

# THE JEWISH JOURNAL

October 14, 2009

## WOMEN RABBIS: Trailblazers and Innovators

BY JEWISHJOURNAL.COM

[http://www.jewishjournal.com/community/article/women\\_rabbis\\_trailblazers\\_and\\_innovators\\_20091014/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/community/article/women_rabbis_trailblazers_and_innovators_20091014/)



*From top-left: Rabbis Sharon Brous, Denise Eger, Laura Geller, Zoë Klein, Naomi Levy, Michelle Missaghieh, Debra Orenstein and moderator Susan Freudenheim*

Los Angeles has been at the very center of the extraordinary growth of the women's rabbinate. These rabbis have brought new voices and certainly a new look to today's clergy. They have established new and innovative minyans, brought new kinds of music to services, written new liturgy and helped establish new forms of activism. Seven extraordinary rabbis will take the stage at 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 21 at the Saban Theatre in Beverly Hills, spanning two generations and sharing seven very different views of the rabbinate, of the future of the Jewish world, and of their roles as leaders, role models and compassionate clergy. Please join me for this singular and provocative evening.

**Susan Freudenheim**  
Jewish Journal Managing Editor,  
Moderator

**Rabbi Sharon Brous**  
IKAR

Rabbi Sharon Brous is founding  
rabbi of IKAR, a Jewish spiritual

community dedicated to the integration of spiritual and religious practice and the pursuit of social justice. She was included in The Forward's annual list of the 50 most influential members of the American Jewish community for three years in a row, and was recently noted in Newsweek as one of the nation's leading rabbis. In 2008, she was the inaugural recipient of the Jewish Community Foundation's Inspired Leadership Award, recognizing inspired leadership, vision and impact in the Los Angeles Jewish community. In 2001, Rabbi Brous was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary, and she received a master's degree in human rights from Columbia University, where she also received her bachelor's degree in history. After ordination, she served as a rabbinic fellow at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York City. For the past seven years, Rabbi Brous has served on the faculty of REBOOT and on the regional council of Progressive Jewish Alliance. She serves as adjunct faculty at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and sits on the rabbinic advisory boards of American Jewish World Service and Hebrew College. Rabbi Brous is married to David Light, a comedy writer, and they have two daughters and a son.

**Rabbi Denise L. Eger**  
Congregation Kol Ami

Rabbi Denise L. Eger is the first woman and the first gay rabbi to serve as president of The Board of Rabbis of Southern California. She is the founding rabbi at Congregation Kol Ami in West Hollywood, established in 1992, after she served for four years as the first full-time rabbi at Beth Chayim Chadashim. Rabbi Eger holds a bachelor's degree in religion

from the University of Southern California. She received her master's degree from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and was ordained at its New York campus in 1988. She is a member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and has served on numerous rabbinic boards and organizations. Rabbi Eger co-chaired the Gay and Lesbian Rabbinic Network for two years and is a past treasurer of the Women's Rabbinic Network. She was the founding president of the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Interfaith Clergy Association, served on the board of the No on Knight Campaign/No on Proposition 22 and is active on the steering committee of the California Faith for Equality. She is also a member of the Religion and Faith Council of the Human Rights Campaign. Rabbi Eger's partner is Karen Siteman. They have a son, Benjamin.

### **Rabbi Laura Geller** **Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills**

Rabbi Laura Geller is senior rabbi of Temple Emanuel in Beverly Hills, the first woman to be selected to lead a major metropolitan synagogue. She was named one of The Forward's top 50 influential Jewish community members and has served as executive director of the American Jewish Congress, Pacific Southwest Region, where she created the Jewish Feminist Center. She was director of Hillel at the University of Southern California, where she co-organized the award-winning national conference, "Illuminating the Unwritten Scroll: Women's Spirituality and Jewish Tradition." She contributed to many books and was on the editorial board of the groundbreaking "The Torah: A Woman's Commentary" (URJ Press), in which she has two essays. Rabbi Geller has taught at the University of Judaism and the University of Southern California, among others, and she served as a trustee on the board of Brown University and the board of governors of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. She was founding chair of the Beverly Hills Human Relations Commission, is a rabbinic fellow at the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem and was a graduate of the first cohort of rabbis from the Institute of Jewish Spirituality. She graduated from Brown University in 1971, was ordained by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1976 and was the third woman in the Reform movement to become a rabbi. Rabbi Geller is married to Richard A. Siegel, and is the mother of Joshua and Elana Goldstein and the stepmother of Andy and Ruth Siegel.

### **Rabbi Zoë Klein** **Temple Isaiah**

Rabbi Zoë Klein has been serving Temple Isaiah for more than eight years and has been senior rabbi since July 2007. She graduated from Brandeis University with a bachelor's degree in psychology, and received her rabbinic ordination from the New York campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1998. Upon ordination, she served Temple Shalom in Norwalk, Conn. Rabbi Klein pursued the rabbinate out of a passion for ancient texts, mythology, liturgy and poetry. She has written numerous articles for magazines, as well as poems and prayers used in houses of prayer all around the country. Her second novel, "Drawing in the Dust" was just released by Simon and Schuster. She has appeared as a commentator on the History Channel in "Digging for the Truth." She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, Rabbi Jonathan Klein, and their three children, Rachmiel, Kinneret and Zimra.

### **Rabbi Naomi Levy** **Nashuva**

Rabbi Naomi Levy is founder and spiritual leader of Nashuva, a groundbreaking Jewish outreach organization, through which she has helped draw hundreds of unaffiliated Jews back to a Judaism that is soulful, committed to social justice, meaningful, relevant and fun. The Forward has listed Rabbi Levy as one of the 50 most influential Jewish leaders in the nation, and Newsweek twice named Rabbi Levy in its "Top 50 Rabbis in America" list. Her first book, "To Begin Again" (Knopf), was a national best-seller. Rabbi Levy lectures widely on topics of revitalizing faith, spirituality, healing and prayer. Her second book, "Talking to God" (Knopf), teaches how reclaiming personal prayer can transform lives. Rabbi Levy attended Cornell University and was in the first class of women to enter the Jewish Theological Seminary's rabbinical school. At the seminary, Rabbi Levy received honors as outstanding underclass student of Talmud and outstanding underclass rabbinical student. For seven years she led Congregation Mishkon Tephilo in Venice Beach, the first female Conservative rabbi to head a pulpit on the West Coast. Rabbi Levy lives with her husband, Robert Eshman, editor-in-chief of The Jewish Journal, and their children, Adin and Noa.

### **Rabbi Michelle Missaghieh** **Temple Israel of Hollywood**

Rabbi Michelle Missaghieh has served as Temple Israel of Hollywood's associate rabbi since her ordination from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1996. She serves on the executive board of the Sandra Caplan Community Bet Din of Southern California and is co-president of the Women's Rabbinic Network. Rabbi Missaghieh holds a master's degree in Jewish education and enjoys teaching Jews of all ages. She takes special interest in working with individuals for conversion and wrote an award-winning conversion brochure. Rabbi Missaghieh's sermons have appeared in Sh'ma's collection of "Best High Holy Day Sermons." She coordinates Temple Israel's adult education programs, healing and

meditation services, has contributed to the new Temple Israel of Hollywood's High Holy Days machzor and facilitates the synagogue's The Healing Community committee. She and her husband, Bruce Ellman, a psychologist in private practice, are the parents of three children, Jael, Sivan and Ezri.

## **Rabbi Debra Orenstein** **Makom Ohr Shalom**

Rabbi Debra Orenstein is the spiritual leader of Makom Ohr Shalom synagogue in Tarzana and has taught in the rabbinical, graduate school, undergraduate, conversion and continuing education programs at the American Jewish University. She received her training at Princeton University and University of Judaism and was ordained and received a master's degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary. She also studied at the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Meisner-Carville School and completed an internship in pastoral psychiatry at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Rabbi Orenstein is the author or editor of five books, including the award-winning "Lifecycles" book series. She co-authored "From Generation to Generation," a collection of sermons and Bible commentaries with her grandfather, Rabbi Israel Mowshowitz. She is a regular contributor to The Jewish Journal, and other publications. A seventh-generation rabbi, she is an alumna of the first entering class at the Jewish Theological Seminary to include women. She worked her way through rabbinical school as an actress, and has appeared in a handful of films and numerous stage productions. Rabbi Orenstein lives with her husband, Craig Weisz, son, Emmett, and daughter, Hannah Mathilda.

© Copyright 2009 The Jewish Journal and JewishJournal.com  
All rights reserved. JewishJournal.com is hosted by [Nexcess.net](http://Nexcess.net). Homepage design by [Koret Communications](http://Koret Communications).  
Widgets by [Mijits](http://Mijits). Site construction by [Hop Studios](http://Hop Studios).