medieval ancestors, we utilize ordination as a criterion to measure one's qualifications for the rabbinate, to determine that one meets and hopefully exceeds the minimum requirements of knowledge and expertise that we would set for our rabbinical leaders. If ordination is to serve as such a standard, it must surely be something more than an expression of some

> rabbi's opinion or a signature on a piece of paper. Ordination must rather attest that its recipient has successfully completed an extended and rigorous program of Torah study and professional training which prepares one to exercise the rabbinical function in our communities.[21]

Although this responsum deals mainly with the educational standards of ordination, as opposed to the ethical, it drives home the point that hopeful rabbis need to be held to a particular standard to live up to the weighty title of rabbi.

Value-based qualities of rabbis are addressed more so in responsa that debate whether intermarried Jews may pursue certain Jewish communal positions. The responsum "May a Jew Married to a Gentile Serve as a Religious School Teacher?" explores expectations for religious school teachers:

> A teacher of Torah, after all, ought to be a positive role model for our children, one who embodies the Jewish values we wish to inculcate in them, who has made the sorts of Jewish choices that we hope they will make for themselves.[22]

The understanding here is that one who seeks to teach Jewish values must first live by those values and model them for students. We want students to do as we do just as much as we want them to do as we say. The responsum goes on to define what the author means by "positive role model:" "We certainly want our religious leaders to adhere as closely as possible to the ideal of Jewish life as we understand it." Although the ideal of Jewish life in this particular case revolves around the religious identity of a religious

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[21] CCAR Responsa 5759.3 "Who Is a Rabbi?" <https://www.ccarnet.org/responsa/nyp-no-5759-3/>.

[22] CCAR Responsa 5758.14 "May a Jew Married to a Gentile Serve as a Religious School Teacher?" <https://www.ccarnet.org/responsa/rr21-no-5758-14/>.

leader's spouse, this same sentiment can be extrapolated to Jewish leadership in general. If in actuality "Our synagogues are entitled and indeed required to ask that those who teach our children be 'good Jews,' 'positive Judaic role models,'" then our synagogues need to articulate what it means to be a "good Jew" and "positive Judaic role model." This responsum ultimately endorses a "personal practice and family life…characterized by Jewish depth and quality." Therefore there is an expectation that Jewish leaders will live by Jewish values in their personal life as well as in their professional role, and those values are determined by the community, not the individual.

Another responsum, "May A Jew Married to a Non-Jew Become A Rabbi?", continues this same conversation. Again it is stressed that "one of the ways in whic[h] we convey our teaching is through personal example."[23] However this responsum differs from the previous one by distinguishing the role of rabbi and other full-time Jewish professionals from that of the typically part-time religious school teacher:

> …why do we set different expectations for the rabbi, who is also a teacher of Judaism? The answer is that the religious school teacher and the rabbi play two very different roles in the life of our community. Mos[t] of our religious school teachers are drawn from the ranks of our congregants, and they teach our children on a part-time basis. Our rabbis, by contrast, like our cantors and our Reform Jewish educators, have accepted upon themselves (and are properly expected by our community to live up to) higher standards of Jewish learning and observance than those that we demand of others. It is true that none of us, including those of us who are

[23] CCAR Responsa 5761.6 "May A Jew Married to a Non-Jew Become A Rabbi?" <https://www.ccarnet.org/responsa/nyp-no-5761-6/>.

> rabbis, achieves these higher standards with perfection. It is also true, however, that we and the people we serve continue to hold us accountable to them.

This responsum argues that by assuming the position of rabbi, cantor, or educator, these Jewish professionals agree to achieve higher standards that they and their communities expect of them. Here the standards are specified as Jewish learning and observance. Furthermore, this responsum acknowledges that rabbis are people too, which means that they may not always live up to these ideals, but what is most important is that they try to do so.

Every year the CCAR convenes in a different North American or Israeli city to provide a gathering space for Reform rabbis to learn and pray together, vote on resolutions, share their work, and more. In 1982, a series of papers was presented before the ninety-first annual convention of the CCAR on the subject of rabbinic authority. A number of the essays included in this compendium are pertinent to our conversation on expectations for rabbis.

In the very first paper of the collection, "Vineyards of the Lord," Rabbi Jerome Malino adds a new element to this discussion when he claims, "Far more important than how we appear to other is how we appear to ourselves."[24] For this rabbi, self-perception precedes communal expectations, and the values he believes rabbis should perceive in themselves are "conscientiousness, integrity, fullness of preparation, relentless pursuit of learning, and respect for the members of our congregations and the circumstances of their

[24] Jerome R. Malino, "Vineyards of the Lord," *Rabbinic Authority: Papers Presented Before The Ninety-First Annual Convention of The Central Conference of American Rabbi*, Ed. Elliot L. Stevens, Vol. 90, Pt. 2 (New York: CCAR, 1982) 5, Ebook.

lives."[25] These are imperative rabbinic duties for Malino. In the following paper, "The Origin and Authority of the Rabbi," Rabbi Harold Saperstein reinforces the idea that "To our people we must be the examples and the teachers."[26] For this author that means possessing sincerity, commitment, education, character, and faith, all of which are the source of a rabbi's authority.[27] For Saperstein, a rabbi is not simply "an expert in Jewish knowledge" but a skilled transmitter of values.[28] In another paper, "Rabbinic Authority: The Human Element," Rabbi Joseph Rudavsky sees the rabbi as *Klee Kadesh*, a holy vessel, who embodies love and humility and spurns intellectual arrogance.[29] Rudavsky feels that rabbis must practice what they preach, above all being a mensch.[30] These three rabbis are all in agreement that it is not enough that a rabbi simply teach and preach. A true pastor has certain personal qualities that imbue him or her with the authority to lead as a rabbi.

When it became evident that even rabbis need clear and enforceable guidelines regarding ethical behavior, the CCAR drafted a Code of Ethics, which was adopted in convention in 1991 and amended several times thereafter. This detailed document begins with an introduction that summarizes many of the arguments above:

> As rabbis, we are expected to abide by the highest moral values of our Jewish tradition: personal conscience and professional integrity, honorable social relationships, and the virtues of family life. As teachers and role models, we are called upon to exemplify the ideals we proclaim. Should

[25] Malino 8.
[26] Harold I. Saperstein, "The Origin and Authority of the Rabbi," *Rabbinic Authority* 26.
[27] Saperstein 25-26.
[28] Saperstein 25.
[29] Joseph Rudavsky, "Rabbinic Authority: The Human Element," *Rabbinic Authority* 38.
[30] Rudavsky 39.

> we fail, we need to do *teshuvah,* ask forgiveness, avoid repetition, and make restitution whenever possible.[31]

What follows is overwhelmingly a description of behaviors that a rabbi must avoid. These include substance abuse, illicit sexual relationships, financial impropriety, plagiarism, malicious gossip, breach of confidentiality, and various other abuses of power. Powers and procedures for adjudicating ethical violations are then defined, stipulating who is responsible for enforcing the Code of Ethics and what that process can look like. What is most impressive about this document is the possibility for violators to do *teshuvah,* and the method for such is clearly spelled out. Just as we have seen a desire for rabbis to be compassionate and forgiving with their congregants, so too do we wish them to be compassionate and forgiving with their colleagues. However, what is missing from the CCAR's Code of Ethics is an explicit affirmative statement of the ethical values Reform rabbis should embody.

Instead such a statement can be found in the CCAR's Ad Hoc Committee Report on Human Sexuality.[32] This document was created by a large committee of Reform rabbis over a number of years with much debate and was finally presented at the CCAR convention in 1998. Although this report was drafted to guide Reform decision-making about sexuality, it is a useful model for our purposes because it uses positive Jewish religious values to frame an ethical conversation. In this case, ten values are presented as contemporary interpretations to the overarching value of *shleimut* or "wholeness, completeness, unity and peace:"

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[31] CCAR "Code of Ethics for Rabbis," adopted 1991, amended 2013 <https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbis-communities/professional-resources/ccar-ethics-code/ >.
[32] Selig Salkowitz, Chair, "CCAR Ad Hoc Committee Report on Human Sexuality," Report to the CCAR Convention, June 1998.

(1) B’tzelem Elohim (“in the image of God”)

(2) Emet (“truth”)

(3) B’ri-ut (“health”)

(4) Mishpat (“justice”)

(5) Mishpacha (“family”)

(6) Tz’niyut (“modesty”)

(7) B’rit (“covenantal relationship”)

(8) Simcha (“joy”)

(9) Ahava (“love”)

(10) Kedusha (“holiness”)

Each value is in turn rooted in Jewish tradition and then applied to the subject of sexuality. The result of this document is a values-based rubric for making decisions about sex and sexuality, topics that touch the lives of all Reform Jews. As we envision Reform Judaism for the twenty-first century, a similar document that articulates the Jewish ethical values of rabbis and other Jewish professionals would be a welcome guide.

The literature of Reform Judaism possesses thoughtful reflections on the qualities of Reform Jewish leaders, particularly rabbis. As president of HUC, Kaufmann Kohler sought to produce rabbis of integrity and character. As the representative body of Reform rabbis, the CCAR has produced numerous writings that call their constituents to be exemplary in their behavior, modeling the Jewish values they want to see their communities embody. Now Reform Judaism could use a statement of positive ethical principles that represents the highest ideals of our movement and serve as a guide for both our leaders and our communities.

CHAPTER THREE: ARTICULATION OF STANDARDS

The central purpose of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), North America's Reform seminary, is to train and sustain rabbis, cantors, communal and educational professionals.[33] This is a solemn responsibility that requires HUC-JIR to grapple daily with the question at hand: Should Reform rabbis be held to a different or higher standard than the Jews they lead, and if so, what is that standard? This question is operative when HUC-JIR considers which candidates are qualified to be students and which students are eligible for ordination. This question also lurks behind the institution's many policies. If we agree with John Dewey's view that education is a process of indoctrination to a set of communal values,[34] then let us attempt to state explicitly the set of values for which HUC-JIR stands. To do so will not only help HUC-JIR to craft its mission, vision, and curricula, but also it will help potential students to decide if HUC-JIR is the right institution for them and for current students to gauge their moral and ethical development during their tenure.

The values of an academic institution can be gleaned from its admissions application, its policies, and its promotional materials such as websites and informational pamphlets. Unsurprisingly for an academic institution, the Rabbinical School application and admissions requirements suggest that HUC-JIR's highest priority is academic achievement. The basic prerequisites for all of HUC-JIR's programs are degrees from accredited institutions of higher learning and certain minimum grade point averages and

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[33] "Mission," *Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion*, 2014 <http://huc.edu/about/mission>.
[34] John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," *School Journal* 54 (January 1897): 77-80.

standardized exam scores.[35] Applicants are asked to list the academic honors or scholarships they have received, publications they have authored, books they have read, and their formal and informal Jewish and secular educational backgrounds.[36] Applicants must submit essays to demonstrate their writing ability as well as to share information about themselves. Even among the less objective requirements listed for the rabbinical program, most are related to academics:

- A readiness for graduate study, including the capacity to meet the intellectual, ethical, and emotional demands of graduate school.
- A serious commitment to academic study and the capacity to develop self-awareness.
- An ability to engage in abstract reasoning, to think analytically and conceptually, and to formulate mature judgments.
- An aptitude for clear oral and written self-expression.[37]

Furthermore, the National Student Academic Handbook of HUC-JIR deals with academic policies for more than fifty pages. Clearly academics are an understandably important value to HUC-JIR.

However, HUC-JIR is not only an academic institution. As a seminary it is also a professional training school and a religious institution. The work of the staff, faculty, and students is often implicitly rooted in Jewish values, but HUC-JIR's promotional materials

[35] "FAQ," *Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion*, 2014 <http://huc.edu/admissions/faq>.
[36] HUC-JIR Admissions Application 2013-2014.
[37] "Apply to Become a Rabbi: Program Requirements," *Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion*, 2014 <http://huc.edu/admissions/applications-and-program-requirements/apply-become-rabbi/program-requirements>.

fail to state these values explicitly. Numerous rabbinic skills are valued,[38] dedication to Reform Judaism and K'lal Yisrael is valued, and endogamy among rabbis is valued,[39] but ethical behavior beyond academic integrity has not been systematically identified for the HUC-JIR community. Just as the CCAR possesses a definitive code of ethics, so too could HUC-JIR define the behaviors that are and are not acceptable for members of this institution. One possibility is an aspirational document that posits the Jewish values HUC-JIR hopes all of its students, faculty, staff, and alumni to embody. Below is an attempt at such a text based on all of the research above.

It is the hope of HUC-JIR that the graduates of the Rabbinical School shall embody the following Jewish values that lie at the core of rabbinic work:

(1) ***Dugmah 'Ishit*** ("personal example") The Babylonian Talmud repeatedly teaches that an important person is different—*adam hashuv sha'ni*. As significant figures in the community, rabbis are expected to lead by personal example. Because of their notable position in the community, rabbis have an obligation to behave ethically and morally in both their personal and professional lives. Only when rabbis serve as role models and live what they teach and preach with integrity can they hope to instill these same values in others.

(2) ***Kashrut*** ("fitness") A Reform responsum teaches that "a 'rabbi' is someone who is *qualified* for that distinction" (CCAR Responsa 5759.3 "Who Is a Rabbi?"). A prospective rabbi must be fit for the role and responsibility of

[38] "Become a Rabbi: Mission," *Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion*, 2014 <http://huc.edu/academics/degree-programs/become-rabbi/mission>.
[39] "Apply to Become a Rabbi: Program Requirements."

rabbi. This requires years of growing, learning, training, and acquiring skills with experienced teachers and mentors. This also requires certain personal qualities and proclivities, such as self-awareness, interpersonal skills, an ability to communicate clearly, and a desire to contribute to the Jewish people. HUC-JIR is committed to working with qualified students to ensure that all of its graduates are fit for the rabbinate.

(3) ***Yir'at 'Elohim*** ("awe of God") "Know before whom you stand." These words are often inscribed over the ark in synagogue sanctuaries to remind all worshipers before and to whom they are praying. Rabbis are religious leaders whose entire work is done in the presence of God. In good times and challenging times, rabbis labor *l'shem shamayim*, for the sake of heaven, or else they cease to fulfill their true purpose.

(4) ***'Emet*** ("truth") For an academic institution, the search for truth is an intellectual imperative. For a religious community, the search for truth is a spiritual practice to find meaning in life. For a rabbi, truth is a critical value to uphold because without it there is no trust between the leader and the led. Rabbis are often considered the gatekeepers of truth, and it is our duty to share the truth we discover with others. Just as God seeks truth according to the psalmist, "indeed You desire truth" (Ps 51:8), so too must rabbis in all they do.

(5) ***Hokhmah*** ("wisdom") Wisdom is more than just knowledge, which is also important for rabbis to possess. Wisdom requires an awareness of what we do and do not know so that we are in an ongoing pursuit of knowledge.

Wisdom enables us “to understand and discern, to heed, learn, and teach” (*Mishkan T’filah*, Ahavah Rabbah). Wisdom grows with age and experience, but only if we are open to receiving it. Rabbis were once referred to as the “wise ones” (*hakhamim*), which encourages their spiritual descendants today to earn the same distinguished title.

(6) ***Ṣedakah uMishpat*** (“righteousness and justice”) God singled out Abraham because he did righteousness and justice and taught his children to do the same (Gen 18:19). Rabbis adopt this solemn responsibility when they choose the rabbinate. It is our job to defend the marginalized members of our society like the biblical widow and the orphan and to repair as much of our broken world as we are able. When we live by these values in all aspects of our lives, we inspire others to do the same.

(7) ***Rahamim*** (“compassion”) Because we human beings are created in God’s image (*b’tzelem ’Elohim*, Gen 1:27), our task is to emulate God. Moses believed God to be “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin” (Exod 34:6-7), so rabbis also endeavor to exercise these qualities. This means having compassion on our teachers, our colleagues, our communities, and ourselves when they do not always meet our expectations. This means employing *teshuvah* when necessary and believing that repentance is possible no matter

what the transgression may be.[40] Compassion enables us to exist in an imperfect world.

(8) ***Omeş Lev*** ("courage") The Hebrew word for courage literally means "strength of heart." The rabbinate is not an easy profession and requires this kind of strength as well as strength of conviction and strength of character. Rabbis struggle not to let the challenges they face wear them down or deter them from their purpose. As public figures, rabbis brave controversy and criticism, utilizing their prophetic voice. Rabbinic courage is crucial to ensuring the future of Jewish life.

(9) ***'Anavah*** ("humility") "Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth" (Num 12:3). Our ancient rabbinic forebears understood all rabbis to follow in Moses' footsteps, and this value that he embodied is one of the most difficult to maintain. Rabbis are in a position of power, which can lead to arrogance and abuses of that power. However, humility is the antidote, keeping egos in check and the needs of the community in the forefront of our vision.

(10) ***Kedushah*** ("holiness") In the words of the CCAR Ad Hoc Committee Report on Human Sexuality:

> This value comes from the root meaning of the Hebrew word KDSh, "distinct from all others, unique, set apart for an elevated

[40] This statement simply seeks to keep open the door to *teshuvah*. Allowing for the possibility of *teshuvah* does not erase transgression altogether, and it does not argue that all rabbis who transgress and then seek to do *teshuvah* may continue to serve as rabbis. Instead, the hope is that we treat all transgressors with compassion despite the difficulty inherent in doing so.

> purpose." The Torah instructs us: "You shall be holy, for I, Adonai your God, am holy" (Lev 19:2). Holiness is not simply a state of being; rather it is a continuing process of human striving for increasingly higher levels of moral living.[41]

Rabbis by their chosen profession set themselves apart as symbolic exemplars.[42] The journey of the rabbinate may be long and arduous, but it can also be filled with great reward and meaning if it is continuously infused with holiness.

By embracing and living by these Jewish values, Reform rabbis serve as ethical role models for the Jewish people, ensuring a strong and rooted future for Jewish life.

[41] Salkowitz 5.

[42] The formulation "rabbi as symbolic exemplar" was crafted by Rabbi Jack H. Bloom in his work *The Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar: By the Power Vested in Me* (New York: The Haworth Press, 2002).

CHAPTER FOUR: APPLICATION OF STANDARDS

It is not enough merely to articulate one's values. Actions speak louder than words, and how you behave in difficult situations more clearly demonstrates your values than any statement ever could. Below are three hypothetical scenarios that HUC-JIR and the CCAR could likely face today. Each one will be examined though the lens of the above proposed ethical values for rabbis in an attempt to determine a possible course of action for the people and institutions involved. If successful, this exploration will demonstrate how to make difficult decisions regarding rabbis using the moral framework provided.

Scenario #1: A Wayward Congregational Rabbi

There is a congregational rabbi who has been in his current pulpit for nearly fifteen years. His synagogue's membership is shrinking. Congregants complain that his sermons are little more than pop culture musings or angry political rants. Some have resigned from the congregation, citing the lack of rabbinic leadership as their primary reason. He has been known to ignore his former congregants when meeting them unexpectedly in other settings. The cantors that have worked with him describe this rabbi as a demanding micromanager. Female colleagues have shared that some of his jokes make them feel uncomfortable. He is well read, which he regularly and unabashedly demonstrates, but he lacks certain basic Jewish knowledge such as how to spell biblical names in Hebrew. Although this rabbi has not explicitly breached the CCAR's Code of Ethics, there is a distinct concern for the well being of this rabbi and his congregation.

Response #1

First this situation must be approached with a sense of compassion and justice, recognizing that there is always more than one side to any story. With the help of the CCAR, it is imperative to learn to what extent these allegations are true, and to what extent there are extenuating circumstances affecting the rabbi's performance or the congregation's perception of him. If the above depiction proves to be accurate, then it appears that this rabbi is failing to serve as a *dugmah 'ishit*. His fitness for the rabbinate is called into question, and he appears to lack the wisdom, humility, and courage to acknowledge his limitations and ask for help. If this congregation has any interest in reestablishing a sacred relationship with this rabbi, despite their negative history, then all attempts must be made to improve the fitness of this rabbi and to communicate clearly the values that are central to his community. This requires some serious professional development and likely private counseling as well. It may be desirable for the rabbi to take an unpaid leave of absence to undergo this process, which would require the congregation to hire an interim rabbi in the meantime. If this rabbi proves unwilling or unable to meet the demands of his congregation, or if the congregation is unwilling or unable to invest any more time and energy into this rabbi, then the rabbi must seek employment elsewhere. This may mean another congregation that is a better fit, or it may mean a different avenue altogether. Otherwise, the holiness of this rabbi and this congregation is at stake.

Scenario #2: A Repentant Prospective Student

There is an applicant to the rabbinical school with a history of cheating during her undergraduate studies. This behavior greatly undermines the value of truth. It also raises doubt about the prospective student's fitness for higher learning altogether, let alone rabbinic studies.

Response #2

One way to quell this doubt would be for this prospective student to take several graduate-level courses to demonstrate an attempt to overcome her past challenges with academic honesty. Another possibility would be for her to write candidly about her struggle with cheating in her application essay. A letter of recommendation from a professor who has worked with her on this issue would also be evidence of an ongoing process of *teshuvah*. If these conditions were met, and she appeared to be fit for the rabbinate in other ways, then her application to rabbinical school expresses great courage on her part, and accepting her would demonstrate compassion on HUC-JIR's part. If ultimately accepted as a rabbinical student, then the just and responsible thing for HUC-JIR to do would be to provide this student with positive role models and resources to support her in maintaining academic honesty. In this case, a concerted effort to overcome past wrongdoings may prove the strength of character of a woman deserving to become a rabbi.

Scenario #3: A Student in an Interfaith Relationship

There is a current student in the rabbinic program who is well liked and respected by students and faculty, receives good grades, and competently serves a congregation as

the student rabbi. In his final year of studies, the administration learns that this student is in a romantic relationship with someone who is not Jewish. When the student is approached about his significant other, he explains that the relationship is new and exciting. Whether or not this student's partner will eventually convert to Judaism has not yet been determined because of the newness of the relationship. The student asserts that he will continue to pursue this relationship because it has been difficult for him to find anyone with whom he connects during rabbinical school, and conversion has not been ruled out as a possibility for the future. He further draws attention to the fact that he has nearly completed all the requirements of the rabbinic program, and he contends that if he were already ordained, then his relationship status would no longer be called into question.

Response #3

This student undeniably embodies truth and courage, for he answered questions about his interfaith relationship openly and honestly when others in his position may have tried to hide their non-Jewish significant other. It seems that this student feels a special connection with his partner, which suggests a sense of holiness in their relationship. It is also possible that this student places great emphasis on the value of seeing all people as having been created *b'tzelem 'Elohim*, for he was drawn to his partner because of her humanity as opposed to her religious identity.

However, this student agreed to HUC-JIR's policy on this matter when he applied to the rabbinic program. He was made aware that his ordination would be in jeopardy if he were to find himself in this very situation. This suggests a lack of humility in subversively challenging the school's policy and a lack of integrity in failing to abide by

the commitment he made. This student may appear fit for the rabbinate in every other way, but he is disregarding this clearly articulated value of the HUC-JIR administration. The concern here is that he may in his rabbinate disregard any number of values held by the communities he serves if they do not suit him. If this policy were such a problem for this student, then it is possible that HUC-JIR was not the right school for him in the first place. Such a conversation should be had with the student to determine if he is ultimately fit to be ordained a Reform rabbi. If such a reconciliation of values cannot be made, then HUC-JIR would be justified in terminating this student's tenure despite his positive history there.

There is an alternative possibility that allows for greater compassion. To honor the student's honesty and positive history, HUC-JIR could simply delay his ordination for a year or two. During this time the situation could resolve itself. Either the relationship could fail to eventuate in a long-term partnership, or the non-Jewish partner could convert of her own free will. In either of these cases, the ordination would eventually be able to proceed. If not, then the student would need to reconsider his commitment to the program.

Living by one's values is not always easy. As these scenarios reveal, putting words into action occasionally leads to difficult conversations that can disappoint or even alienate. All communities operate according to a specific set of values, which means that not every individual is suited for every community. By articulating the values of your community, you communicate the kind of person that you want to join and participate in your community. These scenarios exemplify the challenging decisions that HUC-JIR and

the CCAR have to make on a daily basis to ensure that rabbinical students and rabbis embody the values that the Reform Movement wants to see in its leaders. Although we do not wish to turn anyone away, sometimes it is necessary to maintain our values, which serve as a guide especially during troublesome times.

CONCLUSION

Today's Reform rabbinate is riddled with values tensions. There is a push to satisfy the needs of Jews in the pews, and there is a pull for rabbis to maintain their principles. There is a push to remove rabbis from their pedestals in order to make them more human, and there is a pull to treat them as "a different kind of person, 'a member of the third sex.'"[43] There is a push to respect the rabbi's privacy, and there is a pull to keep the rabbi in the public eye. There is a push to allow for personal autonomy, and there is a pull to establish communal standards of behavior. Although these tensions can be frustrating, they also force us to prioritize our values. Today's rabbinate is much more informal and relatable than it was only a few generations ago, but there remains a need to maintain high ethical expectations for rabbis. In our western liberal culture of moral individualism, a strong and consistent moral voice is necessary to guide the way for Reform Jews. When rabbis answer the call to this profession, they relinquish some of the personal freedom and privacy they enjoyed before the rabbinate. However, it is precisely the values that are expected of rabbis that can serve as a driving force for these leaders, giving them purpose, and instilling them with meaning towards a shared divine goal. Furthermore, if we want all Jews to embody the high moral values articulated here, then we need strong rabbis to lead by example. For rabbis are important people, distinguished in their communities, expected to reveal the way to a better world.

[43] Bloom 107.

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