

# BENJAMIN ALTSHULER

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**STATEMENT OF VISION:** My rabbinate is committed to cultivating thriving Judaism through personal relationships and creative endeavors resulting in meaningful observance and intentional community.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2020-Present **Solo Rabbi**

Mt. Sinai Congregation – Wausau, WI

- *Foster Jewish life and communal connection for a small rural-based and geographically diffuse congregation of 80 families. As the only staff member, oversee Shabbat and Chagim worship, music, and education for adult learners and religious school students through individual mentorship and classroom curricula.*
- *Support congregants and oversaw ritual elements and pastoral care throughout life experiences: birth, coming of age, marriage, funeral, and memorial.*
- *Represent the Jewish community to the local region and news media through televised interviews, civic engagement, interfaith affairs, and cultural festivals.*
- *Connect to satellite community through Traveling Rabbi program, outreach through worship, and Torah study in congregant homes.*
- *Empower congregant task force on social justice, dedicated to voter registration, detention reform, and food pantry.*
- *Shepherd conversion candidates from introductory exploration and personal discernment through Beit Din and community recognition.*
- *Oversee COVID response and collaborate with board leadership on safety mitigations, pastoral care, and technological innovations to allow continued worship and social connection during pandemic isolation.*
- *Coordinated synagogue virtual engagement through social media and brand development.*

### Student Rabbi Positions

*Cultivated Jewish life for small-town congregations through Shabbat services, High Holy Day officiation, adult education, youth religious school, holiday observance, and pastoral visits every 2, 3, or 4 weeks. Invigorate and inspire isolated bastions of Jewish existence. Sole Clergy presence for Parkersburg, Muncie, and Bluefield, respectively.*

2019–2020 Temple Sholom - Cincinnati, OH

2018–2019 Congregation Ahavath Sholom - Bluefield, WV

2017–2018 Temple Beth El - Muncie, IN

Summer 2017 KK Bene Israel, Rockdale Temple - Cincinnati, OH

2016–2017 Temple B'nai Israel - Parkersburg, WV

### Religious School Instructor

2018–Present KK Bene Jeshurun, Wise Temple - Cincinnati, OH

*Virtual Classroom Instruction of Grades 4, 5, & 6 Hebrew Connect,  
Curriculum Development and Implementation Grade 5 Nature Project-Based Learning,  
Curator and Discussion Leader Grades 7 & 8 Current Topics and Taboos*

2016–2017 KK Adath Israel - Cincinnati, OH

*Classroom Instructor Grade 6 Hebrew Language, Ritual, Jewish History, and Ethics*

2014–2015 Temple Sholom of Chicago - Chicago, IL

*Classroom Instructor Grade 2 Judaica, Holidays, and Hebrew Vocabulary*

2015–2016 **Front Desk Administrator; Activity Associate**  
Friedman Place: A Community for Adults with Vision Loss, Chicago, IL

*Coordinated communication within a supportive living facility for visually impaired residents and assisted with logistics of daily operations, technology, budget, and transportation. Oversaw the calendar of daily programs including special events, field trips, and guest performers.*

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

2021-Present **Faculty**, Summer Camp  
Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute, Oconomowoc, WI

*Developed Jewish life and t'fillot programming for a month-long summer camp unit of 90 high school students and 20 counselors. Facilitated wilderness programming for multi-day excursions and collaborated on the supervision and navigation of these trips. Organized all-camp programming in consultation with camp directors and clergy faculty partners.*

2013-Present **Rabbinic Council; Alumni Recruiter; Corps Member; Network Weaver**  
AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps, Chicago, IL

*Clergy consultant and former participant in multi-city faith-based service corps dedicated to cultivating intentional communal living cooperatives, service, and understanding the root causes of urban poverty. Facilitated relationship-building among program alumni through community and discussion-based education. Recruit and support future corps.*

2021- Present **Monteverdi Chorale**, Auditioned Community Choir

*Perform triennially with a semi-professional community-based choral program.*

2021- Present **American Red Cross – North Central Chapter**  
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee

*Collaborate on disaster preparedness and cultural competence resources for the region.*

2022- Present **Eilu v'Eilu Fellowship**  
One America Movement

*Confront Toxic Polarization through social psychology and scriptural text in collaboration with other Jewish professionals through quarterly virtual retreats.*

2022 **Balfour Brickner Clergy Fellowship**  
Religious Action Center

*Engaged with clergy partners through multi-part interdenominational discourse focused on "Using Our Moral Voices to Address Oppression Inside & Outside of Our Jewish Communities".*

2020 **Shallat Rabbinic Transition program**  
Union of Reform Judaism

*Partnered with lay leaders and clergy through a multi-part workshop on congregational best practices, strategies for synagogue engagement, and leadership integration.*

2015-2016 **Personal Aid**, Sighted Guide, Adult Companion, Writing Coach  
T'ruma Project, Jerusalem, Israel

*Weekly volunteer project focused on the assistance of a visually impaired expatriate with emphasis on sighted-guide walking, poetry word processing, life skills coaching, and personal companionship.*

## EDUCATION

2020

### **Rabbinic Ordination, Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters**

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio

Thesis: Harping on the Past, Drawing Truth from the Lyre: Seeking King David in Literary Oeuvre

- Israel Bettan Memorial Prize for creative and imaginative pulpit presentation
- Gold Scholarship Recipient
- Deans' Intern
- Admissions Committee – Student Representative
- Rabbinical Student Association – Elected Class Representative
- Concerts on Clifton – Featured Performer and Soloist

2020

**Master's Concentration in Israel Education**, iCenter, Chicago, Illinois

2018

### **Clinical Pastoral Education – Unit 1**

Didactic: HUC-JIR Cincinnati, OH – Rabbi Julie Schwartz, ACPE Certified Educator

Placements: UC Health West Chester Hospital, Twin Lakes Senior Living Community, Alois Alzheimer Center, The Kenwood by Senior Star

2013

### **Bachelor of Arts, Magna Cum Laude in Cognitive Science**

Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota

Thesis: The Puzzle Puzzle, An Interdisciplinary Approach

Raupp Scholarship Recipient; National Merit Scholar; Residential Assistant; Tour Guide

2011

**Budapest Semester in Cognitive Science**, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

## PUBLICATIONS

Contributor – *Prophetic Voices: Renewing And Reimagining Haftarah* (2023), CCAR Press

Book Review – The Reform Jewish Quarterly, "Search by Michelle Hunever" Winter 2023

D'var Torah – LAASOK – *Taste of Torah*, Parshat HaShavua Blog (March, 2, 2023)

Contributor – *T'ruah*, M(Oral) Torah, Parshat HaShavua Blog (November 2022)

D'var Torah – Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle (June 2, 2021)

Contributor – 929.org English language Torah commentary, *Exodus 26*, (Oct. 28, 2018)

Blogger – Avodah Blog, *Pushing Back Against Darkness* (November 2021)

Blogger – Avodat HaKodesh Sacred Service Learning (Submissions 2016-2020)

## PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR)

Wisconsin Council of Rabbis

NAOMI – Interfaith Conclave, chapter of WISDOM

18 Doors Registry Interfaith Wedding Officiant

## PERSONAL SKILLS

Computer: Adobe Creative Suite, Zoom Meetings, Microsoft Office, SPSS Software

Care: CPE Level One, Sighted Guide, Red Cross First Aid & CPR, Wilderness First Aid (WFA)

Communication: Hebrew and Spanish Language Proficiency

Collaboration: Dispute Mediator, Experienced Sibling, Competitive Board Game Enthusiast

Every life is an unfolding story. Judaism gives us the tools to place our stories in the greater anthology of history, to recognize dominant motifs, to decipher hidden morals, and to connect with each other. We have been called the People of the Book for our literary tendencies, yet it has been our commitment to telling stories that unifies us as a people. We use stories to venture into the imagined and the unknown; through metaphor, we uncover truths about God, belief, and spirituality.

My story is the product of my experiences and my relationships. The prologue is my childhood; with five children, my parents balanced chaos with intentional moments like wrangling multiple schedules to align around the Shabbat table. My parents and siblings were and remain my guiding lights, and it is with them that my captivation with stories began. I remember campouts in the backyard – we would tell each other invented episodic tales until the last of us fell asleep. Now we continue to tell each other the stories of our lives in new ways, sometimes from afar, but always eager to catch up on the latest chapter. The attentiveness we share inspires me to tell the story uniquely mine.

For over a decade, during my formative years, I navigated life and school, waiting only to return to Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, and Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute. I was empowered by life at our local synagogue, but it was at summer camp that I felt part of the larger narrative of the Jewish people. From page to page and year to year, my story developed as I grew from camper to counselor and then part of the leadership team, becoming more confident and more attuned to my spirituality. I felt most connected amidst the wilderness, leading canoe treks, and bike jaunts, each producing its own set of humorous and motivational memories, transformed into anecdotes, and composed as letters home. Of course, storytelling was also a centerpiece of camp Shabbat observance; following a festive meal, hundreds of community members packed into a small gathering space for exuberant song and the director's weekly Shabbat Story. Camp can be a loud and rambunctious experience, but the story was always met with rapt attention. Here I learned the power of stories to mesmerize and unify a community.

I experienced the power of storytelling to be a catalyst for change after I graduated from Carleton College and joined Avodah, the Jewish Service Corps in Chicago. Life in a communal setting with other volunteers was rife with stories of adventure, camaraderie, and growth. We learned to cook together, create an intentional purpose, and bridge Jewish pluralism. At work, I served blind and visually impaired adults in a supportive living facility, advocating for services and accommodations for them. The residents told me tales of living with disability, encountering systematic oppression, and their search for community. In turn, these accounts became the fodder we empowered them to share with local council members and city government in pursuit of social justice.

I had certainly encountered the tenets of ethics and communal care in both secular and Jewish contexts, but this direct service experience sharpened my purpose to enact justice for all people and all peoples. According to tradition<sup>1</sup>, Jewish study leads to community-mindedness and advocacy action. However, I have often found the reciprocal to be true as well; my experiences engaging in social justice pursuits connect me more deeply with my faith.

As I root myself now as a congregational Rabbi, storytelling remains an integral part of community life. Stories enable us to teach, to examine the archetypes of the human condition, and learn from the experiences of others. Everyone is the author of their own life, able to tap into their innate wisdom. This

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<sup>1</sup> Mishnah Peah 1:1, Shabbat 127a

is true from our youngest congregants still learning the tools of language and the elements of expressing the stories in their hearts to our most seasoned storytellers, curious or hesitant to consider life's natural conclusion. As a teacher, I help examine the original story of our people, the Torah; the supporting narratives we compose around holidays, religious laws, and traditions; and the personal memoirs of pioneers, who guide others along the path of living Judaism. These stories are a universal tool that humans use to create meaning, yet also a particularistic instrument that defines the Jewish community.

I think the modern equivalent of human predisposition for stories comes in television, movies, and even podcasts. These are influential tools when crafted with the right intention, but none will ever replace the power of sitting together and sharing a story on the couch, around the campfire, in the classroom, or tucking into bed at night. A story personally told conveys emotion and relationship, bringing together the teller and the listener and transporting them on a shared journey. I want to be present with you at moments of celebration and challenging plot twists. I want to learn from our community, fine-tuning our next chapter with character development and exposition. Come, let us turn the page together.