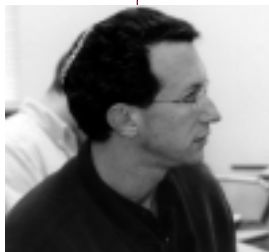


Faith First:

WHAT DO ALL OF THESE PROFESSIONALS HAVE IN COMMON?

THEY ARE ALL SECOND CAREER RABBINICAL STUDENTS AT HUC-JIR!

Unlike generations ago, when rabbinical students entered HUC-JIR directly from college, an increasing number of students today are revisioning their lives and applying to HUC-JIR's programs for a second career. Among those admitted to the new Class of 2007, for example, 12% are 30-39, 3% are 40-49, and 9% are 50-59.



phony or Copland ballet. I realized that this was the "music" I wanted to bring to life; this was the "art" that I needed to devote myself to for the rest of my life — connecting the spirits and minds of young and young-at-heart to our sacred history and tradition. **[Stephen Julius Stein, former conductor of symphony orchestras, opera, and ballet around the world]**

In putting faith first, these students are demonstrating an inspiring commitment to Jewish spiritual leadership. As older students, they bring extensive prior work and life experience to their new calling. As a vital part of the HUC-JIR student community, they bring strength and new perspectives to student life and professional development training.

Several HUC-JIR second career students reflect on this new direction in their lives with *The Chronicle*.

How did you come to choose the rabbinate?

I felt as though the rabbinate "chose" me. I had reached a point in my career where I had reaped considerable rewards. Yet, much to my surprise, I began to feel as though I was losing my love for my work. While as an artist I knew I had moved hearts and sometimes even deeply affected my listeners, I so rarely encountered them as individuals — they were inevitably grouped in the thousands and more. I was drawn to Friday night *Shabbat* services, which led me to *Torah* study for the first time since my becoming a *bar mitzvah*. Being engaged with *Torah* was a life-changing event. Here I found a "score" that was broader and deeper than even the most exalted Mozart sym-

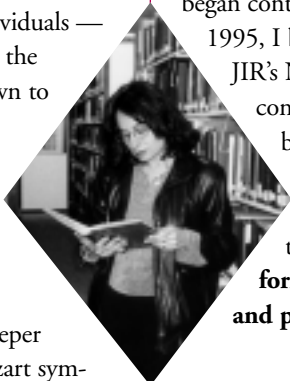


What was your process in changing careers?

My decision to enter rabbinical school was a process that evolved over three years. I knew that being a lawyer called upon only a small portion of who I am as a person. By 1997, I was 37 years old and I began to think of the "big picture" — of having 40-45 productive years of life left. With that perspective, the prospect of 5 years of school didn't matter any more. I was ready to move forward.

[Meir Feldman, former federal prosecutor and Assistant U.S. Attorney]

In producing news and public affairs for public television, I wanted to have an impact on society. The work was frustrating — many of the most informative shows were never aired and I never saw the effect of my work on the audience. Twelve years ago, I began contemplating the rabbinate. In 1995, I began to take classes at HUC-JIR's New York Kollel, and later completed a master's degree, and began the doctoral program, but ultimately knew that the rabbinical program was the right thing for me. **[Suzanne Singer, former public television producer and programming executive]**



- a civil rights activist with Cesar Chavez
- an environmental crimes investigator
- a professional country-Western songwriter
- a community/labor organizer
- a federal prosecutor
- a symphony conductor
- a higher education lobbyist
- a controller/business manager
- a public television producer
- a physicist

What is it like to become a student again?

It's a big transition when you have a family and career and you leave everything and become a student. I was in my thirties, divorced, with a 10-year-old son. I felt like my mind had turned to oatmeal. I didn't know if I could stack up against bright young people right out of college. I worked hard to ensure that I wouldn't fail. Also, I was relieved to see that I was not the only older student. I didn't feel so completely different and I got a lot of support and acceptance from my younger classmates. A special mentor who helped me was my rabbi, Helene Ferris (NY '81), at Temple Israel of Northern Westchester, who was the first older woman with children to enter HUC-JIR's rabbinical program. She has helped me every step of the way and I have learned so much from her.

[Jennifer Jaech, former lobbyist for Evergreen State College, Washington State]



How was your first year of study at HUC-JIR/Jerusalem?

I would not have grown as a Jew as much in my whole life as I did that one year. I was tested in every aspect of my Jewish identity

SECOND CAREER RABBINICAL STUDENTS

Amy Bebbick, Ruth Friedman, Richard Rosenbaum, and Sarah Schriever contributed to this article.

and became more whole and complete as a Jew there. I'm glad that rabbinical studies begin with Israel as the emphasis. I am now able to build on that foundation

Every day I look back upon that experience — which will be integrated into my sermons for the many years to come!

[Annie Fantasia, former controller/business manager]



As a second career student, what do you bring to the program and student community?

What I bring is not more, not less, just different. When I look at a text, I bring my perspective of having lived with illness, death, political experience. It's a different perspective from my younger colleagues — I'm the same age as their parents. I don't think that "youth is wasted on the young," but getting a second chance to be in such an academic, spiritual environment, you bring more of life to it and appreciate it.

[Steven Burton, former attorney and civil rights activist with Cesar Chavez]



What have you learned from your student internships?

I've worked at the UAHC — researching Judaism and masculinity as it relates to teenagers and using anecdotal and statistical data to develop and implement programs in congregations that will make men feel more comfortable about participating. We can learn so much from women's creativity and energy in developing ceremonies to mark cycles of their lives and can apply these models to men's lives too. My goal as a future congregational rabbi is to help people find Judaism to be a language of meaning in their lives, through which they can describe their most powerful moments.

[Michael Holzman, former investigator of environmental crimes for the Department of Justice]



Is there an alumni mentor who has been a role model for you?

As a year-long intern with Rabbi Ronne Friedman (C '75), prior to entering HUC-JIR, I experienced his study circle linking Temple Beth Zion and an African-American Baptist Church in Buffalo. I am applying that model to the Black-Jewish relations class I am now teaching at the Reform Jewish High School in Cincinnati. Ten Jewish students and 10 African-American students meet at the Hebrew School and the Quinn Chapel Memorial Church to learn about each others' identity and experiences, connect on a personal

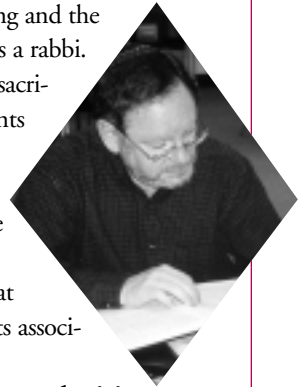
level, reach understanding, and become a light unto their communities.

[John Linder, former community and labor organizer]

How does HUC-JIR help second career students?

I know that I will earn less as a rabbi than I did in my private sector work, but I love what I am studying and the work I will be doing as a rabbi. While it is a financial sacrifice, prospective students should be aware that HUC-JIR is generous and helpful — there are scholarships and field placement stipends that cover many of the costs associated with attending.

[Michael Lotker, former physicist whose company developed alternative energy resources]



What is your advice to those considering a second career in the rabbinate?

Follow your dream. You will need people to help you and support you. It is a major change. It's not easy to put the brakes on life and start over. But every day you will feel like you are living a dream. Every day you will be growing.

[Annie Fantasia]

This is the greatest journey with a wonderful community and every opportunity — where being a part of something bigger has made my life meaningful. Years ago I

spoke with Rabbi Steven Fuchs (C '74) in Nashville during the early stages when I was a professional songwriter struggling with the dream of becoming a rabbi.

He said: "Come back when you lose the struggle!"

[Andrea Cosnowsky, former country Western song writer for Garth Brooks' managers' publishing company]

