

April 2017 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

From Sunday, March 19 – Thursday, March 22, I had the privilege and joy of participating in the 128th Annual Convention of the [Central Conference of American Rabbis](#) where, over the course of four days, I learned, prayed, celebrated, and planned for a more meaningful Jewish future with almost 600 other Reform rabbis. This year we gathered in Atlanta, which, as the Civil Rights capital of our land, served as the thematic backdrop for our overall theme: “Being a Rabbi in Turbulent Times.”

Borrowing from the official 2017 CCAR Convention Mission Statement, this was a convention in which we interacted with and learned from our host city, the institutions of higher learning in and around the city, and the scholars, academics, movers and shakers who help make Atlanta thrive.

As a participant, I made my own track over the course of the four days, choosing from a variety of offerings. While I did choose to do some learning for learning’s sake, I also chose to attend sessions that were more practical in nature in terms of giving me fresh information and new skills that I’m sure will enhance my work as your rabbi.

While there I saw old friends and colleagues, including my own childhood rabbi, and created new relationships as well. I was especially pleased to have the opportunity to fellowship with a strong group of other rabbis who are serving small congregations. We discussed concerns that touch us in ways that large congregations are immune, and we began to strategize on how best to pool our talents and resources for the good of all smaller congregations. As well, I’m happy to say that the professional and lay leadership of the CCAR pledged to offer unprecedented support, both programmatic and financial, as we move forward in the coming months and years.

Though it was a truly wonderful convention overall, here are some of my own personal highlights:

The first thing I did upon arrival on Sunday was meet with the Small Congregations cohort to kick off discussions that then continued throughout the conference. After that, the entire conference enjoyed hearing from CNN’s Dana Bash, herself an active Reform Jew and the daughter of a Reform Jewish Educator. She shared insights about the current political landscape. The evening then concluded with a gala opening dinner, during which I had the pleasure of catching up with former Rabbinical School classmates.

On Monday morning, we had the great privilege of listening to a three-person panel, which included Atlanta’s Mayor Kasim Reed, Ebenezer Baptist Church’s Senior Pastor, Raphael Warnock, and Associate General Counsel of Habitat for Humanity and Associate Pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Natosha Reid Rice. The three of them – two theologians and one politician – spoke with a unified voice about the

positive role religion and religious people play in the difficult endeavor of protecting the rights of the often otherwise unprotected.

That evening, after a visit to the [Center of Civil and Human Rights](#), we concluded the day with a visit to The Temple Atlanta, where we began with dinner (my dinner partner for the evening was Rabbi Lewis!) and finished with a most riveting presentation of “The Temple Bombing,” a dramatic recreation of the evening on October 12, 1958, when a bundle of dynamite blew through the wall of Atlanta’s oldest synagogue.

The highlight of Tuesday for me was sitting in on a session led by Daniel Medwin, Manager of Digital Media for the CCAR, Joshua Halo, Dean of the Cincinnati campus of Hebrew Union College, and Laura Baum, Associate Vice President for Learning and Engagement for the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of the Boston Jewish Federation, on Digital Learning, during which participants were exposed to a wide array of strategies and tools to enhance our teaching. I look forward to exploring this topic more.

On Tuesday evening we gathered to hear Joseph J. Levin, and Alabama Reform Jew and Co-Founder of the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), talk about Hate and Extremism in the United States. He told the compelling story of how he, a privileged white Alabamian during Jim Crow came to see the need for the Center he created. He encouraged us to be ever-vigilant so as to protect our country from falling into the same trap of racist ideology again. And then, if that weren’t enough, the evening closed with an outstandingly inspiring concert by a joint choir from The Temple of Atlanta and Ebenezer Baptist Church. It was a fantastic evening.

On Wednesday morning we heard the unlikely story of how Reform-Jew-turned-Orthodox-Rabbi-and-activist-Israeli-settler, Hanan Schlesinger, and formerly jailed Palestinian political prisoner, Ali Abu Awwad, came to know one another and how they, together, launched the Roots/Shorashim Project, which seeks to create meaningful dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis who otherwise would never find reason to interact. Their story was both moving and filled with hope for a better future. Still on the topic of Israel, I then attended a smaller session that afternoon with Anna Langer, Associate Vice President for Israel Education and Engagement at Hillel International, which focused on the current state of Israel affairs on college campuses. Special attention was given to the topic of BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions). There is considerable work for us to do to ensure that Israel and Jews are treated with fairness at many of our institutions of higher learning. I finished Wednesday’s learning with a session by David Blumenthal, Professor of Judaic Studies at Emory University, and one of my theologian-heroes. It was an honor to hear him discuss God and our Jewish prayer book.

The climax of our week came Wednesday evening, when Cornell William Brooks, President of the [NAACP](#), closed the program with 60 minutes of inspiration from the podium. He tied all the pieces together for us, and charged us to move forward as

rabbis with the prophetic tradition on our side to insist that the vulnerable of our country find the protection and support to which every human being is entitled. Though a Yale-trained lawyer, it was in his persona as a fourth generation minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church that he truly brought the house down. I cannot imagine a better conclusion to the Convention.

On Thursday morning, I said goodbye to old friends and colleagues, as well as to new ones, took the MARTA train to the airport, flew home, kissed the family hello, and fell asleep. It was a magical four days!

L'Shalom
Rabbi Dubin

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