

ANALYSIS OF INTERIM RABBI
ADAT REYIM RABBI SEARCH COMMITTEE
May 2018

Goal:

To conduct research regarding the various roles served by an interim rabbi, appropriate times in which an interim rabbi is utilized, and outlining benefits and drawbacks of having an interim rabbi at Adat Reyim after Rabbi Aft's retirement in 2020.

Role of an Interim Rabbi:

Interim rabbis can:

- 1) fill a gap when a permanent rabbi has not been identified due to an unsuccessful search or insufficient time to conduct a rabbi search;
- 2) help define a synagogue's mission, identify the strengths and weaknesses of the lay leadership and staff, and build trust between them; and/or
- 3) heal the emotions related to the earlier rabbi's departure, and assist the congregation in preparing for a successor rabbi.

Research Methodology:

Eileen Kugler & Rebecca Geller spent several weeks conducting online research and interviews with **11** rabbis of diverse congregations/backgrounds, **8** Jewish professionals, and **19** Jewish lay leaders who have served on their synagogue's rabbi search committees.

Over 95% of the individuals interviewed concluded that the most appropriate time for an interim rabbi is when the synagogue has an insufficient period of time to conduct a comprehensive search and an interim rabbi is needed while the search continued.

1 of the 11 rabbis interviewed recommended an interim rabbi to assist with the transition after a long-term rabbi leaves to allow the new rabbi to assess, make necessary changes, and set the new rabbi up for success. This rabbi commented: "Even if you find the perfect rabbi, you won't set them up for success if there was no interim to assess and make necessary changes first."

10 out of the 11 rabbis felt that while an interim rabbi can be helpful at times, the 2-year transition period for our search gives us ample time to conduct a listening tour with congregants to gauge priorities for a new rabbi and find stake-holders to become involved in the process so that a large part of our community has a vested interest in ensuring a successful transition to a permanent new rabbi.

In 2016, there were 23 interim rabbis in the United States. 22 of the 23 rabbis served reform synagogues, 1 served a reconstructionist synagogue.

Quotes obtained from 95% of interviewees who do not think we need an interim rabbi:

Quotes from rabbis:

- Personally, I think succession can work well without an interim.
- An interim is just treading water and you are not going to grow a congregation (if that is a priority) or get folks to invest in the synagogue (and not just financially) without a permanent rabbi in place
- While healthy departures are sad, moving directly to a new rabbi may be preferable.
- In your situation, with two years notice and a good track record in the part of the congregation having a long-term relationship with a long-tenured rabbi, it isn't critical that you have an interim. The best indication that a new rabbi will succeed is if the previous incumbent succeeded. That rabbi, after all, is only half the match - if the congregation has a history of treating a rabbi well, that culture will likely continue. Congregations with long term rabbis are most likely to continue to have long term rabbis and those who don't, have a reputation as "rabbi killers" among my colleagues

Quotes from Jewish professionals or lay leaders who have served on rabbi search committees:

- People who don't like change, won't like change twice. Also, the families with children in the bar/bat mitzvah phase will want to avoid two transitions. My daughter studied with two different rabbis for her bar mitzvah which was complicated and confusing.
- Making the decision is really challenging; making the decision TWICE, when you really don't have to, will be impossible. As for those who worry about the emotions of a transition, it's better than expending the resources (human capital, time) twice.
- We briefly considered an interim rabbi when we were running out of time in our search process, but we really wanted to avoid that because we thought it would be too much transition and we would lose members. we really needed to keep as much stability as possible through this process.

PROS & CONS OF UTILIZING AN INTERIM RABBI
Should Adat Reyim hire an interim rabbi?

What are the benefits and drawbacks of having an interim rabbi?

Pros

- Congregation doesn't have enough time – unexpected departure of current rabbi
- There have been a series of rabbis cycling through and the congregation needs help defining itself.
- The congregation has not been introspective about what it wants in a new rabbi. (An interim rabbi should be trained in this process.)
- Offers a clean break from past rabbi, particularly important after a long-standing popular rabbi. (From Interim Rabbi Don Rossoff: “I help the congregation see there are other models for a rabbi.”)

Cons

- Requires the congregation to do another search process. We don't just want a placeholder. We want someone who will help make the transition smooth. The wrong choice in an Interim could set us back.
- A lot of work getting to know the interim rabbi – for staff and for members. This will repeat with a permanent rabbi.
- The congregation is in a holding pattern while there is an interim.
 - Particularly difficult for those families with Bar/Bat Mitzvah during that year.
- Choosing an interim rabbi impacts the congregational culture and image –
 - For members who are on the periphery, it appears the leadership hasn't been effective in finding the right rabbi.
 - This may not be attractive to new members who often join for the rabbi.
- An interim rabbi may be an unneeded expense and delay. We are deeply involved in a congregational conversation about our values, starting with the rejuvenation. We understand the process of gaining insights from congregants.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION TO BOARD: Adat Reyim should NOT utilize an interim rabbi during our search process.

ADAT REYIM BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Voted to approve the search committee recommendation in July 2018.