

Dear Members,

We are excited to embark on the final and most critical phase in choosing our next Mara D'atra. Last week, the search committee recommended, and the board approved, two candidates, Rabbis Daniel Fridman (Teaneck Jewish Center) and Chaim Strauchler (Shaarei Shomayim, Toronto), to be introduced to the membership next month. Each of these wonderful candidates will visit our community for a long weekend proba, giving members an opportunity to interact with him in various formal and informal settings. Most of the programming will take place in a heated tent that will be erected in the shul parking lot in early February. A detailed schedule of the proba shabbatot, which will take place on February 20–22 (R. Strauchler) and February 27–March 1 (R. Fridman), will be available shortly. We anticipate holding a membership-wide vote following Rabbi Fridman's proba.

Rabbi Daniel Fridman

Rabbi Daniel Fridman has served as Senior Rabbi of the Jewish Center of Teaneck since 2016. Before that, he served for many years on the rabbinic staff at The Jewish Center on Manhattan's Upper West Side, including as Resident Scholar from 2009-2016. Rabbi Fridman has served as S'gan Rosh Yeshiva at Torah Academy Bergen County (TABC) since 2016 after joining the faculty there in 2015. Rabbi Fridman has also been on the faculty of Lamdeinu, an adult education center in Teaneck, since 2015, where he has given, among other things, a women's Talmud shiur and classes on Parashah and Haftarah. Rabbi Fridman is currently a member of the Executive Committee of the Rabbinical Council of America.

Rabbi Fridman was raised in Teaneck, New Jersey and attended Yavneh Academy and The Frisch School. After studying in Yeshivat Har Etzion, where he learned in the shiur of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, zt"l, Rabbi Fridman attended Columbia College, where he received his B.A. in Biological Sciences. Rabbi Fridman received Semicha from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), where he studied extensively under Rabbi Michael Rosensweig. He is planning to complete Yadin Yadin Semicha at RIETS and a Master's Degree in Jewish Philosophy at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies at YU.

Rabbi Fridman is married to Dr. Chaya Fridman. They have three children: Eliana, Joey, and David.

Rabbi Chaim Strauchler

Rabbi Chaim Strauchler has served as Senior Rabbi at Shaarei Shomayim Congregation in Toronto since 2008. Before that, he served as Rabbi at Beit Chaverim Synagogue in Westport, Connecticut from 2005–2008. Rabbi Strauchler is an associate editor of Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought and is currently a vice-president of the Rabbinical Council of America and an executive member of the Rabbinical Vaad HaKashruth of Canada.

Rabbi Chaim Strauchler grew up in West Orange, NJ and attended JEC. He studied for three years under Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, zt"l, at Yeshivat Har Etzion and received his Bachelors in English Literature from Yeshiva College. Rabbi Strauchler received Semicha from RIETS, where he studied extensively under Rabbi Michael Rosensweig. He earned a Diploma in Theology and a Master's Degree in Religious Studies from Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. He also holds a Master's Degree in Biblical Studies from Bernard Revel Graduate School and is a Wexner Graduate Fellowship alumnus. As a student, Rabbi Strauchler founded the literary journal, Mima'amakim.

Rabbi Strauchler is married to Avital Strauchler (Waltuch), who grew up in Edison, NJ. They have five children: Tehilla, Adir, Atara, Zvi, and Freda.

The FAQs below address many questions that we anticipate members will have. However, please do not hesitate to approach any one of us with any questions you might have, or to email the Committee as a whole at searchcommittee2020@rinat.org.

We hope and pray that this exciting chapter in Rinat's history will be an uplifting experience for all as we welcome these two exceptional Rabbinic leaders and Torah scholars to our shul.

Chavie Acton

Elie Berman

Noam Block

Josh Goldsmith

Tully Harczstark

Avi Katz

Leora Kukin

Ari Mermelstein

Sara Prager

Passi Rosen-Bayewitz

Suzy Schwartz

Rinat Rabbinic Search Committee FAQs

Q. What was the process? How did you arrive at your recommendation?

A. The following details the process we went through:

- We began with the review of 17 independent applications from candidates across the US, Europe and Israel. Application materials included cover letters, resumes or CVs, five minute video divrei torah, and recommendation letters from YU's Rabbinic Placement Office.
- We conducted first round interviews with 10 of the 17 applicants consisting of approximately one hour conversations in which we assessed the applicants' strengths, personality and fit with Rinat.

- We then narrowed down the field to six candidates with whom we conducted in-depth interviews lasting two to three hours each. We posed meaningful, thought provoking and substantive questions on a wide variety of issues, including, among others, issues of hashkafa (both generally and relating to contemporary matters), leadership style, and psak. We additionally requested that each of these applicants submit a sample recording or video of a high level gemara shiur. After each interview, committee members engaged in detailed and thoughtful discussion of the applicant, his answers to our questions, style and comportment.
- After all of the interviews were complete, committee members discussed and deliberated over a period of many days as to the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate and suitability for Rinat. Committee members were aided during the entire process by comprehensive notes taken throughout the process by a recording secretary and review of materials either provided by the candidates or available online.
- After the discussions and deliberations, we conducted our vote to select the finalists.

Q. Did you pre-solicit any candidates or did you consider only those who applied?

A. The pool of applicants came from a number of sources. The job description was designed to and in fact did cast a wide net to help identify and attract potential applicants. The posting of the position generated a lot of interest and we received applications from Rabbis with whom we were familiar, as well as from others previously unknown to us. In addition, we did a thorough canvassing of many of the potential applicants to identify those who we believed might be appropriate for further consideration. These individual rabbis whom we identified as potentially “excellent fits” with our Shul were actively encouraged to apply.

Q. Was your final vote on the final two candidates unanimous?

A. We agreed that of our 11 committee members, the minimum number of votes each candidate would need to garner to become a finalist would be eight. Each of the finalists easily cleared that threshold.

Q. Why did you end up with only two candidates and not three?

A. There never was a mandate to deliver a specific number of recommended finalists. Throughout the search process, we consistently spoke about narrowing down the field to either two or three finalists. The candidates presented themselves in a way in which there was a natural “tiering” effect. At the end of the deliberation process, there were two candidates who distinguished themselves as being in a class unto themselves and worthy of our recommendation to be brought before the Shul membership for a proba.

Q. Why did the candidates who were not selected as finalists not make the cut?

- A. Among the final six candidates, there were other very strong candidates who were part of our final deliberations. For varying reasons, the committee concluded that they were not the right fit for our Shul at this time.

Q. What qualities stood out in these two candidates?

- A. Each one presented as possessing a winning combination of impressive intellect (each one is an outstanding Talmid Chacham, articulate and well spoken), the ability to inspire and lead our Shul, and a demonstrated genuine interest in, and capability of, building meaningful interpersonal connections and relationships with all strata of our Shul's membership.

Q. Do you really believe you have identified the best candidates for Rinat out there?

- A. Emphatically, yes! We wholeheartedly believe that our Shul will be in excellent hands, whichever of the two candidates wins the Shul's vote.

Q. Now that candidate selections for the Proba have been made, why can't the search committee be more candid and share information about what went on in the overall process, including who applied, who made it to the second round, etc.?

- A. Every member of the committee had to sign a non-disclosure agreement before the first meeting. When a rabbi applies for a new position, it puts him in a very vulnerable position with his current congregation should he not be chosen for the new role. To protect the applicants, as well as their current congregations from unnecessary concern and gossip, it is our job to maintain this confidentiality and not disclose any additional information.

Q. How did the search process work with an 11 person committee? Was it unwieldy?

- A. We had an appreciation for the substantial responsibility and the trust that the Shul membership put in our hands. Throughout the process we deliberated openly and honestly, which is not to say that we always agreed on everything. But, at no point was there disrespect or a breakdown in discourse. We believe that the 11 member composition of the committee represented, as it was designed to do, a broad cross section of the Shul's membership so that as many constituencies as reasonably possible were represented and had a voice in the process. All committee members actively participated in all phases of the process and provided valuable and thoughtful input. We are very proud of the profound respect that each member demonstrated towards the work and towards one another.

Q. What was the role of the Shul President in this process?

- A. The Shul President was an active but non-voting member of our committee. She was involved in the entire Rabbinic Search process beginning with the vetting of applications continuing through

both rounds of interviews and then ultimately, in our deliberations, but without a vote in our final tally.