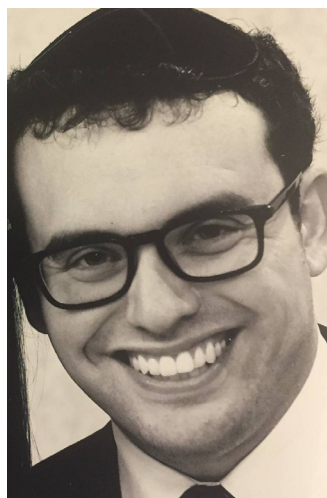
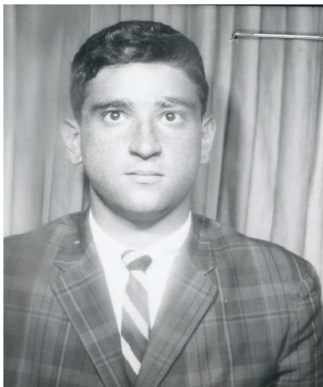


INSTITUTIONAL SYNAGOGUE AND WEST SIDE INSTITUTIONAL SYNAGOGUE CENTENNIAL PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP (1917—2017)

By Rabbi Aaron I. Reichel, Esq.



Acknowledgements

One person's "fake news" is another person's authentic news, and vice versa. Many people simply have different perspectives on the same events and intend to be objective but simply are not and cannot be. This is human nature. This publication relies mainly on primary sources, as well as extensive secondary sources, in describing people who are no longer alive and events that could not have been witnessed by most people now alive and lucid, and this publication relies on quotations, primarily, in recording the memories of people who are very much alive and lucid, may they continue to live and be well. The author/compiler accepts full responsibility for all errors that are not in quotation marks, and expresses his appreciation to all who contributed to the success of the Institutional Synagogue and the West Side Institutional Synagogue, past, present, and future, and to all who contributed words and/or advice and/or graphics for this publication and the simultaneously issued more comprehensive monograph about the activities and people who made the synagogues what they were, what the current surviving synagogue is, and what it has the potential to become.

The author/compiler intends every word to be positive, and desires that every nuance be interpreted in favor of the person, event, or institution quoted or to which reference is made.

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Cover: left to right, repeatedly, Rabbis Herbert S. Goldstein, O. Asher Reichel, Moshe Morduchowitz, Rafael Grossman, Shlomo Einhorn, Joshua Strulowitz, and Daniel Sherman.

These Profiles in Leadership elaborate on what appears in the accompanying monograph on the occasion of the celebration of the Centennial of the Institutional Synagogue and the West Side Institutional Synagogue, June 3, 2018.

RABBIS

Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein, DD, Rabbi, 1917—1960; Sr. Rabbi, 1960--1965; Rabbi Emeritus, 1965--1970

It is impossible to record, in a *page*, the achievements and personality of a person whose early years fill one book, *The Maverick Rabbi*, and whose middle and later years overflow a sequel yet to be completed. Actually, two encyclopedias tried to do it -- *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (1941) and the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971-1972, and again in 2007). The caption of the photograph in the 1971-1972 entry significantly identifies Goldstein not merely as a rabbi but as a “rabbinic leader.”

The Jewish world got its first public view of a young Rabbi Goldstein when he challenged the leadership of the then Orthodox-Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary in his valedictory address, which was headlined in the New York Jewish weeklies. Goldstein did so by pledging his loyalty to the Seminary to the extent that its professors would remain loyal to the Torah. Immediately after becoming ordained at the JTS, along with more traditional ordinations from more traditional rabbis outside of their orbit, he became the English-speaking rabbi of the prestigious Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun (together with the Yiddish-speaking Rabbi Ramaz Margolies, after whom the mega school was named); and first director of its affiliated ground breaking Central Jewish Institute.

Rabbi Goldstein quickly developed into more than just a rabbi, and more than just the first Orthodox rabbi to have been born and completely educated in the United States, at a university and a rabbinical academy. He was also, at various times, a pioneer, an evangelist, an orator, a Bible teacher, a professor of homiletics, a chancellor (of 2 academic institutions), an author, and a fund raiser. He taught the first two generations of American-born Orthodox rabbis how to preach and how to lead beyond the pulpit, as professor of homiletics at the rabbinical school affiliated with Yeshiva University.

The rabbi is best known for his role as the founder of the Institutional Synagogue as a prototype of all Orthodox synagogue-based community centers.

A fundraiser, like a good politician, can take the stinger out of a bee without being stung. Rabbi Goldstein was able to elicit significant funding not just for his synagogue but for rescue work before, during, and after the holocaust, for orphans, for schools of the highest levels of learning, in Israel and in America (and until the holocaust, in Europe too), and for many other causes, all without losing the love and friendship of the donors, many of whom were not particularly religious -- without leaving them feeling stung or bled -- or going into the red -- as their contributions were drawn out of their bank accounts, possibly one of the rabbi's talents most difficult to match or even approach.

Rabbi Goldstein was a co-founder of the National Conference of Christians and Jews; a co-founder and president of the Synagogue Council of America (though one of the first prominent rabbis to resign from the latter in deference to a ruling by the *Moetzet Gdolei Hatorah*); co-founder and first president of the Rabbinical Council of America; executive board member of the Religious Zionists of America (which he is credited with having named); president of many sub-organizations of the Agudath Israel of America (mostly raising funds for projects in Israel); Chancellor of the Harry Fischel Institute for Research in Talmud (long the primary producer of judges for Israel's religious court system) and of the World Academy (later re-named the Yad HaRav Herzog), most noted for publishing the *Talmudic Encyclopedia*; and president of the Harry and Jane Fischel Foundation.

Rabbi Goldstein was an activist in the forefront of activities exposing fraudulent “kosher” butchers, enabling people to observe the Shabbat (through legislation and employment bureaus, and fighting calendar reform), co-launching, as president, the *shatnes*-testing organization, building *yeshivot* throughout the country (as one of only 2 pulpit rabbis on the original advisory board of *Torah Umesorah*, the National Society for Hebrew Day Schools, in 1944 (as noted in the biography of Irving Bunim).

The following books by Rabbi Goldstein were published by leading Jewish publishers of the day, and one leading secular publisher, as well: *Bible Comments for Home Reading* (the Five Books of Moses first individually in English, and then republished twice together with the Hebrew texts and the Shabbat morning prayers, published and republished for use in synagogues around the country), *Bible Comments on the Book of Joshua*, *Between the Lines of the Bible* (on the 613 commandments, originally serialized in the *WSIS Review*; unrelated to another book with that exact title published a few years ago), *Forty Years of Struggle for a Principle* (the biography of Harry Fischel, republished and supplemented with an expanded title, scope, and page count in 2012).

In addition, the following mini-books written by Rabbi Goldstein: A translation of Luzatto’s classical work, *Praise for Righteousness* (with his then fiancée, distributed as a memento at their wedding); and *Comments on the Ethics of the Fathers*.

Rabbi Goldstein’s signature greeting when meeting congregants on the street, was “What’s the good word?”, always staying away from *lashon horah* (negative vibrations), and initiating every conversation with a positive spin.

Rabbi Dr. O. Asher Reichel, DHL, Assistant Rabbi, 1947—1953; Associate Rabbi, 1953—1960; Rabbi, 1960—1985; Rabbi Emeritus, 1986—2012

To elaborate on what has been published elsewhere, people who note that Rabbi Goldstein was Rabbi Reichel’s father-in-law were or may be inclined to assume that he was given the position to share the pulpit with his mentor, Rabbi Goldstein, on a silver platter, based on nepotism – that is, until they find out that Reichel was the valedictorian at Yeshiva College (beating out a well-connected future College Dean), *and* he won the awards for Talmud (in the era of Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Rabbi Dr. Samuel Belkin) *and* Ethics (upon the recommendation of Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung, of the Jewish Center, which competed with the West Side Institutional Synagogue). Reichel acquired *two* masters degrees (one in Hebrew Literature at YU; one in education at NYU), and a doctorate in Hebrew Literature at YU. He was first offered the job at the W.S.I.S. by its president well before he met Rabbi Goldstein’s daughter, and he had leadership positions in a most unusually diverse assortment of organizations. To name a few: President of the Student Organization of Yeshiva, at Yeshiva College; Assistant Head Counselor at Camp Mesifita, which was associated with *Yeshivas Torah V’Daath*, and counselor of the bunk unofficially known as “the bunk of the future *Roshei Yeshiva*” (Note: One of his campers in this bunk was the then-future Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, who could have easily become a *Rosh Yeshiva* like all the others, but who famously and repeatedly told Rabbi Reichel and his three children that had Rabbi Reichel imposed more discipline on Reb Shlomo -- literally, “had he given me a *frask*,” a strong slap -- “maybe he would have straightened me out” – and maybe Carlebach would never have become “Carlebach”; the number 2 person at the Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education (founded , 1940), which in effect was the Lubavitch’s *kiruv* (outreach) organization, and the director of its New York Region, organizing “release time” to give public school students a taste of Torah (as substantiated, in part, by its stationery in the 1940s) *before* the last Lubavitcher Rebbe became THE rebbe, and before Rabbi J. J. Hecht became the head of this famous Committee; long-time chairperson of the Board of Education of the Manhattan Day School; rabbi of the Park East Synagogue (and protégé of its founding Rabbi Bernard Drachman, whose wife recommended the shiduch of Rabbi Reichel to a daughter of his competitor from across the park); rabbi of the Young Israel in Cincinnati (which was housed at the time in the basement of the synagogue of Rabbi Eliezer Silver, president of the Agudath Harabonim of the United States, *and Canada*); regional

co-chair, educational commission, Rabbinical Council of America; Chair of the Board of the Harry and Jane Fischel Foundation. (Note: Okay, subtract one point for possible partial nepotism here, and even here he was related by marriage, on a Board with direct descendants.)

Reichel's magnum opus was on the noted traditional historian and behind-the-scenes political strategist Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Halevy (Rabinowitz), most well-known for his monumental traditional series of books on Jewish history, the Dorot HaRishonim. Reichel's biography of Halevy was published by the Yeshiva University Press and translated into Hebrew and republished by the Mossad Harav Kook in Israel. Dr. Belkin, the president of Yeshiva University, wrote in the Foreword of the original edition, that Reichel was "a brilliant former Talmudic student of mine and later... a friend and colleague... very few, if any, are as intellectually equipped and spiritually attuned as he is to give an evaluation of the immortal Rabbi Isaac Halevy Rabinowitz." The Hebrew translation appears in a special series that includes books by Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Man of Faith), Chief Rabbi, Dr., and Lord Immanuel Jakobovits (who incidentally also wrote the Foreword of the biography of Rabbi Goldstein) and Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung.

Reichel was asked to continue to occupy or reoccupy the pulpits at the prestigious Park East Synagogue on Manhattan's Upper East Side and the Young Israel of Cincinnati at the same time that he was re-offered the position at the W.S.I.S. He actually took a step DOWN to accept the position at the W.S.I.S. since he had been the only rabbi at the other synagogues but was relegated to the status of assistant rabbi in his early years at the W.S.I.S. as he shared the pulpit of his mentor, in part so that his wife could be near her mother whose health was ailing (though both were very active *rebbetzins* and national communal leaders even in this period).

At the W.S.I.S., Rabbi Reichel initiated programs and organizations for every age level at holiday times and in between, and was the principal of a Hebrew school with an impressive faculty. Reichel also recruited the young Rabbi Meir Kahane, a charismatic figure whether you agree with him or not, to lead youth groups upon the recommendation of Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, the long-time head of the N.C.S.Y. before Kahane became a controversial figure and founded the Jewish Defense League.

Rabbi Moshe Morduchowitz, 1986-1999

Perhaps one of the most impressive aspects of the academic career of Rabbi Moshe Morduchowitz would not appear on any traditional resume – his placement on an early track, and his ability to keep up on the fast track as a student beginning in elementary school. He entered the first grade at 4 years of age; he began high school at 11; and Yeshiva College at 15. His Jewish studies education then appeared on the surface to slow down a bit, with his then spending 9 years of study in the class of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Of course anyone who knows anything about the dynamics of Yeshiva University's rabbinical school knows that it was considered an honor just to be accepted into the class of Rabbi Soloveitchik; the more years of study in his class, the higher was the student regarded; and to serve as Rabbi Soloveitchik's assistant was the highest level. The last 3 years that Rabbi Morduchowitz spent in the class of Rabbi Soloveitchik were as his assistant, which means he had taught the review classes to prepare his fellow students for Rabbi Soloveitchik's exams. Serving as Rabbi Soloveitchik's "assistant" was considered more of a distinction than teaching a regular Talmud class on one's own at the rabbinical school affiliated with Yeshiva University, or at virtually any other rabbinical school.

Rabbi Morduchowitz sought out and was mentored by some of the most successful transmitters of Torah in America, each in his own way, notably, for example, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, of Yeshiva University (as noted above); Rabbi Avi Weiss of The Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, and much later, of *Chovevei*, Rabbi Isadore Twersky, of Harvard (where Rabbi Morduchowitz was granted a Master of Philosophy degree); Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, of the Lincoln Square Synagogue (L.S.S.) (later Chief Rabbi of Efrat); and Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, of the Carlebach mystique. Rabbi Morduchowitz managed to

emulate the signature features of each. Rabbi Samuel Intrator, a successor of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, noted that Rabbi Morduchowitz combined the brilliant intellectual substance of the Rav with the profound and meaningful life force of Reb Shlomo!

Rabbi Morduchowitz developed a “following” at the LSS, as rabbi of the *hashkama minyan* and then acting rabbi of the whole synagogue, and then at his Yeshiva of the West Side. He also chaired the Judaic Studies Department at Touro College, and taught at the City College of New York. Earlier, he had brief stints as rabbi of Congregation Ramath Orah, near Columbia University, and Congregation Beth Israel, in Malden, Massachusetts.

One of his most devoted followers, Dara Blumenthal, noted that he “never shied away from controversial topics; he always went to the source; his love of Torah was genuine.” He did not ask for money for some of his services outside of the synagogue, like at life cycle events, as noted by some of his former congregants of more modest means, and he could be unconventional in the way he spent money to recruit new members. Rabbi Morduchowitz was known to bring a classic book on Jewish mourning to a house of mourning when he felt it was needed, which he paid for out of his own money, according to one of the past W.S.I.S. presidents.

Rabbi Morduchowitz was always where the action was. Before coming to the W.S.I.S. to serve as its rabbi, he joined Rabbi David Silber at the Drisha service held in the ballroom of the W.S.I.S. on the High Holidays after the W.S.I.S. ended its overflow services there. On the other most solemn day of the Jewish calendar, he went to the Isaiah Wall near the United Nations with Rabbi Weiss and other activists every Tisha B'Av, to demonstrate on behalf of Soviet Jewry, and participated in a prayer service and sometimes got arrested for civil disobedience.

Rabbi Rafael Grossman, DD, 2002—2005

Rabbi Rafael Grossman’s first memory of the founder of our synagogue was when Rabbi Grossman’s father first immigrated from Europe and needed some help in rebuilding his life, which Rabbi Goldstein provided. Then, after Rabbi Grossman established a reputation as the builder of the largest Orthodox Jewish Congregation in America – in Memphis, Elvis Presley country, of all places – when Rabbi Grossman heard that the W.S.I.S. was in need of a rabbi to rebuild it, he decided to return the favor – in addition to his desire to live closer to his children and grandchildren. Although Rabbi Grossman was also a first rate scholar and a national leader, having been president of the Beth Din of America, the Rabbinical Council of America, and the Religious Zionists of America, and having been on a first-name basis with governors and members of Congress, he was needed at the WSIS more for his charisma and his executive abilities, to generate excitement and to expand the membership of our synagogue. Although he only served the W.S.I.S for fewer than 3 years, and didn’t have an opportunity to recreate the successes of Memphis, he impressed virtually everyone with his erudition, sincerity, warmth, and nonjudgmental approach. He “restored the daily minyan, and increased the weekly attendance on Shabbat.”

Rabbi Grossman authored *Binah: The Modern Quest for Torah Understanding, on the Book of Genesis*. His scholarly papers appeared in numerous journals and volumes, and his weekly column, “Thinking Aloud,” appeared in *The Jewish Press* and on numerous websites, to the point where it was read by approximately 500,000 people, making him one of the most widely read Jewish columnists in the world at some point.

Note: Rabbi Grossman’s doctorate was honorary, as was Rabbi Goldstein’s (which had been the first Doctor of Divinity degree granted by Yeshiva University). Such doctorates are granted in recognition of unusual and outstanding accomplishments in the course of a lifetime. Rabbi Reichel’s degree was earned with course work and a dissertation, which was later modified, published and republished (see above).

Speaking of centennials, Rabbi Grossman was one of 10 rabbis to be honored at the centennial celebration of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America.

Rabbi Shlomo Einhorn, 2005—2012

It would be safe to say that virtually nobody else, before or since, was hired by a major synagogue anywhere, at any time, after a competitive search, based on in-person impressions and personal charisma more than anything else, and left, after only 6 years, with comparable tremendous accomplishments. He had come when the synagogue seemed to be dying, and revived it to the point where the shul was filled not merely with congregants, but also with exhilaration and enthusiasm, so that by the time Rabbi Einhorn left, he was hired by the Orthodox Union and designated as its primary contact person for inspiring new growth and programming in synagogues. The original Institutional Synagogue had been a prototype combination of institutions centering around the synagogue; the West Side Institutional Synagogue became a prototype of creative programming within the synagogue center, which other synagogues have tried to emulate once again.

Rabbi Einhorn came to the W.S.I.S. brimming with erudition, energy, emotion, charisma, creativity, warmth, and wit. Most notably, he created a series of *Shalosh Seudot* whereby he developed annual themes that lasted throughout the year, such as the study of a different *Chassidic rebbe* at every *Shabbat* afternoon *Shalosh Seudot*, and then he actually brought some to the synagogue in person. He did the same with contemporary rabbis, never one to shy away from bringing competitors to the synagogue, but secure enough to do so, just as his cantorial counterpart in the synagogue, “*Chazzan Zevi*” Muller (see below).

Above all, Rabbi Einhorn built up the membership from what he thinks were 65 family units to an estimated 400 family units; he created a strong young leadership movement; and he brought an extensive amount of learning and Torah to the W.S.I.S. What he did further defies being described in words – anyone’s words. The excitement was so electric at even a typical *Shabbat*, and the noise level was so high that it literally felt like the national convention of the Republican or Democratic Party, where the acceptance speech of the president gradually builds up to a climax with a crescendo of cheering, applause, and sheer frenzy. The synagogue had that atmosphere, the frenzy and excitement, though without actual cheering and applause.

The rabbi appreciated the history of the synagogue, and its openness and flexibility, and felt an obligation to keep it going, to “always try something new, something fun, but always keeping in mind the main goal was to spread the light of Torah.”

He wrote: “One of my most famous lectures while there was a social sermon -- it was an experiment where we all collaborated to create my speech [<http://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/crowd-sourcing-the-sermon/>].

To the extreme sorrow and disappointment of everyone at the synagogue, as President Andrew Fox later observed, “we were victims of our own success.” Rabbi Einhorn was so successful that, after 6 years in the fishbowl of the Upper West Side, David Fishof’s prodigal son-in-law was weaned away from the W.S.I.S. with “an offer he couldn’t refuse,” to his home town of Los Angeles to become the Dean/Rosh Yeshiva of Yavneh, which is both a synagogue and a school. While there, he already set the record, last month, for the longest *shiur* in recorded history (19 consecutive hours, with a different intriguing topic each hour on the hour). None of his *shiurim* at the W.S.I.S. lasted for more than an hour or so, except for on *Shavuot* night, 6 hours straight.

Rabbi Einhorn has already written a number of books, and some of his many lectures can be downloaded from www.rabbieinhorn.com and YUTORAH. The books he wrote that have *already* been published include *The W.S.I.S. Hagaddah*, Foreword by Y.U. President Richard Joel; *The W.S.I.S. Megilat Esther*, Foreword by Rabbi Kenneth Brander; and *Judaism Alive: Using the Torah to Unlock Your Life's Potential*; and two musical albums: *Judaism Alive: A Musical Odyssey* (with Yishai Mendelsohn), and *Judaism Alive: Teshuva -- The Return* (with Yishai Mendelsohn).

Rabbi Joshua Strulowitz, 2012—2014

Rabbi Strulowitz came to the WSIS from Adath Israel in San Francisco, where he served as Rabbi from 2005 to 2012... “We transformed the community from an elderly *Shul* to a thriving *Shul* with a bright future. We built a preschool, brought in a community *Kollel*, established the first *Eruv* in San Francisco and attracted many new families.

He wrote: “I’m very proud of many things we did at W.S.I.S. First, we modernized the mechitzah. When I arrived the women were very unhappy with the mechitzah. It was a yellow tinted glass that made it difficult to see and hear. I formed a team of women to help choose a new design, reached out to a designer, and our President, David Fiedler, generously donated the funds to make it happen...

“...We hired new youth directors, created numerous programs throughout the year, started a *Yom Haatzmaut* street fair and much more. W.S.I.S. became a place the entire family could find meaningful and fun programming... I wanted all members to feel important and valued and worked hard to connect them to the Shul. I feel that we did that, and were able to bring in many new families to the Shul as well. We also brought in a Rabbinic Intern, Daniel Sherman” ... who stayed on and succeeded Rabbi Strulowitz.

“I took the history of W.S.I.S. very seriously, and was very proud to have followed in the footsteps of Rabbi Herbert Goldstein. We brought in Rabbi J. J. Schachter as a scholar-in-residence to teach the community about the history of W.S.I.S., and tried hard to be consistent with the values and spirit in which the Shul was founded.

“I always tried to operate with dignity and integrity, and I can proudly look at the good I did in my time with fondness.

“After W.S.I.S., I spent a year as the Resident Scholar at O.Z. [Congregation Ohab Zedek] and have taught full time at Central (Yeshiva University's High School for Girls)...[where I also head] the Honor Society and run... the Holocaust education program.”

Rabbi Daniel Sherman, Rabbinic Intern 2013—2014; Assistant Rabbi 2014--2015, Associate Rabbi 2015—2017; Rabbi 2017--present

Rabbi Sherman follows a rich tradition at our synagogue, winning the Talmud Award at the rabbinical school affiliated with Yeshiva College and then distinguishing himself in many other ways. He is the Co-Director of Torah Letzion, which assists high school students to afford a gap year in Israel. Previously, at Camp Nesher, he served as the Head of Staff *Beit Medrash* Program, *Chinuch Rebbe*, and Assistant Athletic Director. He is pursuing a Master's degree in Modern Jewish History.

Rabbi Sherman's tenure as the official rabbi of the synagogue is still in its nascent stages, but he has already had an impact, notably expanding membership and helping to develop community-wide events, such as *Yom Haatzmaut* and *Yom Hashoa* programs, numerous *chesed* programs, and stabilizing and strengthening the *Shacharit minyan*. Rabbi Sherman's dynamic full-length and fast-paced mini-

shiurim and sermons have become a draw – often a quickdraw -- for those seeking Torah from across the community without feeling they have to cross the Red Sea again or any other barrier to get it.

Rabbi Sherman observed: “The history of the WSIS imposes an exciting responsibility to adhere to the shul’s legacy of serving as the spiritual, religious, and social home of the Upper West Side community. Following in the path set before me by my illustrious predecessors doesn’t mean doing everything in the exact same way as they did. But rather, every decision that we make must be in line with the aforementioned three-pronged ethos that they set. Our sacred mission is to continue to ensure that those aspirations continue into the next century, G-d willing.”

The inaugural address of Rabbi Sherman substantially as delivered at the dinner of June 15, 2017, tendered in his honor, welcoming him upon his auspicious start as rabbi of the synagogue:

“I would like to first thank the dedicated volunteers who have made this dinner so beautiful and elegant. Shari, and Bari, along with Ariel, Billie, Rebecca, Lisa, Suri, Odit, and Rachel have put together an incredible dinner. Thank you. I would also like to thank our hard-working and committed Executive Director, Abbey, who works tirelessly on behalf of our *shul*, along with Chet, as well as Miguel, Simpson and Wayne. Thank you!

“... Tamar and I feel so privileged to have our lives inextricably bonded with a community that has embraced us and we have learned to love... The incredible people in this community have become OUR community...

“From a young age I always wanted to be a rabbi. However, as I was in the middle of *semicha*, about the same time as I began as Rabbinic Intern at WSIS, I took the LSATS and begin thinking about law school. As I continued contemplating the law school track, as well as flirting with a career in academia and teaching Jewish history, I was torn as to whether I should go into the rabbinic path or law. And while now you all know the ending - there were many sleepless nights when I didn’t know. For me it was never a question of religiosity - the question was just professional aspirations. So I called various rabbis, and without fail they all told me to go into Law. As one rabbi poignantly stated: “Daniel, why would you do this to yourself? Just go into law and make your life less complicated”. [Note: Notice the repetition of a pattern here. Our founding rabbi was actually accepted into law school before making the same decision that Rabbi Sherman made about a century later!] However, something about their answers rubbed me the wrong way. I was increasingly discouraged. I then went to the people we usually convince ourselves we know better than, and find out that we are wrong - my family. After many long and agonizing conversations with my parents, grandparents, and other family members, their strong support and encouragement provided me the clarity that I so desperately needed in my moments of confusion and agony. It gives me great pleasure to publicly thank my grandparents, parents, sister, and in-laws who have given me the support and encouragement at every moment along this journey. Merging these elements of our Upper West Side family with our biological families, I would like to thank the members of all of them for their encouragement and support.

“The last thank you goes to the person who wants it least --Tamar. Many people attribute their success to their spouse, or invoke the popular saying “there’s a great woman behind every man.” [Note: An alternate version appears in the centennial video.] This is true in my case but does not even begin to offer the full picture. For those who don’t know, my skills in the kitchen are rather limited or better put, nonexistent. The relationships we have formed over our *Shabbat* table, her comments and critiques following a sermon or class, prodding to learn and go back to school for graduate school in Jewish history, and constant feedback and support are only but a few of the ways Tamar has guided my career and my life. I hope to be half as supportive to Tamar as she has been to me. Rebbitzin, because I know how much you love it -- thank you.

“The common question since our official election has been ‘Rabbi, what is your vision for our shul?’ So my first reaction is usually, why of course – ‘To make our *shul* great again.’ And for those on the other side of the aisle – ‘It’s to increase the number of deplorables in our basket.’ However, in all seriousness, usually the questioners then gives me their suggestion - and many of these have spanned the gamut of thought and feelings. Some have told me I need to end the *Kiddush* Club; others need to make sure it remains vibrant; some have told me I need to improve decorum; some have had the temerity to tell me that I need to allow more speaking during the *davening*. Others tell me more programs, make a *Mincha Maariv minyan*, strengthen the daily *Shacharit minyan*, increase programming for empty-nesters; others have said more youth programming and lastly, that I need to increase membership and attendance. While some of these may seem funny, there are many vital and significant questions that our synagogue faces, like any other shul. Many of the above mentioned questions are ones that we will need to address and respond to as we continue to move forward and develop the *shul* that we all love so much and are so committed to.

“So as our synagogue and community take a giant step forward, what shall our vision be? I would like to answer this by invoking the metaphor that the Torah so often uses to describe a righteous individual or endeavor - that of a Tree. Every morning as we are about to put the Torah away in the *aron* we quote the *passuk* that refers to the Torah as an *Eitz Chaim* *he* - a living tree. In the Books of a *Tehilim* and *Yirmiyahu* the righteous are described as firmly planted trees. Friday night we praise the “cedars of Lebanon” as being sturdy. Why the metaphor of a tree? Based off the *Malbim* I believe the following -- when it comes to a tree we often focus on the plants, the buds, and flower -- the elements that meet the eye. However, the discerning individual understands that the tree’s true strength is in the deep roots that allow the tree to blossom. It is not My goal but Our goal moving forward to anticipate beautiful buds that will fill our trees -- but also to ensure that the roots are there to make sure they come.

“Many of the important questions that we are raising, and will be addressed in serious and creative forums between myself, the board, office, and broader membership to reimagine the exciting potential our synagogue can, must, and shall offer, seriously analyzing our strengths and challenges to forge ahead, ensuring the vibrancy of our *shul*. However, many of these questions are more focused on the “buds,” and tonight I would like to focus on the “roots” of our trees. What will be the constant elements that allow our buds to flourish?

“Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm used to tell every incoming *Semicha* class at YU that the role of the community was to transform itself from a “*Kehilah* to a *Kehilah Kedosha* -- from a community to a Holy Community.” ... What does a Holy Community have?

- “A Holy Community is one in which, in a large bustling city, and it is easy to feel alone in the large city of Manhattan - someone is always there for you. We all will celebrate with each other and we all will cry with each other.
- A Holy Community is one where any stranger who enters our building during a Shabbat or Tuesday *Shacharit*, or *shiur* is acknowledged, and welcomed.
- A Holy Community is one that understands that “Strength in Numbers” really means it is about how the strength of those numbers interact with each other - friendships that cross ages, stages of life, status, or religious worldview.
- A Holy Community prioritizes its children’s Jewish education and believes that the synagogue must have a large part in ensuring the next generation’s commitment to Torah and Mitzvot.
- A Holy Community is one that recognizes the role of *davening* and meaningful *tefilah*. How we have the greatest *chazzan* on the planet, in Zevi Muller, and appreciate how he elevates our *davening* and communication with the Almighty.

- A Holy Community is one that knows that Torah is the bedrock of our faith, our spiritual DNA. Torah will unite us and give us our direction. Our *shul* will offer invigorating and exciting Torah along with a fidelity to its principles and values.
- A Holy Community -- and our community's greatest strength -- is letting everyone know that they are welcomed without any pretense
- A Holy Community is one where every single person knows that they count, has something to contribute, that they matter.

"I am confident that as our *Kehilah* further evolves into a *Kehilah Kedosha* and we strengthen and nourish our roots -- the buds, flowers, and fruit of our tree will allow our tree to become the large, strong, vibrant tree whose glow will illuminate the entire Upper West Side Community for many years to come."

YOETZET HALACHA

Shiffy Friedman

Shiffy Friedman is a graduate of Nishmat's Miriam Glaubach Center's U.S. Yoatzot Halacha Fellows Program. She has taught at the SAR Academy and now teaches at the Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School. She has a dual M.A. in Education and Jewish Studies from New York University. She is available for consultation and has already demonstrated a wide range of knowledge, analytical ability, and personal sensitivity. She and her husband, Rabbi Noam Friedman, live with their children in Morningside Heights, where they serve as the OU-JLIC couple at Columbia/Barnard Hillel.

PRESIDENTS

Congressman Isaac Siegel, 1917--1941

There was only one president in the history of the original Institutional Synagogue: Member of Congress -- and later Judge -- Isaac Siegel. He even remained the president of the synagogue in Harlem after the West Side Branch was formed, and after the West Side Institutional Synagogue became an independent entity. His roles are integrated into discussions above. Most notably, he was a very active president, not just a figurehead lending his name and his title, even -- especially -- while serving as an incumbent Member of Congress.

As a Jewish Member of Congress, he did not hide his Jewishness or vote against Jewish interests the way so many Members of Congress do today. When the U.S. was arming for World War I, Siegel authored the legislation to provide for up to 20 Jewish chaplains in the American Expeditionary Forces. Until then, the American military had few rabbis serving as chaplains. In later years, Rabbi Goldstein served on the Board that evaluated the applications of people to serve as chaplains.

One more factoid. Siegel's seat in Congress was next occupied by Fiorello La Guardia, who later became the mayor of New York who appointed Siegel to a judgeship.

President Lester Udell, 1937--1965

President Lester Udell was the president of the West Side Institutional Synagogue from its founding through 1965, which means during and beyond the entire tenure of the Synagogue's founding rabbi as an active rabbi! His son Arthur noted, as we went to press with this publication, that "the synagogue was my father's life for close to 40 years," bridging the Harlem heydays to the West Side Goldstein and golden years. Lester Udell had been such a dominant fundraiser that for years, the competitive congregants only vied for the designation of fundraiser number 2.

Outside of the synagogue, Udell signed so many affidavits to save Jews from the holocaust that two members of the FBI visited his office to find out how one person could make such commitments. His son recalled that he answered very simply, “to save Jews,” knowing the consequences of such commitments, and with such simple sincerity that no action was taken against him as a result.

Udell was the head of a major suit and coat business, and he was known to distribute suits to yeshiva students for the holidays, and to immigrants escaping from the holocaust. He was so popular – and not JUST among the recipients of free suits – that it was said he could have run for mayor (and presumably won).

The Rest of the Presidents

After that, the following people served as president of the WSIS: Samuel W.. Siegel (though his title was formally Chairman of the Board, presumably since his term began while President Udell was still alive, and it was probably unthinkable at first for anyone other than the founding president to have the title of president), Jacob Kinzler, Isaiah O. Zucker, William Foont, William T. Steinlauf (who fought off the first proposed merger with L.S.S. and promoted the alternative of bringing in Rabbi Morduchowitz), Arthur M. Rogers, Herbert Schwarz, Freddy Heiser, Richard Wigler, David Ohayon (who fought off the proposed takeover by the L.S.S. and other institutions), Jacques Ohayon, Richard Siegel, Shalom Maya, Andrew Fox, David Fiedler, Joshua Olshin.

Presidential Memoirs

Note: Credit was taken by various people for many wonderful achievements. Some overlap; some conflict. No attempt will be made here to judge as which claims are correct, and how to apportion credit. Each president was asked to present his memoirs in his own words. They were merely lightly edited and in some cases paraphrased and/or condensed. The reader is invited to examine the different perspectives of each, often of the same events.

Richard Wigler, 1996-1998

“About 25 years ago I decided that it was about time to learn a little Talmud. I was a congregant at a different synagogue at the time, so when I heard about Rabbi Morduchowitz’s Talmud class after the services, I’d run over to catch it. After a short while I felt that it was not supportive of him & the I.S. to show up only at the end and decided to attend services from the beginning, and so began my life at the I.S. Somehow I got recruited to be *Gabbai Sheni* under the great guidance of Mr. Alfred Florsheim... who became one of the greatest and most inspiring friends I ever had.

“A couple of years later (May of 1996) I was asked to become the shul President.... following are some of the many wonderful things our administration accomplished as well as acknowledgements:

“(1) our wonderful *chazzan*, Joel Selter and his talented wife, Beth. His davening inspired all of us to pray with great love and *kavanah*. (2) our *Baal Koreh*, Alex, now Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh, always dependable and flawless in his *leining*. (3) the signing up of our long term tenants, the seniors program *Jasa*, headed by the skillful program leader, Marjorie Scheer. (4) the very active Men's Club headed by long time member, Mr. Al Rauchman: dinners, operas, guest speakers and great camaraderie & his successor, Dr. Barry Pinchevsky. (5) Arthur Rogers: heart and soul and former President... always welcoming to any guests...donated the Israeli flag in the sanctuary. (6) Estie Hollander. incomparable master organizer for so many shul events. Purim, Chanukah, fairs. etc., always perfect and fun. (7) Gananu: our kindergarten school so well attended and run by the invincible Ronnie Becher & Cheryl Meskin. (8) holiday visits by Shlomo Carlebach doing his thing which speaks for itself. (9) Rabbi Chaim Eisenstein and Rabbi Jonathan Feldman, two outstanding assistant Rabbis always there to teach and do what they could to make the shul even better. (10) sharing our sanctuary with a wonderful outreach effort

toward female members of Alcoholics Anonymous. (11) our opening up of an upstairs room for Rabbi Gordetsky who helped Russian immigrants find positions here. (12) Dr. Andrew Koenigsberg gave up his Shabbat rest in order to oversee the shul youth groups and helped make the kids' *shabbatot* so much fun and so meaningful. (13) to my wonderful group of Trustees, Gary Glass, Jon Dachs, Eva Talel, Judy Putterman, Lisa Weinsoff, Stan Broome & Dena Farhi. (14) in memory of those no longer with us: Rabbi O. Asher Reichel, Herbert Schwarz, Alfred Florsheim, Fred Heiser, Dr. Hyman Kirschenbaum, Alexander Rauchman, Arthur Rogers, Solomon Sagall, William Steinlauf, and Gabriel Goldstein (a son of Rabbi Goldstein, who lived further uptown but served on the W.S.I.S Board). (15) Josie Reichel (daughter of Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein, and, of course, wife of Rabbi O. Asher Reichel), as gracious a woman as there ever was in the history of this wonderful shul. (16) lastly, both of our sons, Mark & Josh were Bar Mitzvah at the I.S.

"At some point, the passionate prayers and constructive activities within the synagogue were rivaled by passionate disputes about certain operational issues dealt with by the rabbi and his supporters within the synagogue, and how certain fundamental functions were implemented. Many of the key Board Members devoted much time and effort to supporting their conflicting views, and even acted with heroism and self-sacrifice, pulling some punches, so to speak, to avoid hurting each other, and thereby not looking as good and righteous as some of them actually were. This is not a time to attempt to be judgmental, or to open old wounds, or to debate old disputes, but rather to acknowledge the existence of some bumps along the road, and to focus on what happened before the wounds were opened and after the wounds were healed, substantially, and the disputes became moot."

"With great *Hakarat HaTov* on behalf of my family and lifetime friends of the W.S.I.S. we celebrate with all of you the first 100 years and pray for many more."

David Ohayon , 1998--2004

When asked, during one of the many *kiddushes* he has sponsored or co-sponsored, for any observations that might be quoted in this monograph, David said "I'm not good with words, but let me show you." His deeds are far more eloquent than most people's words. He immediately proceeded to lead a head-turning guided tour of his accomplishments, and it turns out he is very good with words as well:

"The main synagogue had all sorts of major maintenance issues; the huge roof was always a huge problem to maintain. I had it repaired 3 times. We had to fix the air conditioning that had to serve such a large area as well. The classrooms weren't getting enough heat from the main boiler, so I improved the heating system so that they didn't need supplemental heaters in each room. We even added sinks to the classrooms. I also arranged for a whole Torah restoration project, because just about all the Torahs needed work, at some point.

All of these physical improvements of the plant didn't happen in a vacuum.

"When I became involved, the synagogue [seemed] destined to close. The board wanted to fire the rabbi and had no plan to replace or refurbish the building. After the rabbinical dispute, half the board walked out and went to Lincoln Square. The half that gave money told me to give the building to Lincoln Square. The next four years were horrible. The institution had no money and no credit. I had to personally guarantee all purchases from vendors. The kindergarten Gananu was in [significant] debt...there were significant costs for insurance. JASA contributed [a significant rental payment] per year and the dinner netted [a different sum every year]. The membership and contributions were pathetic, since no one wanted to put money into a sinking ship. Bernie Landers (president of Touro College) wanted to put Touro here. [Some people from] Lincoln Square wanted to merge [again, but this time to openly take

over] to relocate their synagogue here during their construction campaign; then sell this synagogue to fund its construction costs. Elliot Gibber wanted to make an M.D.S. high school here, with a small shul in the basement. George Klein, a past member and friend of the shul, wanted to put the Manhattan High School here and put a small shul in the basement. Chabad wanted to take over. Aish HaTorah wanted real estate, and other organizations had other schemes. Each said the community had no need for this synagogue; the demographics have changed; and the shul will close. I began my campaign to restore confidence in the synagogue with a concert. Nearly 1,000 people attended. The *shul* had seven different kiddush clubs. I combined them into one and supported it. I began a program of hot kiddushes. [Note: To be fair, others have made a similar claim as well. Each in his own time.] I installed windows in the ballroom and removed plywood and installed a quality commercial refrigerator, to indicate the synagogue was alive. I removed squatters from the building. Whole families were living in the annex. I personally ran a daily minyan and a Friday night *minyan* for several years after they [fell on hard times]. I began [Note: to some extent restored] a nonjudgmental atmosphere and welcomed all. I next began a financial campaign. I brought the Yemenite minyan to the W.S.I.S. I brought the International Preschool to the WSIS, as major tenants, with the significant help of Jeffrey Jankelovits, bringing in [a significant rental fee]. I got Barry Kirshenbaum and Chaim Lazarus to use their influence to get a mortgage for the building. When I took over the synagogue, it took in [a relatively modest sum in rentals] annually... When I left the presidency, the shul had four times the revenue compared to when my term began.

“Going back, we really put the W.S.I.S. back on the map, when it was struggling, by becoming THE place to be on *Simchas Torah* night. The L.S.S. had an issue with the people running their community wide event, and West End Avenue got closed off to such an event after 9/11, so I managed to get a family friend, Diane Kasdin, to get us a special permit through the City Council for *Simchas Torah* night. We had a monopoly on the West Side. Hundreds of people from all over the United States came to the West Side for *Simchas Torah*, and we became the place to be. We were urged not to be intimidated by terrorist threats, and not to let the American way of life – or the JEWISH way of *Simchas Torah* on the West Side, to give in. This was a major turning point for our synagogue. A lot of other people were involved, Aaron Braunstein, Steve Hirsch, Alisa Adler, and others.

“I have continued to work for the synagogue as a member, being told by presidents that I do more as a member without any titles than most board members... a new sidewalk, *chumashim*, *talits*, refrigerators, a new most unusual illustrated plaque in the lobby highlighting the glorious history of the *shul* [Note: proposed and funded by David Ohayon; written by the author of this publication, and edited by the Davids Ohayon and Locker], new windows, plumbing repairs.

“Sam Domb and his sons Jay and Ron were also very helpful [to many synagogues, but especially] to us since we have been the landlords of the Yemenite Synagogue which used to serve as our Daily Synagogue. In our main sanctuary, the archway above the ark was chipping. Sam Domb covered up the tiles on the archway with sleek new beautifully painted and shellacked wooden beams. In the Yemenite Synagogue, he donated a beautiful new ark and installed new state of the art air conditioning.

“My latest project was to revitalize the synagogue for Passover [Note: when many families go away to hotels and to join other family members elsewhere]. I sponsored *kiddushes* and ran *seders*, both family and communal. This year we had 130 people the first night, 140 the second night. Attendance at the shul was alive and the *kiddush* club was weak.”

David has also served, for many years, as the chair of the consolidated Kiddush Club, to help raise the spirits of all who attend, and to strengthen the camaraderie. “I used to tell people that at our shul we don’t [just] OBSERVE *Shabbos*; we CELEBRATE it every week.”

“I have spent close to a million dollars on this synagogue in the last 30 years. I have raised much more than that by inspiring people of what can be in the future and how great things were in the shul in its heyday. If you count the rent from the tenants, I raised 10 times what I contributed myself. In short, I stood up against the Board, the community, and other synagogues, and kept the WSIS open with funds from my own pocket” and time from his own schedule – “sometimes 4 days a week.”

“Rabbi Reichel said he had been praying for years for me – or somebody like me -- to come along.”

To sum up, his legacies were many and important: He kept the synagogue alive when it was in danger of going under; he fought off takeover attempts when the synagogue was vulnerable; he inspired people with the vision to make it shine again; he inspired people to believe, to come and to give, to make it happen; he led by example, in involvement and in his own money; and, perhaps best of all, he inspired his daughter, Bari Ohayon Erber, to follow in his giant footsteps, in many of these ways as well.

Jacques Ohayon, 2004 –2005

“I served in many roles [at the W.S.I.S.] through the years, including Assistant Gabai to Chet Lipson, marketing the shul to the Upper West Side, and since I was trained in culinary skills, I decided to make all the *kiddushes* and fund them myself! [Note: when not individually sponsored] I decided that if we had the best *kiddushes* along with Rabbi Morduchowitz, we would begin to attract the ‘Herring and *Chulent*’ lovers on the West Side – yes, it worked!! [Note: The kiddushes featured – and continue to feature – much more than herring and *chulent*.]

“David Ohayon had been President with Rabbi Morduchowitz and later hired Rabbi Rafael Grossman. David decided to step down from the Presidency and not seek re-election in August 2004 - I **asked** David for permission to run for the office and he said it was fine with him (I felt that it was the right thing to do and had he said no I would have respected his wishes), and I was elected President in September 2004. Aaron Braunstein ran against me and the board voted me President and Aaron Vice President. [Note: Aaron had previously run against David, and lost that election on a tie breaker] ...

“I became very close to Rabbi Grossman ... and handled this smooth transition [from Rabbi Grossman to his successor]... I worked quickly to find an up and coming superstar and I bumped into Rabbi Einhorn. After my spending 30 minutes with him in a private meeting, I realized that Rabbi Einhorn at the tender age of 25 was not only a *talmid chacham* with charm, but he could reach and embrace anyone he met. He had a stage presence that was magnetic and full of passion. ... He and I were natural chemistry and I knew he would become a sensation. I realized that Hashem sent me my wish.

“I had hired Chaim Kiss as the *baal tefillah* of the shul. He is blessed with a sweet voice and it showed. He is also a dear friend that dates back 30 years.

“My own inner circle included Rick Siegel and David Locker.

“In one year as president I had accomplished exactly what I set out to do. At the same time, I became engaged to my wife who hailed from Dallas Texas, yet was living on the Upper West Side.

“I decided I was done and did not seek re election. I remained on the board and continued to craft programming with Rabbi Einhorn for adults and children. It was the first time in countless years that we had a children’s program on Shabbat in the ballroom. We now had some 75 children attending. The shul thrived and suddenly with Rabbi Einhorn, Chaim Kiss, and my *kiddushes*, we were the place to be on the Upper West Side... Singles, young couples and older couples began to join the shul.

... Aaron Braunstein and I [arranged for the W.S.I.S. to become] the first and only shul granted a permit to close the street for dancing on *Simchat Torah*. [Note: According to Steve Hirsch, one of the people who first promoted the idea, the event was originally known as “the thing at that place.” Hirsch is now a *Gabbai* at the W.S.I.S.] It is still an annual event in which almost all shuls on the West Side participate. Since I lived down the block from the shul in a brownstone with a garden, it became the annual barbecue for singles during *Sukkot* and on *Simchat Torah*. My wife and I wanted singles to meet and marry!!... 4 people [that I know of] met and married through our barbecues.

“In June of 2011 we decided to move to Dallas Texas -- my wife’s hometown... It was a sad moment for me to say “so long.” When I sat down after the announcement, Rabbi Einhorn came over to me and said, “Jacques don’t feel so bad, because I too am announcing that I am leaving WSIS in July and headed for Los Angeles to become the Dean and Rosh Yeshiva of Yavneh Academy in Los Angeles”!!

What might have been:

“When I hired Rabbi Einhorn, we both had the exact same vision for WSIS. We both wanted to revive this historical shul with vigor. The history and greatness ran deep. We both read *The Maverick Rabbi*. Yet we had an even deeper vision. Rabbi Einhorn’s real passion was to be a Rosh Yeshiva and a Rabbi of a *shul*. I shared the same dream. Our vision was to build a Yeshiva High School above the *shul* that would be the high school of Manhattan Day School!!... We tried to convince the Board to agree to attempt this by floating the idea to those with deep pockets. The Board was ... not on board. I explained to them that Manhattan Day School would be complete with a high school only 3 blocks away with a historical shul right below it. Clearly nothing came of it.”

What ALSO might have been

[Note: Without taking sides on this controversial issue, it may also be pointed out that the market for another yeshiva high in Manhattan is questionable, as more and more high schools are formed, draining away students who would have gone to the Yeshiva University High School that already exists in Manhattan, so there is no assurance a viable additional high school would have been formed, and there is a precedent in Manhattan for a major historic synagogue making a similar deal with a developer; the synagogue was torn down to be downsized (in that case, to be beneath apartments whose rentals were supposed to subsidize the synagogue), but then the developer developed a problem, and the synagogue members were left without a synagogue, and with a bitter taste in their mouths – and beautiful memories. Had that happened here, and/or had the high school idea received too low a level of support to be viable, Rabbi Einhorn would not have remained in that event, and a downsized synagogue would find it almost impossible to maintain a full set of programs and to hire a suitable rabbi and chazzan, so the synagogue could have been left with nothing but its name and its memories – and perhaps this monograph.]

Rick Siegel, 2005--2006

Rick makes no claim to be related to the Congressman Siegel who founded the I.S. or to the Samuel W. Siegel who founded the Manhattan Day School and was the chairman of the Board of the W.S.I.S. “I am only related to Bugsy.” [Note: For the record, and for those without a sense of humor, Rick makes sure to add: Actually, “I would say that while I am not related to Bugsy Siegel, I find it humorous when I am asked.”]

“Before I took office, the WSIS was at rock bottom. Jacques Ohayon, David Locker, and I approached Rabbi Einhorn to become the Rabbi. We all knew it was the bottom of the ninth inning with two outs and two strikes and we were trailing by a lot. He asked us how many members we had. We were down to about 45 family units, so we rounded it off to the nearest 10, which made it 50, and then we rounded THAT off to the nearest 100, which made it about 100! [Note: No two people have come up with identical numbers.] We told him we could guarantee each new member not just a seat but his own ROW! ☺ Rabbi Einhorn turned out to be the only person who could save the synagogue. He was a real superstar.” Asked whether it was fair to compare Rabbi Einhorn to Rabbi Riskin, Rick observed, “Rabbi Einhorn’s job was harder, to stop the freefall and turn it around.”

"Board members who were particularly helpful while I was President were: 1. David Locker, who was both smart and unemotional when it came to important decisions. 2. Mitch Moss, who was intelligent and pragmatic (although we disagreed on most everything, I respected his opinions). 3. Ellen Silber who was always helpful and articulate. 4. Russ Wenger who was my 5 Star General who I depended on for sage advice. 5. Jeff Jankelovits who cared deeply and sincerely for the Shul. 6. Shalom Maya who took over as President after me, and who gave more time for the Shul than was humanly possible. 6. Mark Appel was an important board member who I would often speak to for his advice and guidance. 7. Aaron Braunstein also served on the board and loved W.S.I.S. and especially enjoyed the events surrounding Simchat Torah. And the rest of the board who without them the Shul could have never been able to turn itself around.

[Note: Rick orally referred to David Locker as the backbone of the synagogue. When I contacted David and asked him to email something for this monograph, he emailed his very proper acceptance speech upon being a guest of honor, a few years ago, but I have chosen rather to quote from his cover letter regarding this speech: “Don’t feel obligated [to include any of it] – I do not need to see my name in lights, but thanks for asking.” No lights here. If anything, we offered to settle for a lighthearted sound bite, to which he responded in his characteristic always informative way with a whole documented discussion on the evolution of the term sound bite to sound byte (favoring the former incidentally)! So this tells us more about David than any speech – appreciative; not looking for glory; and always looking to be analytical and informative!]

Shalom Maya, 2006—2009

By all accounts, Shalom was a most energetic and devoted president, welcoming every new congregant, and then doing everything in his power to keep that person happy. The only unanswered question about his term in office is how he managed to find so many hours in the day to do all that he did for the synagogue.

Perhaps Maya’s most significant act as president was to “discover” *Chazzan Zevi*, and not let him slip away. Now, *Chazzan Zevi* is not just the voice of the WSIS, but to a great extent its most recognizable face as well. (Give Rabbi Sherman time...) It wasn’t always this way. When *Chazzan Zevi* first came to the WSIS, it was not as the first choice or even the second choice of a formal search committee. It was *Chazzan Zevi* who was searching for a job as a *Chazzan*, and it was Shalom Maya who first let him sing, from time to time, on a per diem basis. Eventually, the engagements became more frequent, and by the time a search committee was formed, it was basically to deal with a pleasant and mellifluous fait accompli, almost as an anticlimax. And the rest is history.

It seems that from time immemorial, if there are 2 Jews, there are 3 *shuls* – and 3 opinions. Strong willed people do not always work together very easily. Shalom had an amazing ability to bring people together in harmony. His presidential predecessor David Ohayon may have said it best, “Shalom brought Shalom to the shul.”

Andrew Fox, 2009--2011

“Within 5 minutes of my entering the *shul* for the first time, the Great President Shalom Maya ran down from the pulpit and welcomed me, introducing himself and seating me with some other members. Of course, I had my own 6 feet of space as there were only 25-30 men in the sanctuary. I enjoyed the big synagogue feel and the majesty of the W.S.I.S. *davening*, stuck my head in on the babysitting, kibitzed a bit with a couple regulars and attended the *kiddush*, which was fantastic. My first *Shabbat* in the *Shul* struck me by how empty it was, given that the Rabbi was so young and dynamic and the *Chazzan* was obviously such a talent. But I came to W.S.I.S. at just the right time demographically, as the shul was just about to grow very substantially....

“The next weekend, I returned with my 2 year old son Jack, and we walked the steps to the Babysitting, run ably by Polly. With trepidation we entered, and Polly turned, looked at Jack and uttered the words that define her as one of the great shul babysitter Leaders: “Jack, would you like a lollypop?” He answered yes, went to build a train, and I left.

“That was the first defining moment of my ability to become involved at WSIS... I came to know virtually every person, to joke with David Ohayon, talk diamonds with Sulimayoff, discuss shul marketing with Aaron Braunstein, and of course everyone wanted to talk about the big hole in the ceiling that had been there for 20-30 years and was obviously unfixable. [Note: This 20-30 year estimate may indeed have been made by some people, but there appears to be a consensus that this was a significantly exaggerated figure.]

“I asked Shalom Maya about helping the shul and he replied: “I empower you to do whatever you want.” So I started to do the weekly bulletin.” Not only did it come out weekly, but it was beautifully and professionally done, in color, setting a significant precedent for the future.

[Before long, I was voted onto the board.]

“... I was also elected Treasurer. Unfortunately, I found the shul in rough financial shape

“But all was not bleak, we had a fast growing Young Leadership group, led by Joshua Schwalbe and Gabe Schiff. ... snowball effect... led to our incredible growth in fall 2010, 2011 and 2012, when we would have 1-3 new members literally every single week.

“I sponsored a Leadership Development Dinner at Prime Grill in midtown... I put together sheets with proposed committees for Finance, Marketing, Strategy, Membership, and Management... to create a properly managed businesslike organization that would become the foremost Modern Orthodox Jewish *Shul* or organization of any kind, anywhere. W.S.I.S. had in place the religious talent to fuel unlimited attendance growth, the verbal branding to siphon off a large part of the attendance of the other *shuls* [Note: including some who had been poached from us, over the years.], and a large facility to accommodate a huge number of people. All we needed was proper marketing and to be run like a business. I intended to get the structure in place to make it happen.

“I thought about [becoming a presidential candidate] and decided to go for it. The only problem was that I did not have a proper religious background, at least as far as I and the community were concerned. I discussed it with my very dear friend, Rabbi Adam Mintz [Note: Now rabbi of the neighboring Congregation *Rayim Ahuvim*, who delivered a memorable speech about the founder of the W.S.I.S. at a joint *Shavuot* service with the 2 shuls in 2015, which was then put in writing and inserted into our website], and he encouraged me to plow forward.

“There was a large hole in the ceiling of the WSIS ...[See above comment.] I was told it would cost \$40,000, \$50,000 to fix... Can't be fixed... Costs too much!. Too hard. ... disrepair... including the leaky, damp *Aron Kodesh*. 5-6 of the Torahs were rotting and unable to be used for religious services. This bothered me greatly.

“I called the contractor that I intended to use to renovate the ballroom and asked them to come meet me at the W.S.I.S. to see a small project that I wanted to do immediately... we had a 3 minute discussion about fixing the holes; actually there was a big one, plus a couple of small ones, and some painting to do, plus tearing out the *Aron Kodesh* (Ark) and rebuilding it completely to be DRY. The contractor sat for 5 minutes and quoted me \$2800 (yes twenty eight hundred dollars) for the holes in the ceiling and another \$5000 to do the *Aron Kodesh*, plus fabric (not much). I TOLD HIM: DON'T TELL ANYONE!!!! ...

“Armed with this information, I came to shul the next Shabbat to fundraise \$12,000 to fix the ceiling. I neither told anyone the cost of the repairs, nor the amount I was fundraising... 2 weeks after [I became] President... I did not even say that we were going to fix the *Aron Kodesh*; that was a surprise! I raised the money, walking person to person in 10 minutes. Nobody knew, not even Rabbi Einhorn, only George (see below).

“The very next week, the contractor came and fixed the holes and painted.

“[The next *Shabbat*. When I stepped up to make weekly the announcements,] I walked up to the center of the pulpit. No *shtender*. Stood there. People stopped talking. Dead silent as I stared at the crowd. And it was a big crowd. W.S.I.S. was growing like weeds in the springtime at this point. I laid down on the floor, looked up at the ceiling. Keep in mind this is my 3rd week on the job. I said loud and clear ‘Ladies and Gentlemen: The hole in the ceiling has been fixed. *Shabbat Shalom*.’ Stood up, went back to my seat.

“...This set us up as a new board as having been successful, so when we fundraised for the Ballroom Renovation, everyone knew we could do it, fast and properly.

“We had a very tough time getting members together to vote. So I came up with the idea of a member party. After *Shabbat*, we had a party, with a live band that Rabbi Einhorn found...a sushi bar, open bar and a small dessert buffet. Total budget \$2000, all sponsored. This was a fun and nice way to get a quorum needed to take a vote. [Note: And infinitely more fun than filling a proxy form.]... But what was really nice is that members got together, not on *Shabbat*, not for someone's personal event, and just schmoozed, drank a bit, and had a nice time.

“...A huge move that we made was setting up a special Young Families area at our *Kiddush*. Why was this pivotal to the community coming together? The result of this kids table was that the kids stayed still at the *Kiddush* and parents were able to talk and meet one another.

“... from mid-2010 to June 2011, W.S.I.S. was probably the greatest Shul product of all time, with the possible exception of Lincoln Square with Rabbi Riskin and Chazzan Goffin. W.S.I.S. was literally full every week. The Kiddush Club would have 50 or 60 guys every week. It was simply incredible. Friends invited friends, and word got out that the W.S.I.S. was the place to be... There was simply nothing that we were not doing right, our services were fantastic and everyone loved coming to our shul. Infighting, a long time hallmark of destroying the W.S.I.S. from the inside-out, seemed to be at an all-time low, due to the fact that there didn't seem to be anything to fight about.

“In either January or February of 2011 (I do not recollect the date and did not record it), I was contacted by Mr. Richard Kestenbaum, President of Lincoln Square Synagogue. Richard is a very fine gentleman. We had lunch at Wolf & Lamb at which Richard requested that we consider merging the 2 shuls together [AGAIN], creating one great synagogue to serve the Upper West Side. Lincoln Square wished to sell the W.S.I.S.’s property and use the proceeds to complete payment for their building, yet under construction with a significant balance under fundraised. I informed Richard that we had no interest, knowing that there was no appetite for ending the illustrious history of the W.S.I.S., especially when our organization was doing so wonderfully well. The board agreed. Interestingly, within 1 week of David Fiedler becoming President he reported to the board that Richard had contacted him to discuss the 2 shuls merging. I forcefully let him know that no such discussion should be considered.

Our good times came to a crashing halt in late May 2011.

W.S.I.S.: Vicitimized By Our Own Success

One sunny afternoon in late May, 2011... Rabbi Einhorn told me [of the famous offer that he couldn’t refuse]... Rabbi Einhorn’s great success in growing the W.S.I.S. informed everyone in his old neighborhood [in Los Angeles] that he was ready to take the next step in his career, and they made him an offer that was too good to refuse. We let him know that we would open the treasury to keep him... Rabbi Einhorn decided to stay for a year, until the end of his contract. The timing of Rabbi Einhorn’s departure provided him with a triumphant final year and gave the W.S.I.S. plenty of time to run an organized rabbinic search.

“Funny” story

“A week after announcing that Rabbi Einhorn was leaving us, I found myself at a trade show in Las Vegas... a friendly acquaintance pointed to a gentleman whom I happened to know was the President of the Yavneh School in Los Angeles, and the father of a highly involved WSIS board member and Screamed: ‘Go Punch That Guy. He Stole Our Rabbi!!!!’ We had to calm him down.

Acknowledgements:

It must be recorded that the person who helped me more than anyone was my 1st Vice President, Mr. George Sokolowski, who remains one of my very closest friends... And George does have the Judaic Studies background...I felt that WSIS needed a new, Ashkenaz presence alongside Rabbi Einhorn and I wanted that person to be Yanky Kleinman... All of the current leadership group, with the exception of current President Joshua Olshin, whom I dragged in, and super-volunteer/shul supporter Bari Ohayon Erber whose father David brought her in, came into the shul as a direct result of the marketing and verbal branding of Messrs. Schwalbe and Shiff...Another advisor to mention is the Great President of Beth Shalom of Lawrence, Mr. Joel Schiff, may he rest in peace, who always told me to stay calm and keep doing the good work.....[In 4th month of the Fox presidency], myself, Rabbi Einhorn, George, Joshua Schwalbe and Gabe Schiff put together the Ballroom Renovation project... In June of 2010, I had a dinner... in Las Vegas with Sidney Schlusberg... he offered to cut us a check against the pledges, and receive his money back as our pledges came in... Sidney sent his check in 4-5 days later in an envelope, no note, nothing to sign, no nothing...Our largest single donation was from future President David Fiedler who gave me the compliment, “I have never seen a President accomplish so much so fast.”

David Fiedler, 2012--2016

After the tumultuous (in a good way!) – and unpredictable and even sometimes quirky -- days of the exciting Fox administration, during which the enthusiasm soared to its highest level, David restored a sense of traditional dignity to the synagogue. No less important, he encouraged people moving into the neighborhood from the Five Towns and other areas to consider making our *shul* their spiritual home, and in many cases, they liked what they saw enough to do so, despite the stiff competition in our vibrant

neighborhood. David has also been a mainstay of the Kiddush club. When asked to talk about his administration, he humbly preferred talking about the big picture, from which he seems to take more pride than from anything he has contributed personally.

“When I became president... Rabbi Einhorn was still our rabbi. He used to say, and I used to repeat, that ‘A few people come to *shul* to hear my sermon; I know more people come to *shul* to hear the *Chazzan*; even more people come to *shul* for the *Kiddush* Club and most people probably come to enjoy our hot *shul kiddush*, but as long as everyone leaves *shul* with a smile on their face, I feel like we’ve done our job.’

Fiedler adds: ... “I feel a special sense of pride in that I pushed to hire Rabbi Sherman as our intern when I first became president.”

Joshua Olshin, 2016 – present

“I became an Executive Vice President at the W.S.I.S. in early 2012 and served as 1st or 2nd Vice President for 4 years before becoming President in January 2016. I was just re-elected for my third term.

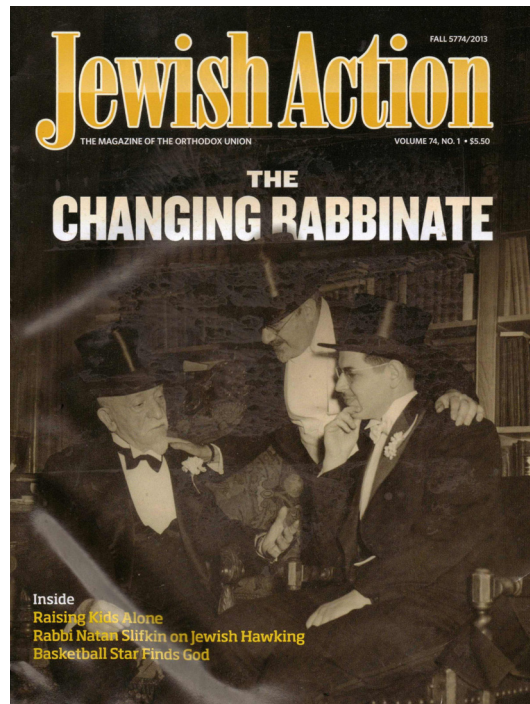
“Upon my taking office as V.P., Rabbi Einhorn’s term as rabbi was about to end and Rabbi Strulowitz was hired with great fanfare and began his position during the Summer of 2012. Unfortunately, Rabbi Strulowitz’s tenure was short and he left the W.S.I.S. in the fall of 2014.

“When Rabbi Strulowitz left, we hired our former intern Rabbi Sherman initially as an interim Rabbi while we put together two search committees and reviewed numerous Rabbinic candidates over what became a two-plus year period. Eventually, Rabbi Sherman’s sincerity, intellect, and commitment won over the membership, and by an overwhelming membership vote it was determined we did not need to go outside and that he was the right fit for our community. Since taking this step, under Rabbi Sherman’s leadership W.S.I.S. has solidified a position of stability and steady growth.

“During the last few years, the *Shul* has placed a strong emphasis on programming, from academic programming... bringing in quality speakers... to youth programming and family activities (carnivals, street fairs, cooking competitions etc.). We recently took the step of hiring an Events Programming Director to ensure that this continues on a successful path. Also, in recent years there has been a heightened consciousness at the *Shul* and its membership with respect to our role as a source through which *chesed* can be provided, both in terms of stepping up for individual members in need as well as taking on larger *chesed* projects (such as *Masbia* Soup kitchen, raising money for fire victims in Israel, etc.). We have also strengthened our daily *Shaharith minyan*, to the point where it has now become a reliable *minyan* well attended by both congregants as well as other community members.

“Regarding other signature characteristics of the *Shul* in recent years which I might highlight in my observations: we have an emphasis on being “family friendly,” we are committed to maintaining an open, accepting and non-judgmental atmosphere, we run the services with a bit of a *laissez faire* and unstructured approach, there is a strong social component to our Saturday morning service, including an active *Kiddush* Club and a regular hot *kiddush* lunch every week which usually ensures a big crowd.

“Rabbi Goldstein’s vision of a *Shul* that is a center of our communal life, far beyond just being a place to pray, is still as relevant today as it was 100 years ago. It very much guides the actions of the Trustees and is something we hope and expect will be nurtured and developed further as we enter our next 100 years.”



Top photo, above, Cover of Special Issue of *Jewish Action*, published by the Orthodox Union, on the Changing American Rabbinate, featuring Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein with one hand resting on a shoulder of Institutional Synagogue benefactor, his father-in-law, Harry Fischel, and Rabbi Goldstein's other hand resting on a shoulder of his successor and son-in-law, Rabbi O. Asher Reichel, Fall 2013.

Photo just below the center of the page, on the left, Yoetzet Halacha Shiffy Friedman.

Photo just below the center of the page, on the right, author of this publication, Rabbi Aaron I. Reichel, Esq.

Photographs on back page, left to right, repeatedly: Congressman Isaac Siegel, the first and only president of the Institutional Synagogue; Lester Udell, the first and only president of the West Side Institutional Synagogue throughout the duration of the active rabbinate of the synagogue's founder; David Ohayon; Jacques Ohayon, Rick Siegel; David Fiedler; Joshua Olshin. The other living presidents opted not to submit photographs. Photographs of the presidents not listed above who are no longer alive appear in the monograph of the W.S.I.S that was published in its 50th – jubilee – year, in 1987.



