

Rabbi Lewis' message for April 2005

Week after week, I teach Jewish history to our 6th & 7th grades. If you accept the traditional reckoning, that's 5765 years worth of history (give or take a couple thousand years if you prefer historical reckoning). In either case, twenty-five years is no time at all compared with the span of Jewish history. And yet the twenty-five year period since I was ordained has seen seismic changes in our Reform movement and in the larger American Jewish community. When I was ordained in 1980, fewer than twenty women had become rabbis in the Reform movement. When people asked us (and everyone did), "How many women rabbis are there?" we could not only count but also name each one. Years later, after we had passed the four hundred number, I simply lost count of how many women had been ordained.

In planning for the weekend of May 6, I thought about what I wanted said about this past quarter century. I realized that I did not want to bring in a famous scholar or an important official of our movement. Rather, I wanted you to hear from people who have lived through these past twenty five years with me, who can place the issue of women's ordination within the larger context of Jewish history but who can also express the personal experience we shared along the way. Buddy Rosenthal was the Chairperson of the Search Committee of Temple Emanu-el in Dallas, Texas, in 1980 and was brave enough to take the risk of hiring me. Dr. Milly Brichto, whom some of you met two years ago when she came to speak for Kristallnacht, was the first Religious School principal for whom I taught when I was a rabbinical student in Cincinnati; she was and continues to be my mentor in the rabbinate. Rabbi Kim Geringer became first a congregant and later a friend of mine when I went to Temple Sinai in Summit in 1985; she entered rabbinical school as a second career and now serves as Associate Rabbi at Temple Har Shalom in Warren, NJ. I have learned so much from each of these people; I know you will enjoy them as well.

Thank you again for celebrating with me. I would have it no other way.

Rabbi Ellen J. Lewis
April 2005