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CBH Selects Spiritual, Musical Interim Rabbi

Rabbi Dayle Friedman, an author and musician known for her expertise in geriatrics, is helping Congregation Bet Haverim formulate the future.

By **MARCIA CALLER JAFFE** ✓

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Rabbi Dayle Friedman is committed to lead CBH's transition and to help the congregation find its dream rabbi.

After a Zoomed search and interview process, Congregation Bet Haverim selected Rabbi Dayle Friedman to lead them through a transition as a temporary replacement for their longtime rabbi, Josh Lesser.

As a spiritual guide, social innovator, chaplain and scholar, Friedman has been a leader in the fields of aging, pastoral care and Jewish healing. With 320 households, CBH also welcomes interfaith marriages, those of color and those “curious.” It was founded by gay men and lesbians as a Jewish home where they could fully engage in Jewish life. Now about half identify as LGBTQ+.

Amy Lighthill, head of the interim rabbi search committee, recalled the process. “We expected a difficult interim search after losing our charismatic rabbi of 21 years; but when ‘Rabbi Dayle’ beamed us her warm, kind, reassuring smile in her first interview, we became calm. Her years of working with the elderly, and her deep practice around spiritual direction, have made her an insightful and compassionate listener. “Her knowledge of Torah, wisdom around personal and institutional life cycles, and beautiful singing voice made her our unanimous choice. When we brought her back for round two interview, we were in complete agreement that she was the perfect rabbi to help us reflect on and create our vision. The congregation loves her already, and we won’t want her to leave! From her perspective, Friedman exclaimed, “It was love at first sight. I fell in love with their values of inclusively and justice, and commitment to diversity.”

Friedman grew up in Denver as a third-generation Coloradoan. She felt the calling to be a rabbi as early as age 7. At age 15, the first female rabbi was ordained by the Hebrew Union College. At Brandeis University, six women in her class became rabbis. She earned two master's degrees, then rabbinical school, always directed toward Jewish communal service.



Rabbi Dayle Friedman is a challah baker and an avid hiker, as pictured here amid trees in Israel.

"I first was drawn to geriatrics working in a center for 1,100 Jewish elders. I was inspired to tap into spiritual lives at various levels of aging, connecting them to the larger community and training students to work with elders."

Friedman recently served as interim rabbi for Congregation Leyv ha-Ir. Previously, she founded and directed Hiddur: The Center for Aging and Judaism of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and was founding director of chaplaincy services of Philadelphia Geriatric Center. She offers spiritual direction, pastoral care, and consulting on caregiving and end-of-life care through her Philadelphia-based, national practice, Growing Older.

She also wrote the book "Jewish Wisdom for Growing Older: Finding Your Grit and Grace Beyond Midlife," and "Jewish End-of-Life Care in a Virtual Age: Our Traditions Reimagined," which she co-edited. Her first book, "Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources," is recognized as a foundational

text for its field.

Friedman's husband David Ferleger is a civil rights disability attorney practicing in Philadelphia. She has three children ages 22 to 27, one of whom lives in Israel.

Since Friedman is musically talented, she finds CBH's renowned choir appealing.

In addition to piano playing and singing, she relishes nature, hiking and challah baking. Of the latter, she explained, "It's all in the feel of the dough. I have to make adjustments assessing local conditions. A Denver challah would need a different touch than one prepared in a hot humid climate."

Contrasting her Reconstructionist thread to Reform Judaism, Friedman said, "We have more emphasis on the Hebrew language. Also, I have a long commitment to culture and folkways by living in two civilizations. I love Shabbat and Independence Day. We all want to repair the world with tikkun olam."

Friedman ended our talk with a coincidence about old ties to Atlanta. In 1985, Rabbi Alvin Sugarman of The Temple offered her the assistant rabbi position, which she declined based on timing and her next move.

Asked if she would consider staying here after the year term, she noted, "My interim role is just that. To carry a community through transition-stages of grief, loss and reemergence, to help figure out what leader they need, the leader of their dreams." She plans to reside in Atlanta 10 days a month.