



Meet Israeli Reform Rabbis

Rabbi Tamara Shifrin



Community Position: Rabbi of Kehillat Achvat Yisrael in Rishon Lezion, since 2014

Born: Haifa

Ordination: HUC Jerusalem, 2015

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City/region: Rishon Lezion is the fourth-largest city in Israel in terms of population. It was founded in 1882 and was the first community founded by the first Aliyah immigrants. The Israeli flag emerged in Rishon Lezion and the city was a center for the renewal of Hebrew culture, particularly in the fields of language and education.

Special activities in my community: **A.** A Women's Circle at the Center for Victims of Sexual Assault, which I lead together with Keren B'Kavod - the Fund for Humanitarian Assistance and Social Responsibility at the Israel Reform Movement. **B.** A municipal Kabbalat Shabbat service once a month at the Beit Ha'am community center, with the goal of reaching wider circles. **C.** "ReforMimouna" - A special celebration of the Mimouna holiday, held the day after Passover marking the return to eating Chametz. This tradition of North-African Jewish communities is widely celebrated among Mizrahi Israelis today.

Formative event in my history: When I was 16, I visited the United States as part of a B'nai B'rith Noar LeNoar youth delegation. We spent a month in Jewish communities in Canada and the United States, and a month at Starlight Pennsylvania summer camp.

This was the first time in my life that I experienced egalitarian synagogues and a woman cantor. One of the rabbis at camp was from the Reconstructionist stream and the other was Modern Orthodox. I come from a traditional family and I had a very strong bond with Judaism before the trip, but I came back with a greater love for Judaism and a dream for my professional future: to become a rabbi. It took me a long time to make the dream come true.

Dreams for personal and professional future: To establish a Democratic - Reform School in Rishon Lezion. To reach an equal (and large) number of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs. Unfortunately, after three years in my position, we've had 75 Bar Mitzvahs - but not a single Bat Mitzvah.

Unusual experience in the Diaspora: At the Starlight Pennsylvania summer camp I mentioned

before, the Orthodox Rabbi Mitchell Wohlberg told the kids: "If the tunes are nicer at the Conservative synagogue, if the guys are cooler at the Reform - go there. The main thing is that you go to synagogue." What Orthodox rabbi in Israel - then or now - would say something like that? More than anything else I learned during the trip, that comment made me understand the true depth of the struggle to keep the Judaism alive in the United States.

Gift I would like to give to my peers around the world: An open gate - they should feel at home here in religious and democratic terms. Or to quote the song by Yoram Taharlev: "The hungry one will find a slice of bread The tired will find shade and water from the well The one whose shack is falling down Will come in quietly And will be able to stay forever."