



CELEBRATING
50 YEARS
OF CLAL



Clal



CLAL MEMORIES



Morton Kornreich, Ben Zion Leuchter, Martin Stein, Shoshana Cardin, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Blu Greenberg, Radine Spier, Irvin Frank, Robert Loup. 1992.



Rabbi Steven Shaw, Shoshana Cardin, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Blu Greenberg, Ben Zion Leuchter. 1992.



Rabbi Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi, Rabbi Bene Lappe, Rabbi Dianne Cohler-Esses, Dr. Michael Gottsegen, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Blu Greenberg, Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow, Michael Paasche-Orlow. 1992.



Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, Al Engelberg, Rabbi Irwin Kula, Charles Bronfman, Tom Katz. 2000.



Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, David Kunin, Rabbi Steve Greenberg. 2006.



Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, Rabbi Irwin Kula, Rabbi Rebecca Sirbu. Rabbis Without Borders. 2009.



CELEBRATING CLAL

Steven Rotter
Chair of the Board



Steven Rotter, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, and Rabbi Irwin Kula. 2006.

Gratitude. Revering the Past. Doing in the Present. Building for the Future. But mostly Gratitude.

Growing up in Brooklyn, I watched my dad (of blessed memory) write \$2, \$3, \$5, and \$10 checks to a myriad of organizations because that's what he could afford to do. I asked him, "Dad, why spend the time and the postage?" And his answer was, "Steven, if they are asking me for money, they must need it more than we do. And if we can give it we are obligated to do so." Gratitude.

We revere the past, when Clal's ethos of making Jewish a public good helped to keep the Jewish community together. Clal did so in a way that emphasized our similarities, as opposed to our differences, and brought a meaningful Torah and teaching to the lay people at the Federations and other

philanthropic and Jewish civic organizations, which had excised them from their thinking, but not their mission.



Steve Rotter, Tom Katz, Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, Phil Darivoff. 2006.

My first Clal meeting was with Rabbi Irwin Kula and Donna Rosenthal of blessed memory – without whom I don’t believe Clal would have gotten to 20 much less 50 without her imposing her will, knowledge, and financial discipline upon some very indomitable people. We were at the Resnick office, where I was asked by my friend, mentor, and partner Burt Resnick to join the meeting to “protect” the matriarch of the family, his mother Pearl, from the “rabbis.” (She did not need protection!) I said half in jest that if our enemies were only smart enough to leave the Jews alone for 10 years, we would tear ourselves apart. Clal built the bridges to keep that from happening. While it has been difficult to get people to cross those bridges, they now exist. As Rabbi Tarfon famously said, “It is not our job to finish the task, but nor can we desist from it.”

That was the beginning of my journey at Clal. Irwin and I became close and I joined the

Board. I watched the focus, but not the ethos, change: Why just a “good” for the Jewish people? Why not bring it to the “public square” and make it a good for all? We continued on that path, using Jewish wisdom as our “toolbox.”

Then some guy with a ponytail showed up at a board meeting and was introduced as the Vice President. A new friendship and perspective was quickly added to the mix; Rabbi Brad Hirschfield brought different ideas, a different focus, but the same ethos: This tradition of ours has value and we can and should use it to make people’s lives better.

The evolution continued. The through-lines and ethos remained the same, but now the emphasis changed a bit, to more overtly one of service and privileging people over ideology. How wonderful to recognize people as being created in the image of God.

More time passed. Geoff, Julia and Elan joined the faculty, others who made great contributions left. The work continued. A pandemic occurred; the way we live and work changed, but Clal persisted in its work, even thrived, because the ethos remained the same and the need increased.

Irwin decided to become President Emeritus, Brad became sole President; change is hard, but we navigate it because the work remains important, maybe more important than before, and the ethos remains the same. Programs change: Rabbis without Borders

and other programs fall away and are revived soon in new iterations, both at Clal and in other places (with Spark, Leading Through Innovation, and The Belonging Project). Stand and See, Jewish at Work, work with military chaplains, and so many more rise up to take their place. The ethos remains, even if the way and how it is delivered is changed. We take pride in navigating the changes.

It has been a difficult year to be a Jew, with the tragic events of October 7th 2023 and the tragic days that followed – in Israel, in Gaza, in Lebanon, and here in America, on campuses and in the media. It's been a tough time to be Jewish – but when has it not?

I have three overriding philosophies on life, and Clal responds to them all.

First, be careful of the Tyranny of the Present -- of being convinced that what is happening now are the most important events that have ever happened and the most existentially impactful. Clal's response, in Brad's words, is to be fully engaged and above the fray.

Second, be optimistic. As Yitz has taught since the beginning of Clal, in the Torah God says, "I place before you the choice of life and death. Choose life!" (Deut. 30:19).

Third, my dad's philosophy, which I strive to continue: Be nice. Be kind whenever you can, and sometimes even when you can't – and it's really hard. Clal's response: we always privilege the person above the ideology.

The future for Clal is great because we have the best Jewish minds at work at Clal; a board that is concerned, engaged, and fully supportive of that work; a tradition of wisdom to be mined and disseminated; and an ethos that has stood the test of time. As Irwin has said to me many times, 50 years is a pretty significant body of work, which we can all take great pride in; it only happened and will continue to happen with our continued and sustained support.

I'm proud to share this collection of memories and reflections with you, Clal's supporters, to celebrate the outsized legacy of this small but mighty organization.



COVER TOP TO BOTTOM

1. Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Dr. Elie Wiesel, Rabbi Steven Shaw. Clal's founders. 1970s
2. Rabbi Brad Hirschfield and Clal supporters. World Bank Symposium, Morocco. 2004
3. Rabbi Elan Babchuck, Rabbi Julia Appel, and Rabbi Brad Hirschfield. 2024
4. Rabbi Carnie Rose, Rabbi Amy Small, and Rabbi Darby Leigh. Clal's first cohort of Rabbis Without Borders. 2009
5. Rabbi Brad Hirschfield and Rabbi Irwin Kula. 2006



FOUNDING CLAL

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

President 1974-1997

President Emeritus 1997-Present



Clal was created by three primary founders to help the Jewish community deal with three main concerns.

The first issue was my greatest fear. I could see that American society was opening up as never before. The media penetration whereby every identity, culture, and religion would be exposed to every other was already at a high level. It was clearly going to end the cultural/geographical shelter behind which all religions and cultures had raised their constituents. This raised the question of whether any particular identity or way of life could resist assimilation into the majority. (I had a secondary hope that this intensified interaction between groups, if dealt with positively, would stimulate an age of renewal and greater learning from each other.)

My diagnosis of the Jewish community was that it was dominated by the desire to Americanize and modernize and it would be vulnerable to a high degree of assimilation.

Clal's solution was to deepen the content and experience of Jewish living. A high degree of Jewish learning was needed to give substance to Jewish identity and life. This needed to be combined with religious and other emotionally compelling experiences. Then, Jews would choose to live Jewishly out of free choice and meaningful commitments.

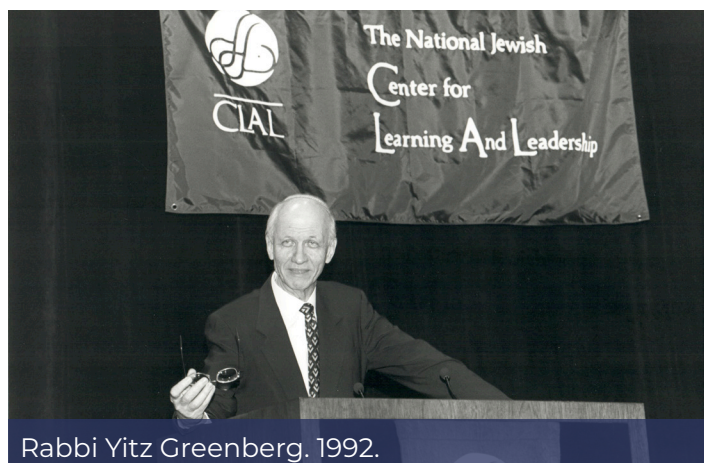


Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Dr. Elie Wiesel, Rabbi Steven Shaw. Clal's founders. 1970s.

Clal targeted lay leadership on the grounds that meaningful communal leadership was shifting to the lay leaders, who would then serve as role models for the masses. We concluded that the learning (and the teaching faculty) would have to be pluralistic, so that every kind of Jew would be equal in standing and welcome to participate. We particularly targeted the Federation world, believing that the communal organizations lacked the depth of Jewish understanding

to see that their agenda (much of it officially non-sectarian) was rooted in Jewish culture and the practical application of classic Jewish values and tradition. Clal created learning classes around the country and infused the national General Assembly of the Federations with Jewish content and Shabbat and other Jewish experiences.

The second focus was particularly close to the heart of Elie Wiesel, the second founder. He and I were convinced that the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel were major events of Jewish history. Jewish religion, culture, and policies needed to be rethought in light of these events. (We believed that American society at large and religions – especially Christianity – also needed to rethink their values and policies in light of these events.) Clal created classes and ran weekends and seminars on these topics. We created a project called Zachor: Holocaust Resource Center to advance Holocaust education, and especially to spread the model of a Holocaust Memorial Center, a museum-like total environment in which the Holocaust would be encountered, its lessons drawn and expressed, and study advanced. We helped



Rabbi Yitz Greenberg. 1992.

local communities create Holocaust Centers, including Pittsburgh, St. Louis, New York, and Montreal.



Rabbi Jerome Epstein of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism presents Rabbi Yitz Greenberg with an award. 1986.

Then came a big breakthrough: Stuart Eizenstat, Chief Domestic Affairs Advisor to President Carter, was turned on to the importance of the Holocaust and the need for a physical Center to communicate the event and its implications. He persuaded President Carter to appoint the President's Commission on the Holocaust (PCH) to determine an



Rabbi Irwin Kula, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Blu Greenberg, Ambassador Stuart E. Eizenstat. 1992.

appropriate American national memorial to the Holocaust. He also successfully placed Elie Wiesel as chairman of the mission and myself as Executive Director of the Commission. The PCH proposed that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum should be located on the National Mall. Zachor's lay leadership (mostly survivors) and professional leadership migrated to the PCH and subsequently to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the US Holocaust Memorial Council. Clal continued to teach the centrality of the Holocaust and the significance of the State of Israel for Jewish religion and culture going forward.



Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Rabbi Irwin Kula. 1989.

The third factor was closest to the third founder, Rabbi Steven Shaw. Shaw was a programming genius and did a lot to create impactful Jewish learning experiences for Clal's constituents. In particular, Steve and I were convinced that total environment retreats could communicate powerful Jewish experiences and values in a very short time. Clal used retreats and encouraged the other organizations we served to use retreats. Clal

planned to create a national retreat center to serve as a model and proposed that the community set up such retreat centers in every major Jewish population center. Clal's original name was the National Jewish Conference Center. I regret to say that although Clal ran hundreds of retreats with great impact on lay leaders and communal agenda, the organization tried twice to create an actual retreat center. Both efforts failed, due to inadequate financing and professional resources. Nevertheless, some local community camps and facilities were reshaped to offer retreats year round.

Perhaps Clal's other major impact was to confirm the triumph of Jewish civil religion in our communities: that Israel should be a central focus for Jewish life and that the creation of the State of Israel in response to the death blow of the Holocaust was truly a turning point in Jewish history. The Jewish State was the reassertion of Jewish life and the value of Jewish lives. Clal taught that this historic response was a confirmation of the

classic Jewish religion and its affirmation of life. Therefore, the contemporary activity of the community was the contemporary expression of the classic Jewish tradition, but also a major step forward on the road to *tikkun olam* – repair of the whole world, starting with the Jewish people.



Irving and Phyllis Bernstein, Blu and Yitz Greenberg. 2005.



Blu Greenberg and Rabbi Yitz Greenberg. 2000.



COMING TO CLAL

Rabbi Irwin Kula

President, 1997-2023

President Emeritus, 2023-Present



Rabbi Elan Babchuck, Alan Harlam,
Rabbi Irwin Kula. 2018.

I came to Clal in December 1987 barely thirty years old. I came for one reason: A breathtaking eight hour conversation with Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, sitting on a porch overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, at his home in Gloucester, Massachusetts that changed my life. *The Third Era in Jewish History, Voluntary Covenant, Holy Secularity, the Infinite Value of every Human Being, Principled Pluralism...* Every idea Yitz talked about gave profound substance to intuitions I had about Judaism going back to being a teenager in yeshiva. I had no choice. I went to my room that night, called my wife, who was pregnant with our first daughter, and simply said, “I don’t know how we are going to pull this off but we are moving to New York City. I have to study with Rabbi Yitz Greenberg.”

It was a crazy move. Aside from my wife, no one in my life – not my parents, my friends,

my colleagues, my teachers – supported the move. I was leaving a thriving 1,200 family congregation where I had just been designated the next senior rabbi – the youngest senior rabbi in the country of such a large congregation – to take a fifty percent pay cut for a one year fellowship to study privately with Rabbi Greenberg. The fellowship was not even funded by Clal but by the Wexner Heritage Foundation. The only assurance I received beyond the one year fellowship was an oral commitment from Yitz that he would find the money for me to stay. The decision to risk all I had accomplished and come to Clal, with a new baby on the way, was one of the best decisions of my life.



At the time, Clal was essentially the teaching arm of the Jewish Federation system, with classes primarily in New York City, and a vehicle for Yitz to teach his remarkable Torah. Clal was an enormously creative but fragile organization that threatened to go bankrupt every few years. There were times we were not paid on time. There were no pensions nor sabbaticals, and salaries were far below what any of our stellar faculty could have received as rabbis in synagogues.

But, there was no place in the Jewish world as intellectually thrilling. No collection of teachers and lay leaders more animated by the challenge of reimagining Judaism to meet the unprecedented new conditions of power, freedom, and affluence enjoyed by Jews in both America and Israel.

In my first years at Clal I had numerous roles. I headed Hevre (Clal's earliest groundbreaking work on pluralism with rabbis from all denominations) and founded the Bronfman Rabbinic Fellowship Program – both forerunners of Rabbis Without Borders. We created the first two-year Leadership Program for young and senior communal leaders, producing some two dozen curricula that applied Jewish wisdom in profound and innovative ways to the most pressing contemporary issues. Each curriculum was customized for the different institutions we served – Federations, Jewish Community Centers, Jewish Family Services, Synagogues, etc. – and to the particular issues in the more than forty cities in which we taught. We developed seminars, missions to Israel, and thought pieces for the highest echelon of Jewish philanthropic and professional leadership. These were heady times.

One spring evening in 1997, Yitz walked into my office, sat down, and said it's time for you to become President of Clal. Those years at Clal were a bit like the wild west. Literally, the next day I was President. That night Yitz had called every Board member. No founder of an organization could have been more gracious than Yitz in giving room and support to the

next generation of leadership to evolve the organization he founded. Clal's extraordinary faculty and Board pulled together, and the past twenty plus years, first as President and then as Co-President with Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, have been a remarkable run.



We built on and expanded Yitz's Torah -- specifically his insights on the infinite value and dignity of every human being as an Image of God, the voluntary nature of all our contemporary commitments, the emergence of a secular spirituality, and the theological, political, and sociological implications of power and the necessity of pluralism. While always serving the Jewish community, we expanded our reach and made *Jewish Wisdom a Public Good*, taking Jewish wisdom into the American marketplace of ideas.

In this period, I wrote my book *Yearnings: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life*, which opened doors to traditional and new media. This included doing a PBS special called *Simple Wisdom* and writing and being the principal in an award winning short documentary film *Time For A New God*. We developed a Community Wide Change Initiative -- the first initiative to bring every

Jewish organization into community together and integrate Systems Theory and Jewish wisdom to help leaders reimagine Jewish life and navigate change. With the UJA Federation of New York, and later the Jewish Federations of North America, we founded *Leadership 2000* to cultivate the next generation of American Jewish philanthropists. We created the Jewish Public Forum, where we gathered academics across every field and brought their expertise into dialogue with Jewish wisdom, in order to address the most pressing issues facing our country. All these were first of their kind programs. In these years, Clal more than doubled in size and became financially secure, as we garnered support from people who cared more about ideas and were more generous than any people I ever met in my life.



I have given my all to Clal. I love our people, our fearlessness about ideas, our courageous and discerning pluralism, and our agility to pivot and innovate to serve and inspire ever new constituencies with care, creativity, courage, and wisdom. I am most proud of Clal's unique role in bringing new thinking not only to Jewish life, but to the broader American religious, cultural, and entrepreneurial landscape. We literally introduced all of the

following frameworks and lenses to American Jewish life: Adult Leadership Development, Futuring, Scenario Planning, Secular Spirituality, Adaptive Leadership, Positive Psychology, Systems Theory, Postmodern Identity-Formation, Polarity Thinking, Social Psychoanalysis, Disruptive Innovation Theory, Spiritual Entrepreneurship, and Epistemological Pluralism. We remain the only robustly pluralist Jewish think tank in the country, and in these last years we've expanded our reach to other faith communities, as well as to the academic, media, business, military, and tech sectors.



For fifty years Clal has punched well above our weight. Most remarkably, we have held together deep engagement with the Jewish tradition and our existing institutions and a commitment to imagination and innovation in embracing change and creating the future. All the while, we have cultivated an unconditional fidelity to a robust pluralism and to a community in which people can be their authentic selves and have difficult conversations across the most painful divides.

We stayed true to the conviction of Clal: that including and engaging diverse and opposing voices in sacred conversation will create new forms of collective intelligence, from which will emerge new solutions and paths to navigate the metacrises and opportunities of this unprecedented era.

It has been a privilege to work at Clal for thirty-five years. As the longest serving person in the history of Clal, I can confidently say that Clal has never been in a stronger and healthier position intellectually, programmatically, and financially, and has never had more talented professional and volunteer leadership than today. We weathered every storm, from financial crises and a pandemic, to changing political conditions for Jews in America and Israel, to the inevitable comings and goings of faculty and major donors. Today we serve more people using Jewish wisdom than ever before. As we celebrate Clal's fifty years of learning and leadership, and as I become Clal's second President Emeritus, it is a remarkable blessing to say that our Torah has never been more needed, and Clal has never been more poised to impact global Jewish life and American society. I have never been more excited about Clal's future.



STAYING AT CLAL

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield

Co-President 2005-2022

President 2023-Present



God has a sense of humor and seems to support crime. Those are the short answers to how I came to Clal and why I stayed, since neither were part of any original career plan I had 31 years ago when I first agreed to spend a year studying with Yitz and ended up making one of the best decisions of my life.

The crime was theft, as I was stolen to Clal by Yitz Greenberg and Les Wexner — whose invitation to come to Clal for a year “stole” me from a happily budding career as a Jewish academic. That’s how spectacular the experience was. The sense of humor part is that I never planned to be a rabbi at all. In fact, I only went back to yeshiva for ordination so that I could teach my students in Talmud and Ancient Jewish History, many of whom were entering the rabbinate, from the inside of that shared choice. Often, the rabbinical

students experienced the classes I taught as academic. I wanted to be sure that they experienced our learning as a religious act, and that I appreciated the sacredness of what we were doing. Ordination was a way of signifying that we were in it together.



I shied away from the rabbinate because too often rabbis' success was defined by their ability to get more people to "Jew like the rabbi," as opposed to helping people use Jewish to become who they most wanted to be. Rabbi'ing, it seemed to me, was too often about sales, and I wanted to be in service. That, and I had experienced the depth and integrity of "Jewing" in so many different ways and been so well taught by teachers who understood Jewishness in so many different ways.

Spending a year studying with Yitz, and getting to know Irwin, the rest of our faculty, and the community of lay leaders at Clal, showed me that one could rabbi with a robust pluralism and deep passion, in ways that privileged and championed service over sales — that the kind of servant leadership I had always wanted was not only possible, but was happening. That is how a year became a life.

Clal was clearly something bigger than the already expanding organization into which I was invited — first as a Fellow, then as a faculty member, followed by a term as Vice President, years of amazing partnership with Irwin as Co-Presidents, and now as sole President. Clal was, and remains, an idea — an ethos — that is actively deployed in the world, one that was desperately needed then, and is even more desperately needed today.

In a world that that is increasingly polarized in most every domain of collective community — political, religious, philanthropic, intellectual, academic — and with levels of personal alienation and existential loneliness reported at levels which make it, according to the US Surgeon General, a public health crisis on par with cigarette smoking, there has never been a time in our lives when Clal was needed more.



Clal is the Hebrew word for inclusive. It's the kind of inclusivity that deepens human connectivity and nurtures community, be it the classical use of Clal Yisrael — the totality of the Jewish people, or the notion of the larger human community that flows from our founding story in Genesis -- a story not of Jewish origins but of shared human origins

and ongoing human dignity that is shared by all. That potent combination of Jewish depth and human breadth was what I experienced with Yitz from the very beginning. It only deepened and expanded as I get to know and ultimately joined in partnership with Irwin.



I joined, then contributed to and came to lead, an organization synonymous with that kind of ability to go deep and wide, using Jewish wisdom for the good of both the Jewish and larger communities of which we are all a part. That is the kind of servant leadership that Clal aims for and achieves each and every day.

There is truly no organization or institution in American Jewish life, or on the American religious landscape, that consistently addresses the challenges and opportunities of pluralism and of nurturing pluralist leadership, as we do. From the education of communal lay leaders to the ongoing training of rabbis; from the creation of initiatives at leading universities to the pioneering of spiritual entrepreneurship and innovation; from working with Christian seminaries and their graduates to building networks to support Jews in the workplace; contributing to print, digital, television, and radio media on issues that impact Jews and Israel specifically, and America as whole. Not to mention the books Clal faculty write, the

institutions for whom we consult, including the US military, and so much more. All of it is always animated by our own unique approach to the use of Jewish ideas toward two goals: First, when it comes to “Jewish life,” there should be a place for everyone who wants one, regardless of dogma, doctrine or belief. Second, and perhaps even more boldly, that Jewish ideas are a human inheritance that should be accessible to all people, as a tool for helping them build both their own lives and a more humane world.



Shelli Aderman, Rabbi Rebecca Sirbu, Rabbi Irwin Kula, Rabbi Brad Hirschfield. 2017.

By the time you read my words here, the urgent need for Clal’s work will have only increased -- unless by some miracle the Messiah has arrived and we are living in a world of radical human decency, peace, and enduring good health. As much I want to see that world, I work each day presuming that reaching it is a longer-term process, and that we have plenty to do right now. That is another way of saying that my long-term goal for Clal is that we might put ourselves out of business — that the world would live our ethos as naturally and effortlessly as most

people breathe. Ironically, I also know that the achievement of that goal requires ongoing work, creative vision, sharp thinking, and soft hearts, not to mention the nurturing of hope and the occasional prayer.



Chaplain (Col.) Bob Marsi, Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, Rabbi Elan Babchuck. U.S. Army Chaplains trip to Israel. 2023.

That is what Clal has done for fifty years, and what we will continue to do for fifty more and longer. We will do it knowing that whether we achieve our biggest dreams or not, we are a people driven by dreams, fueled by hope, and animated by the fundamental understanding that each of us has a role to play in realizing those dreams. We need to be in the trenches and also above the fray — to be actively engaged in the most immediately pressing questions of the moment, and yet still keep our eyes on the bigger picture and our highest aspirations.

Clal, in that regard, has never changed. We engage, inspire, inform, and mobilize leaders and communities to play their role in realizing their dreams, even as they continue to expand their ability to connect with those who dream differently than they do. That is how passionate principled pluralism works, and that is what Clal does.

None of this — not Clal, not my own work, nor the work of the next fifty years — would be possible without so many people. It would not have been possible without visionary founders like Yitz and Elie and Steve. It would not be possible without Irwin, whose friendship, leadership, partnership, and brotherhood are gifts beyond words. It would not be possible without the list of remarkable past board chairs whose generosity — both material and intellectual — never failed. It would not be possible without our current board chair, Steve Rotter, whose sharp mind is matched only by the depth of his heart, both of which are so deeply authentic that he remains not only a brother but a role model for me in so many ways. It would not be possible without the lay leaders who have chosen to play less public roles — you know who you are — and without whom neither Clal nor I would be what we are. And it would not be possible without our faculty and staff — past and present — who deliver the promise of Clal each and every day. All of you are the reason to be at least as excited about the future as we are grateful to celebrate this remarkable moment of accomplishment.



Rabbi Elan Babchuck and Rabbi Brad Hirschfield. 2024.

CLAL'S IMPACT

Testimonials and memories



Tehilah Eisenstadt

Founder and Director of Wonder and Repair, alumna of Clal's Leading Through Innovation

One of my most valuable classes at the Academy for Jewish Religion was Clal's inter-seminary class "Leading Through Innovation" (LTI), led by Rabbi Julia Appel with special sessions with Rabbi Elan Babchuck. As the founder of my own spiritual start-up, Wonder and Repair, the class deepened my understanding of the needs in the field and allowed me to ask new questions around my expectations and goals. Through LTI, I solidified my understanding of the importance of our Survivor's Shiva project and received the scaffolding to iterate slowly, with respect for those we serve. As a Clal rabbinic intern, I participated in and witnessed honest questioning around existing Clal programs and emerging Jewish communal needs. Through attending one of Clal's board meetings, I saw how Rabbi Brad Hirschfeld and other professional and lay leaders exemplified community building, meaning, purpose, efficiency, and respect for people's time and difference of perspectives. Clal has helped me develop a clearer vision for the kind of rabbi, leader, and CEO I strive to become upon and after ordination.



Rebecca Leeman

Clal's Chief of Staff, alumna of Glean Network's START program

Working at Clal has been an incredible experience and has instilled in me the importance of relationship-based leadership. Under Rabbi Elan Babchuck's mentorship, I've grown as a leader, consistently challenged to deliver high-quality, independent work. Clal's environment has allowed me to apply my previous experiences and pursue my interests while resisting the urge to follow a prescriptive path. Participating in the START program with Clal's Glean Network in the fall of 2023 allowed me to learn from entrepreneurial experts, be in an intentional community, and advance my business idea of supporting Jews in the workplace. Glean deepened my confidence in leading through uncertainty—and taught me to 'fall in love with the problem, not the solution.' I'm grateful that today at Clal we are doing research to shine a light on this issue.

Participants in Clal's programs. 2018-2024.





Meredith Dragon speaking to the Jay Birnbaum Leadership Development Program, which was designed and taught by Clal's faculty. 2023. *Photo courtesy of Greg Francis.*

Meredith Dragon

CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester

Clal - The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership is profoundly important to the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester and has been since its inception. From creating generations of leaders to thinking about new ways to inspire Jewish in our community, our work together has never been more important. Clal's mission to foster inclusive Jewish leadership resonates deeply in Rochester and empowers us to bring community together, especially during such turbulent times. With the ongoing crises in Israel and rising global antisemitism, Clal creates space for open dialogue and diverse perspectives within the Jewish community, which feels essential as we navigate moments of division and uncertainty. Its approach to integrating Jewish wisdom with contemporary issues equips our leadership to respond thoughtfully and compassionately. Clal's emphasis on community resilience and unity gives us hope and direction, grounding our leadership in Jewish values that will guide us through many more decades to come.



Rabbi Scott Bolton

Congregation Or Zarua, alumnus of LEAP

Where to begin about how wonderful LEAP was for me in 5784? No one gem I collected is more precious to me than another. The diamond was the idea that encountering and learning with the scholars who produce Jewish scholarship helps us refine our intellectual seriousness and invites new lines of inquiry in our rabbinate. The ruby was Rabbi Brad Hirschfield's incisive questioning and sharing observations about Jewish life. Brad helped me look at the place of music, song, Jewish history, scholarly pursuits in my life and my career. He asked us to consider the people we serve and whom we love: "Where does this impact you? How? What does it mean for your community?" The emerald was studying at the Katz Center. What an honored address, and not one rabbis and cantors and Jewish professionals get to frequent. I am so appreciative of the access LEAP and Clal afforded me to the administration, the scholars, the rare books, and the invitation to hear first hand what was happening on campus post-10/7. All precious: the true dialogue with scholars, their scholarship, the invitation to synthesize from our leaders, and chevruta with superb colleagues made the LEAP Fellowship a true blessing that continues to inspire.

CLAL'S BOARD CHAIRS

We thank our board chairs, who over the years have been instrumental in guiding Clal and its faculty toward ever-greater clarity and impact.



Steven Rotter
2015-Present

To think I am Chair of an organization Co-Founded by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg and Elie Wiesel 50 years ago. Amazing. To have had the privilege to serve on the board of Clal for almost half its existence and as chair for almost a decade. Gratitude. To have had the privilege to read the foundational documents of Clal written by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg and to study them with Brad and Irwin. Gratitude. Gratitude for having such wonderful friends and teachers. If I had to choose one thing that I am most proud of in my time as Chair, it would be hard, but I would choose reinstating the writing of a dvar torah by our faculty each week, a legacy of wisdom for the future. Grateful to be a part of this and grateful to have Gary Davis and Al Engelberg as mentors and teachers and grateful to have Brad and Irwin as brothers and the entire Clal board and faculty as part of my life and family.



Debra Tuchman
2012-2014

I joined the Clal board over 20 years ago. The reasons I joined the board and continue to support the organization are the same, but even more important today than they were back then. Clal's mission is about teaching and learning. Always devoted to a pluralist view while remaining grounded in Jewish wisdom and traditions, the Clal way is to truly respect the varying viewpoints and endeavor to bring people together to help them evolve and learn, especially regarding difficult and complicated issues.

The need for facilitating growth, connectedness, and community in a respectful and effective way has never been greater, and Clal is uniquely capable of delivering on this mission.



Larry Gellman
2008-2011

For 36 years--half of my life and most of Clal's life--I have served on and/or chaired the Clal Board. Clal has been the North Star of my Jewish journey and essential to defining who and what I am as a person. The Jewish community, and I personally, have never needed more desperately what Clal has uniquely provided over the last 50 years: the passions and disagreements over key issues have become louder, more partisan, nastier, and more potentially destructive than ever in the Jewish community, in Israel, in our own country, and around the world. Clal remains unique in its focus on balancing time-honored values, Jewish text and traditions, and wisdom traditions with ever-changing facts on the ground – in an effort to remain credible, relevant, and intellectually honest and decent in challenging times.



Fern Hurst
2005-2007

Many years ago at my first UJA Federation fundraiser, I was privileged to hear a Clal faculty member speak about Queen Esther, and my eyes were opened to new ways to view the Purim story. Esther's story was not only hers; it was my story. I began to study with Clal and to investigate the spectrum of Jewish thought on every issue. Judaism may be monotheistic, but it is not monolithic ideologically. Although a practice or thought may have been debated and adopted, minority arguments and opinions were and are valued and preserved alongside that of the majority. I understand and value the concept of pluralism as it is put into practice by Clal and in Clal's work with Jewish communities around the country. Clal's faculty was and is drawn from a variety of backgrounds, creating opportunities to learn from teachers of different denominations and practices who may hold differing opinions on an issue, yet at the same time acknowledge that their story is not the only story. That opposing ideas and multiple "truths" can exist is central to Clal and essential for the Jewish community to embrace and endure. Whether in Jewish life or beyond, if we can hold and transmit the value of everyone's story, it would be a major move toward tikkun olam, healing our broken world.



Thomas Katz
2002-2005

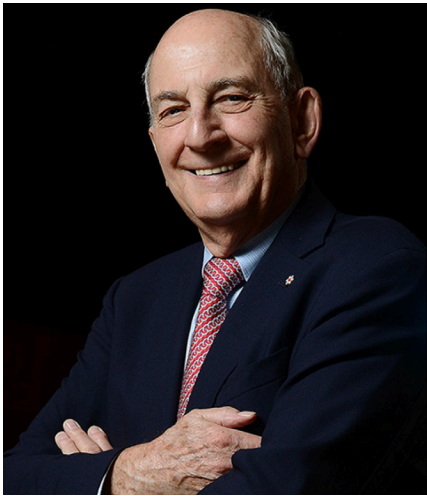
When I became chair of Clal in 2002, I referenced Rabbi Soloveitchik's Yom HaAtzmaut talk in 1956, Kol Dodi Dofek. In it, he used Song of Songs to illustrate the love affair between God and the Jewish people -- that the creation of Israel was an opportunity in one's lifetime to hear God's knock at our communal door. The question was if we were prepared to answer our Beloved's knock.

What Clal has taught -- to individuals, and communities, to Jews and non-Jews -- is how to tune our ears to God's knock at the door. The pluralism that has its origin in Tzelem Elohim -- that each person is an image of God -- is needed now perhaps more than ever in our lifetimes. Our ability to hear and see the other is like seeing the thunder and hearing the lightning at Sinai. In Clal's work, I hear our Beloved knocking. The question is whether we will arise and answer the door.



Barbara Friedman
1999-2001

Clal came into my life during a period when I was very involved with the UJA Federation in New York. As leaders, we had the opportunity to study with Rabbi Yitz Greenberg and the other extraordinary teachers he brought together from the various streams of Judaism, which provided a broad understanding of each branch's contributions. The Clal Shabbatons my fellow students and I attended with rabbis, students, and leaders from various communities throughout the US helped instill a deep respect for each other. Clal's internships with rabbinic students from the various seminaries showed them teaching methods that were dynamic, inclusive, and engaging, while increasing respect and understanding, which they then brought back to their communities. Rabbi Irwin Kula brought Clal to a different phase, becoming change agents to the broader community and bringing Jewish Wisdom to the wider world. These efforts continue under Rabbi Brad Hirschfield with building communities and cutting edge programs. For a small organization, Clal has planted seeds over the past decades for a stronger, more knowledgeable Jewish community.



Charles Bronfman
1998-1999



Radine Abramson Spier
1994-1997



Shoshana Cardin
1992-1994



Morton Kornreich
1990-1992



Martin Stein
1988-1989



Robert Loup
1987-1988

Martin Stein, Rabbi Irwin Kula. 2000.

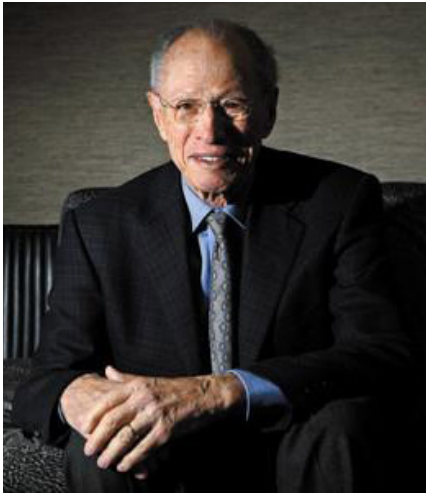


Shoshana Cardin, Radine Spier,
Martin Stein. 1992.



Larry Gellman, Fern Hurst.
2006.





Herschel Blumberg
1984-1986



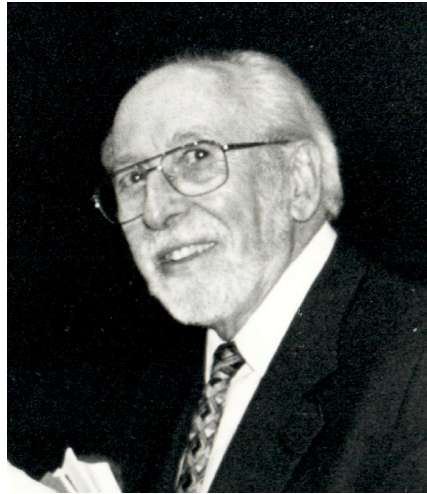
Irvin Frank
1980-1984



Neil Norry
1979-1980



Lee Javitch
1977-1979



Ben Zion Leuchter
1974-1977

Gary Davis, Larry Gellman,
Rabbi Brad Hirschfield. 2006.



Helen Nitkin,
Debra Tuchman. 2006.



Fern Hurst, Tom Katz. 2005.





CLAL'S FUTURE

Rabbi Elan Babchuck

Executive Vice President

Rabbi Julia Appel

Senior Director of Innovation

Rabbi Geoff Mitelman

Director of Sinai and Synapses



Rabbi Julia Appel, Rabbi Elan Babchuck, and Rabbi Geoff Mitelman. 2024.

Fifty years ago, it was clear to Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Dr. Elie Weisel z”l, and Rabbi Steve Shaw z”l that the Jewish people could no longer do business as usual – not theologically, not intellectually, and not communally. A new era was dawning, and we needed to appreciate that shift for what it was: an opportunity to architect a new future, built on the foundations of our past experiences and our current realities. We would need new ideas, new institutions, new relationships, and new leadership. This was Clal’s founding purpose.

Although the specifics have changed over the decades, the basic governing choices remain. Should we invest in **divisiveness** or in the **dignity of difference**? Should we embrace an **ethos of powerlessness** or an **ethic of power**? Should we teach Jewish wisdom only as a **private benefit** or also as a **public good**?

As new generations of leaders seek out tools to teach to this new reality in the Jewish community and beyond, Clal is still here, working at the interstices of Jewish life and on the cutting edges of thought leadership.

Fifty years ago, we took a centralized approach, teaching communal leaders through intensive cohorts to elevate their leadership through Jewish wisdom. Today, with faculty and associates all around the world, Clal creates tailored approaches to the unique challenges faced by each of our partner communities, from methodologies for building community to consultations about fostering pluralism to harnessing the power of design thinking to reshape the Jewish future.

Fifty years ago, we helped Jewish leaders dream of a promising future through

programs like Zachor, Am Echad, and Learning Leaders. Today, we embrace that same challenge through projects like Jewish at Work, The Belonging Project, Leading Through Innovation, Glean Network, Sinai and Synapses, and Stand and See.

Fifty years ago, in his timeless lecture “Crossroads of Destiny,” Rabbi Yitz Greenberg challenged Jewish leaders to identify the “primary challenge of this moment... [To] choose the road best suited, [and to] bet your life!” In these pages, we’ve heard from presidents, faculty, board chairs, rabbinical students, and Jewish professionals who have answered Rav Yitz’s call time and time again – and have done so through Clal. Today, the three of us are grateful to include our names and commit our careers to the very same thing, each in our own way, and yet each in the most classical “Clal” way imaginable: by valuing people over programs, by seeking the partial truth in even the most oppositional ideologies, and by celebrating Jewish life, Jewish history, and the Jewish future with joy, optimism, and fearlessness.



Rabbi Julia Appel. The Belonging Project. 2024.



Rabbis Brad Hirschfield, Julia Appel, Elan Babchuck, Irwin Kula, and Geoff Mitelman. 2024.



Rabbi Elan Babchuck. Calvin Center Festival of Faith and Writing. 2024.



The Belonging Project workshop. 2024.



Rabbi Elan Babchuck. The Calvin Center Festival of Faith and Writing. 2024.



Rabbi Isaiah Rothstein, Rabbi Jeremy Markiz. Rabbis Without Borders retreat. 2018.



Erin Satterwhite and Rabbi Elan Babchuck. 2018.



Glean Network workshop. 2018.



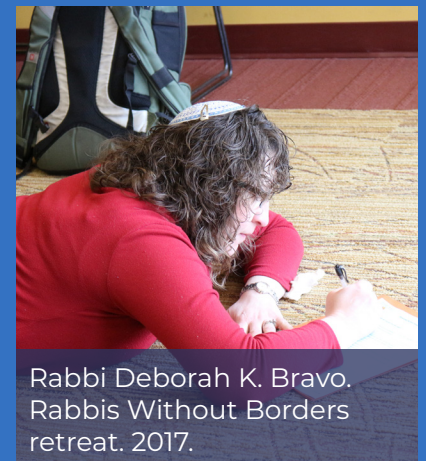
SPARK: Montreal Symposium. 2022.



Panina Magid, Lori Polacheck, Melina Higbee. Glean Network workshop. 2017.



Rabbi Julia Appel and Rabbi Elan Babchuck. 2024.



Rabbi Deborah K. Bravo. Rabbis Without Borders retreat. 2017.

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