



## FEBRUARY 2021 REPORT OF THE TBI RABBINIC SEARCH COMMITTEE INTRODUCING RABBI RACHEL K. MARKS

On behalf of the Rabbinic Search Committee (“RSC”), we enthusiastically present this Report summarizing the work of the RSC and its unanimous recommendation of Rabbi Rachel K. Marks to be elected the next Rabbi of TBI.

In February, 2020 President Helene Levine appointed Michael M. Lorge, Jon Schneider and Deb Spiegel to be Co-Chairs of the RSC and together they selected 14 RSC members representing every facet of our congregation. In March, 2020, the RSC began its work to map a process that was careful, thoughtful, stressed consensus and engaged the entire congregation.

Fundamental to its work was input from the TBI membership through virtual “Coffee Talks” which were facilitated by Dick and Emily Axelrod. Nearly two hundred congregants participated and shared their opinions and priorities concerning our next rabbi. A Catalogue of Opinions was created by the Axelrod’s and it clearly established that TBI was seeking a warm, compassionate leader, a great teacher who would be collaborative, down to earth, a good listener, accepting of diversity and easily approachable. The Catalogue was a constant source of information and a touchstone for the RSC throughout their work, including preparing the CCAR application about our congregation.

In December, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (“CCAR”), the organization which oversees the rabbinic search process in the Reform movement, provided resumes and materials from 13 rabbinic candidates from around the country and overseas. The RSC reviewed and assessed the resumes and materials provided by the CCAR and selected four rabbinic candidates with whom to have virtual interviews. Again, relying on the Catalogue, as well as members’ own impressions, the RSC came to a consensus on three of the rabbinic candidates for an in-depth interview. These three follow-up sessions lasted approximately five hours each and included a formal teaching session and an informal personal story from the candidate. The sessions also included a virtual tour of our building, a virtual tour of the Skokie area and extensive interview questions. The questions covered the candidate’s strengths and weaknesses as a congregational rabbi, religious practices and worship style, experience with youth and schools, social justice work, interfaith engagement and leadership style. Finally, the Co-Chairs interviewed the references for each of the finalist candidates. Once we identified the leading candidate, the rabbi met with our professional staff and the RSC Co-Chairs met with them for their insights.

Based on Rabbi Rachel K. Marks’ interview, exuberant comments from her references and the printed and virtual materials we received the RSC members concluded that she was engaging, confident, warm, creative, bright, personable, collaborative, approachable, enthusiastic, dedicated, forward thinking, genuine, organized and passionate. It was clear to the RSC members that Rabbi Marks is an ideal fit for our community and that she embodies the qualities and values in our Catalogue. The decision and recommendation of the RSC is unanimous and enthusiastic.

We will host several “Meet the Rabbi” sessions on Zoom, to provide an opportunity to meet Rabbi Marks (see the dates and times listed inside) before you are asked to elect her as our next rabbi. We are confident and thrilled in our recommendation and look forward to Rabbi Marks’ election as the next rabbi of TBI at a Special Meeting of the congregation on February 21, 2021 at 7:00 PM.

Respectfully and Joyfully Submitted,

*Co-Chairs Michael M. Lorge, Jon Schneider and Deb Spiegel*

*RSC Members Michelle Agrest, Eli Castellano, Aaron Cohn, Lisa Drucker, Adam Eisenberg, Steve Epstein, Johanna Fine, Cindy Franklin, Jessica Hornick, June & Joel Levin, Susan Zoline  
Ex-Officio Helene Levine and Neal Gussis*



## Rabbi's Biographical Statement

Rabbi Marks was born and raised in suburban Chicago. From a very young age she was involved in her synagogue, youth group, and as a young camper, then counselor and unit head at Olin-Sang Ruby Union Institute, the Reform Movement's summer camp in Oconomowoc, WI. It was these experiences, along with a set of rich family customs and traditions, that led Rabbi Marks to discover her passion for Judaism. Rabbi Marks felt called to the rabbinate to be a leader and a teacher in the Jewish community with the mission of transmitting Jewish wisdom, inspiring social action, and promoting a vibrant Jewish life for people on all stages of their journeys. She believes the sacred synagogue community has the potential to be the Jewish answer to the challenge of radical individualism.

Rabbi Marks received a Bachelor of Arts in Jewish Studies from Indiana University. She attended the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Los Angeles where she earned her rabbinic ordination, as well as a Master of Arts in Jewish Education from the Rhea Hirsch School of Education.

Currently, Rabbi Marks serves as the Associate Rabbi, Director of Congregational Learning at Congregation Shalom in Milwaukee, WI. She has served there since her ordination in 2015. During her tenure at Congregation Shalom, Rabbi Marks has been known for her warmth, creativity, and commitment to *talmud Torah* - Jewish Study, and passion for *tikkun olam* - social justice work. During her tenure at Congregation Shalom, Rabbi Marks worked in collaboration with the clergy team to revamp family Shabbat and holiday services and experiences, as well as the Selichot and Purim experiences for adults. She brought programs such as "Pop Up Shabbat," "Torah on the Trails," and "The Expecting Parents' Circle," to the congregation, all of which helped to broaden and deepen the congregation's impact on segments of the community not normally reached. She introduced innovative learning models for students of all ages, and brought a variety of stimulating adult educational opportunities to Congregation Shalom.

Rabbi Marks is deeply involved in the wider community, some highlights of this work include serving each summer since her ordination on the faculty at Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute. She has also served on the ARZA board and sits on the Rabbinical Alumni Association of HUC-JIR. She currently serves on the executive committee for the faith-based, community organizing group, MICAHA (Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope).

Rabbi Marks is married to Albert Marks. They are the proud parents of George (almost 4) and Dena (almost 2). Rabbi Marks looks forward to the post-COVID day when she can cook for and entertain new and old friends and family in her home once again. She also finds great peace in nature and treasures being able to see the world anew through her children's eyes. The Marks family eagerly awaits the arrival of summer when they will officially join the TBI Family.

### Dates for TBI Members to Meet the Rabbi

The TBI Rabbinic Search Committee is thrilled to invite you to hear from the rabbi we are recommending to be our new rabbi. We encourage you to **Meet the Rabbi** at one of these sessions:

**February 7, 2021** for Executive Board Members, Board Members, Sisterhood Executive Board Members and Brotherhood Board Members (a link will be sent)

**Open to all TBI Members: Feb. 8, 2021, 8:00 pm; Feb. 11, 2021, 8:00 pm; Feb. 21, 2021, Noon**

Sign up for **ONE** of these sessions through the TBI web site

**Election of Rabbi Rachel K. Marks** by our congregation at Special Meeting Feb. 21, 2021, 7:00 pm

## A Personal Greeting from Rabbi Rachel K. Marks

Shalom Temple Beth Israel,

Each Shabbat, before we recite *Birkat HaMazon*, the Grace After Meals, we sing the words from Psalm 126. This psalm serves as an expression of pure optimism and hope as the psalmist imagined what it might feel like to return home to Zion from exile in Babylon. The text invites the Jewish people to be like dreamers - to keep hold of their hope and joy when the time comes to return to the Promised Land.



Joining the TBI community as your next rabbi feels both like a homecoming and the fulfillment of a dream. For as long as I can recall, I have known of TBI. My father became Bar Mitzvah and was confirmed in the Albany Park sanctuary, and still speaks warmly of his experiences with Rabbi Lorge <sup>z"l</sup>. As for me, I grew up immersed in synagogue life at Temple Chai, in Long Grove. My involvement there led to many formative summers in Oconomowoc at OSRUI. Part of what made it so were the close relationships I formed with members of the faculty including, of course, Rabbi Weinberg. So too, I made many friends at camp who called TBI home. I have long admired TBI's true sense of community, deep love of Torah and Israel, commitment to *tikkun olam*, and the balance TBI has struck between tradition and innovation. I sensed that TBI's core identity and values align with my own identity and values. This is what led me to seek special permission from Congregation Shalom in Milwaukee, where I have happily served as the Assistant and then Associate Rabbi since my ordination in 2015, to apply for this position.

Through my meetings with the Rabbinic Search Committee my admiration for this sacred congregation only deepened. I am so grateful to Michael Lorge, Jon Schneider, Deb Spiegel and the whole Rabbinic Search Committee for the pride with which you represented TBI, and for the warmth you exuded throughout the entire process.

As your next rabbi I am both humbled and honored to be able to walk with you on your journeys. I look forward with exhilaration to get to know each of you and your families. I also look forward with great anticipation to forming a collaborative relationship with TBI's leadership and with Lori Sagarin, Marla Aviva Bentley, and Amber Wood. My husband, Albert, and our young children, George and Dena, can hardly wait to join you this summer. Albert and I feel blessed beyond measure to be able to put down roots and raise our children at TBI.

It goes without saying that this has been an incredibly challenging year. In addition to the widespread and deep suffering brought on by the pandemic, we have all had to stretch our conceptions about the way we come together marking ordinary moments, moments of mourning, and moments of celebration. As we begin to emerge from this dark time, we have an opportunity to take our cue from the psalmist. I pray that when we return to TBI, we will all be like dreamers filled with hope and joy as we continue to build this sacred community together.

L'Shalom,

*Rachel K. Marks*

Rabbi Rachel K. Marks

## A Bulletin Article from Congregation Shalom by Rabbi Rachel K. Marks

August, 2020 Av, 5780

Did you know that many essential Jewish rituals, customs, and even prayers do not date back directly to Torah? For instance, the Torah does not instruct us regarding the lighting of Shabbat candles, or regarding the Passover seder, or even regarding the fixed prayers that we say during our services.

Don't get me wrong, all of these essential rituals, customs and prayers draw their origins from Torah. But, the religion described in the Torah of the ancient Jews was that of a sacrificial cult, whose center would become the Temple in Jerusalem, once the Israelites reached the Promised Land.

So what happened when that religious center was destroyed by outside forces not only once (586 BCE), but twice (70CE)? Legend has it that as the Romans lay siege on Jerusalem, the leader of what would become Rabbinic Judaism, Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai was smuggled out of Jerusalem in a coffin to meet with Vespasian, the Roman leader. He pleaded with Vespasian, "Give me Yavne." (Yavne was a town about forty miles west of Jerusalem). Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai understood that Jerusalem, for the time being, was no longer an option to serve as the religious center for the Jewish People. He accepted this, and shifted the center west to Yavne. There, learning flourished. It was there that rabbinic Judaism, the Judaism that would produce innovations such as lighting Shabbat candles, marking Passover with a seder, and authoring fixed prayers for us to say communally, thrived.

Why do I share this piece of history? Because we find ourselves in the midst of a *Yavne moment*. We long for our religious center -- we love our physical synagogue, the sanctuary, and all it represents - a *Beit Knesset* - a House of Gathering, where our beloved community can physically be together. For the time being, though, just like Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai understood about his religious center, we know that we must shift our center. And so, we have made the decision to offer virtual education to our learners of all ages come fall. Just like the ancient rabbis, this shift has provided us the opportunity to innovate and to elevate our learning.

In our new models we have shifted to family learning for our youngest students; small group learning for our Hebrew students; and we have engaged experts from across the country to teach our teens. So too are we committed to engaging interesting and relevant guest lecturers and providing an array of virtual adult educational opportunities. We have learned many lessons about what does, and what does not work with virtual education. We are poised to make the most out of this challenging *Yavne moment*, so that the Jewish values, traditions, and our sacred community itself, all of which represent the true center of our religious practice, will continue to be central, even if our physical center has shifted for the time being. We may even find that when all of this passes, and we return to our beloved building, we will do so having embraced new customs, rituals and traditions from this time.

Because of Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai's flexibility during challenging times, rabbinic Judaism, the Judaism that we know and love, flourished. I am certain that our Judaism, too, will continue to thrive in the weeks and months ahead.