

# Role Models

## Rationale

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Examining role models self-identified as Jewish is a positive learning tool to counter antisemitic biases which circulate through stereotypes, conspiracy theories and limited knowledge about Jews and Judaism.

In addition, role models provide inspiration to help us to reach our aspirational goals. Role models can help make personal connections between the topics explored and the learners. They may share similar values, religions, upbringings and even worldviews.

This activity introduces participants to some Jewish social activists who can be a source of inspiration for a more inclusive and democratic society. Their activism methods and also help illuminate some of the strategies which can be used to achieve social change.

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## Learning outcomes

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- To highlight a diversity of role models who self-identified as Jewish
- To counter negative biases, stereotypical notions and limited information by learning about past and present activists in the Jewish community
- To analyse what motivated them to act and identify some social change strategies
- To reflect on the role that Judaism may have had in driving the role models' activist goals or methods

## Requirements

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Materials: Sheets Role Model Profile printouts for every participant

Flip charts

Markers

Duration: 1 ½ hours

## CULTURAL AWARENESS

## Role Models

### Directions

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1. In advance of the activity, write on the Flip Chart the following questions:
  - What qualities characterized this person?
  - How did s/he relate to Judaism/Jewish community?
  - What needs motivated/drove them to action?
  - What kind of activism did s/he engage in?
  - What tools/tactics did they use to change/evolve the situation to address the need?
2. Explain the rationale of the activity to the participants.
3. Divide them in small groups so that each group can examine one role model profile.
4. After approximately 20 minutes, ask each group to elect one person to share about the role model they examined. Ask the presenter to introduce their person as though they are introducing themselves, saying "I am...". Encourage them to think dramatically and not simply read the profile to the group.
5. After each presentation is made, invite the group to ask any questions they have for this person. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that the "actor/ presenter" and the group as a whole may not have the answers at that time, but it is interesting to note the questions anyhow.
6. Encourage participants to look for further information after the training. Website links at the bottom of each profile provide more on each role model. Copies of the profiles from the other groups can also be distributed.
7. Engage the group in a conversation using the following questions.

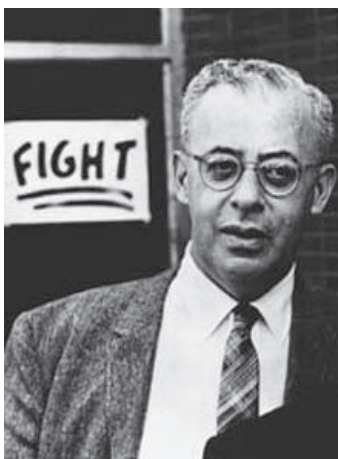
### Discussion questions

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1. Are there any particular profiles from those that we looked at that inspire you more? Why?
2. What kind of change were they acting for?
3. Did you recognize yourself in any of these people?
4. Did the role models do Jewish activism? What makes activism Jewish?
5. Are there other Jewish activist role models that you can tell us about?
6. What have you learned from this activity?

## Role Models

### Saul Alinsky



Saul Alinsky was an agnostic Jew for whom religion of any kind held very little importance and little relation to the focus of his life's work: the struggle for economic and social justice, for human dignity and human rights, and for the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor and downtrodden. His methods have long been considered controversial and it is perhaps for this reason that the Jewish world has never trumpeted its connection to the late Saul Alinsky, father of modern community organizing. Still, when asked what his religion or ethnicity was, he would say he is Jewish.

Born to Russian-Jewish parents in Chicago in 1909, Saul Alinsky was a Communist/ Marxist sympathizer who helped establish the tactics of confrontation—that have been central to revolutionary political movements in the United States in recent decades. Saul Alinsky had a colourful history. While studying criminology as a graduate student at the University of Chicago, he became friendly with Al Capone and his mobsters.

Ryan Lizza, senior editor of *The New Republic*, offers a glimpse into Alinsky's personality: "Charming and self-absorbed, Alinsky would entertain friends with stories—some true, many embellished—from his mob days for decades afterward. He was profane, outspoken, and narcissistic, always the center of attention despite his tweedy, academic look and thick, horn-rimmed glasses."

Despite these characteristics, according to Lizza, "Alinsky was deeply influenced by the great social science insight of his times, one developed by his professors at Chicago: that the pathologies of the urban poor were not hereditary but environmental.

This idea, that people could change their lives by changing their surroundings, led him to take an obscure social science phrase—'the community organisation'—and turn it into, in the words of Alinsky biographer Sanford Horwitt, 'something controversial, important, even romantic.'"

He identified a set of specific rules for ordinary citizens to follow – "The 12 rules for radicals", and tactics for them to employ, as a means of gaining public power. His motto was: "The most effective means are whatever will achieve the desired results."

In the late 1930s, Saul Alinsky earned a reputation as a master organizer of the poor when he organized the "Back of the Yards" area in Chicago, an industrial and residential, ethnic minority neighbourhood on the Southwest Side of the city. In 1940, Alinsky established the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), through which he and his staff expanded his methods of community organizing throughout the United States.

IAF remains an active entity to this day, with national headquarters located in Chicago and affiliates in the District of Columbia, twenty-one separate states, and three foreign countries (Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom).

Further information:

[www.discoverthenetworks.org/individualProfile.asp?indid=2314](http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/individualProfile.asp?indid=2314)

[http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new\\_york/saul\\_alinskys\\_moment\\_0](http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new_york/saul_alinskys_moment_0)

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However, by the late 1960s, the Black Power movement drove Alinsky and his organizing crusades out of the African-American neighbourhoods in the projects, leaving him no choice but to shift his focus to predominantly white, middle-class communities and establish the Citizens Action Programme (CAP) in 1970. As Stanley Kurtz writes in his 2010 book *Radical in Chief*, “Alinsky was...convinced that largescale socialist transformation would require an alliance between the struggling middle class and the poor. The key to radical social change, Alinsky thought, was to turn the wrath of America’s middle class against large corporations.” “[W]e are concerned,” Alinsky elaborated, “with how to create mass organisations to seize power and give it to the people; to realize the democratic dream of equality, justice, peace, cooperation, equal and full opportunities for education, full and useful employment, health, and the creation of those circumstances in which men have the chance to live by the values that give meaning to life. We are talking about a mass power organisation which will change the world ... This means revolution.”

Alinsky’s tactics were often unorthodox. In *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky wrote that “the job of the organizer is to manoeuvre and bait the establishment so that it will publicly attack him as a ‘dangerous enemy,’” thus generating public attention, validating the cause and increasing the credentials of the organizer.

## Rachel Azaria

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After 10 years working among activists promoting environmentalism and Jewish law concerning women’s rights, Rachel Azaria, a Jewish politician, established the Yerushalmim political party in Jerusalem in 2008. Now as the councilwoman representing the party, she promotes a pluralistic and diverse future for Jerusalem and primarily represents the religious and secular youth of Jerusalem. Azaria has led many campaigns for pluralism in Jerusalem, such as the campaign against segregation of women in the public sphere as well as the Kosher restaurants revolt against the Rabbinat certification. Azaria represented young families in the “Imahot Protest” in Jerusalem in the summer of 2011, in which she fought to bring free education to children ages three and up, a right that holds personal value as she has four children of her own.

While Azaria never planned on getting into politics, she now finds herself firmly ensconced in the field. Perhaps this is due to her firm belief that: “you can’t just give up on Jerusalem; it’s not an option.” She switched her title from Deputy Mayor to a member of a new party in the Knesset, formed in November 2015 by former Likud minister, Moshe Kahlon. Among her current goals are her plans to upgrade playgrounds with better equipment, get Jerusalem’s sanitation trucks to collect garbage at night, create an adequate number of preschools for the capital’s kids, ensure that all train platforms offer shade to waiting passengers, create bike stands and easy access for commuters, etc, all in addition to her fight against gender segregation, empowering secular Jerusalemites and changing the face of urban planning.

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Having had an Orthodox upbringing, Azaria now works to encourage a better relationship between secular and Orthodox Jerusalemites. She has recently held successful secular Shabbat events about which she says: “When we started the Shabbat events for secular families, everyone was amazed that so many people showed up. They didn’t think there was anyone like them in the city. It has to do with the way you perceive yourself, and in Jerusalem, it’s about the way the non-Orthodox are starting to perceive themselves as they really are. Secular Jerusalemites had nothing to do in this city on Shabbat and we have to let them have what they need. Jerusalem was always a city filled with social activism, but it’s become even more intense over the past few years. That’s what we do in Jerusalem. There is power in the system. I spent a decade in social change organisations and four years on the city

council and I got more done in my first year in the city council than in the previous decade. In addition to religious and secular tolerance, Azaria works tirelessly against the culturally entrenched sexism that plagues Jerusalem. She is credited with bringing the now often used term, *hadarat nashim*—exclusion of women—from the women’s studies textbooks to the frontlines of Israeli society. Recently, for example, she fought against religious extremism in order to keep images of women in advertisements on the sides of Jerusalem’s buses. However, the bus company Egged refused to resolve

the situation and instead avoided the issue all-together by removing all images of humans from bus advertisements. According to Azaria, this is because “there’s a very strong link between Egged and the radical ultra-Orthodox, a lot of behind the-scenes work. Now they’re using that power for segregation and the removal of women from the public sphere.”

Azaria has fought to battle sexism on all fronts, particularly calling to question religious extremism. “For a while, the Israeli public wrote of the Rabbanut, relegated its relevancy to the religious and ultra-orthodox sectors alone. However, many Israelis are coming to the realization that the Chief Rabbinate significantly affects all our lives through marriage, divorce, burial, kashrut, Shabbat, and more. Someone is making concrete decisions, and we have absolved ourselves of responsibility for ensuring that someone who shares our values be involved. It should come as no surprise that the Chief Rabbis don’t really reflect the majority of Israelis. After all, they are largely elected by other ultra-orthodox rabbis, with almost no female representatives. It is perfectly logical that the newly elected Chief Rabbis reflect the Haredi –strictly Orthodox - world. That’s just how it’s done.

“They seem to fear the effect that women would have over the process. At the same time, the female, Zionist, religious world is undergoing a true feminist revolution, marked by struggles and changes in consciousness and values...We are re-defining the system, the power relations, and the internal dynamics. I have no doubt that if women were included in the Rabbanut’s electoral body, the end result would have been completely different.”

Azaria’s social efforts and powerful rhetoric distinguish her as a modern and progressive Jewish politician and a champion of a more tolerant future for Jerusalem.

### Further information

[www.jewishpress.com/sections/jewess-press/impact-womenhistory/rachelazaria-yerushalmimjerusalem/2014/02/07/](http://www.jewishpress.com/sections/jewess-press/impact-womenhistory/rachelazaria-yerushalmimjerusalem/2014/02/07/)

<http://blogs.forward.com/sisterhoodblog/190645/rachel-azariadeputy-mayor-ofholy-town/>

<http://www.voiceofisrael.com/meetjerusalem-deputymayor-knessetcandidate-rachelazaria/>

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## Dr Abraham Joshua Heschel



Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel was born in 1907 in Warsaw, Poland to a devout Jewish family and was the namesake and descendent of two preeminent rabbis in Eastern Europe. He received his PhD in 1933 from the University of Berlin and a liberal rabbinic ordination from the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in 1934.

In 1938, he was arrested by the Gestapo and deported back to Poland where he taught at the University of Warsaw. With the help of a friend, he obtained a visa to go to London, narrowly missing the German invasion of Poland by six months. His family was not so lucky. Heschel's sister Esther was killed in a German bombing. His mother was murdered by the Nazis, and two other sisters, Gittel and Devorah, died in Nazi concentration camps. Heschel would never again return to Poland or Germany. His experience during the Holocaust would be a major influence on his life's work.

He had seen first-hand what racism and apathy could do, and how violence towards human beings often began with the abuse of language. Hitler, he would later say, did not come to power with tanks and machine guns, but with words. Despite the tragedies he had witnessed Heschel would never blame God. According to Father Daniel Berrigan, who knew Heschel well: "I was seeing someone who was totally immersed in his own religious tradition and was at the same time charmingly ecumenical...and open to others...The two went together...if you were a person of deep faith, you were open to others, and you didn't draw lines or boundaries or say we're inside the circle and others are out."

It was upon moving to New York City in the mid-1940s that Dr. Heschel would become a prominent social activist. He campaigned for the rights of Jews in the Soviet Union, and at the Vatican Council II, as representative of American Jews, Heschel persuaded the Roman Catholic Church to eliminate or modify passages in its liturgy that demeaned the Jews or referred to an expected conversion to Christianity. He published theological works in the 1950s that argued that religious experience is a fundamentally human impulse, not just a Jewish one. He believed that no religious community could claim a monopoly on religious truth.

In his opening address at the National Conference on Religion and Race in Chicago on 14 January 1963, at which Martin Luther King Jr. was also a featured speaker, Heschel maintained that Americans had the chance to find redemption through their efforts to combat racism: "Seen in the light of our religious tradition, the Negro problem is God's gift to America, the test of our integrity, a magnificent spiritual opportunity." Heschel also viewed ecumenism as the necessary means to attack this social ill.

A social consciousness infused with an ecumenical approach brought Heschel and King together again on 19 November 1963, when both men addressed the United Synagogue of America's Golden Jubilee Convention in New York. King expressed his deep accord with Heschel's cause—which was to stand against the Soviet Union's treatment of its Jewish population—by restating his own view that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." King stated that he

## Further information

<http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/heschelreligion-and-racespeech-text/>

<http://pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2008/01/18/january-18-2008-abraham-joshuaheschel/1789/>

[http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about\\_king/encyclopedia/heschel\\_abraham.htm](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/heschel_abraham.htm)



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could not neglect the plight of his “brothers and sisters who happen to be Jews in Soviet Russia.” In March 1965, Heschel responded to King’s call for religious leaders to join the Alabama voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery march for voting rights. The march was spiritually fulfilling for Heschel, and he recalled feeling like his “legs were praying” as he walked next to King.

Dr. Heschel would remain devout to his religion until his death in 1972. “My being Jewish,” he once said, “is so sacred to me that I am ready to die for it.” His notable activism in the fight for civil rights went hand-in-hand with his religion. As he once said, “God is either the father of all men or of no man, and the idea of judging a person in terms of black or brown or white is an eye disease.”

## Ruth Messinger



Ruth Messinger is a New Yorker through and through. She “[walks] fast, [talks] fast, [thinks] fast and, most importantly, [stands] up fast when the best interests of [her] city are being sold down the river.” Born in 1940 on the Upper West Side, Messinger worked tirelessly throughout the 1990s in the public service in New York City to fight for women’s and minority rights.

During her years as the Manhattan Borough President, Messinger noted that, while there was an increase in the percentage of women that held such positions, there was still a distinctive discrimination in the financial support of political donors as well as the treatment of herself by colleagues. One of her colleagues would ask “all sorts of questions and then, at the end of our conversation, when I push for a response, says, ‘Of course you can have a hearing. I can never say no to a pretty girl.’”

She became the first woman to get the Democratic Party’s nomination for the mayoral race in 1997, which she lost to Rudy Giuliani. However, her role in the public sphere was far from over. She became the President and Executive Director of the American Jewish World Service (AJWS), an organisation which dedicates itself on fulfilling “Judaism’s imperative to pursue justice.” Through this organisation she has worked to alleviate poverty, hunger and disease in the developing world.

Messinger is well known for her leadership in the movement to end genocide in Darfur and her efforts to give voice to women and LGBT communities in the developing world.

She has helped mobilize faith-based communities throughout the U.S. to speak out on the global plight of marginalized people. She served on the Obama administration’s Task Force on Global Poverty and Development and now sits on the State Department’s Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group. Heading successful campaigns for human rights, Ruth Messinger works for the betterment of conditions for all people through the Jewish values instilled in her from a young age. “The expression ‘Never again,’” Messinger says, “cannot be reserved

### Further information

[http://ajws.org/who\\_we\\_are/executive\\_team/ruthmessinger.html](http://ajws.org/who_we_are/executive_team/ruthmessinger.html)

<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/messingerruth>

<http://www.miriamscup.com/MessingerBiog.htm>

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only for Jews.” Now in her 70s, she still fights inequality through AJWS as well as through the many NGOs she is active in, including Surprise Lake Camp, of which she is President. It is little surprise then that Ruth Messinger has been named numerous times as one of the 50 most influential Jews of the Year by Forward newspaper.

## Anita Diamant

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Anita Diamant was born in 1951, in Brooklyn, NY, the daughter of two Holocaust survivors who met as interned refugees in Switzerland. She had moved many times across the United States by the time she settled in Boston, Massachusetts where she received her first job writing as a journalist. During her time in Boston, she wrote for many different magazines including Equal Times, an alternative women's weekly and the Boston Phoenix where she worked as the assistant to the editor. It was while working for an article on Jewish Renewal for the Boston Phoenix that she met Rabbi Laurence Kushner, who would convert Diamant's husband—then, fiancé—Jim. It was through her husband's conversion and learning of the Jewish faith that Diamant felt a renewal of interest in her religion. She proceeded to write many non-fiction Jewish books that were

linked to her own experience in the faith: *Living a Jewish Life*; *The New Jewish Baby Book*; *Choosing a Jewish Life: A Handbook for People Converting to Judaism*; *Saying Kaddish: How to Mourn as a Jew*; *How to Be a Jewish Parent: A Practical Handbook for Family Life*; and the *New Jewish Wedding-Revised and Updated*.

Anita Diamant has gained notice, however, from her novels. In 1997, she published a New York Times bestseller in which she gave voice to one of the silent female figures in the Bible, Dinah. *The Red Tent* was adapted into a two-part miniseries by Lifetime, which was released in December 2014. Her other novels also have links to Judaism. *Good Harbor*, published in 2001, is a character reflection of her own experience as a mother and wife within the secular Jewish community. It explores the dynamics of being born into the faith as well as being a convert. Her most recent novel, *The Boston Girl*, depicts a fictional account of a girl growing up at the turn of the 20th century to strict Russian Jewish immigrants and the dynamics that arose because of it.

When Anita Diamant is not writing, she is the founding president of MayyimHayyim: Living Water Community Mikveh and Education Center, a community-based ritual bath in Newton, Massachusetts. Mikveh has a rich history in the Jewish culture and Diamant wants to bring resurgence to the tradition. At MayyimHayyim, people are welcome to immerse to commemorate a wide variety of transitions and occasions: prior to reading Torah for the first time, before or after surgery, on the occasion of being ordained a rabbi, or becoming a grandparent, or reaching the age of 40, or 50, or 85. Regarding Mikveh, Diamant has said, “We wanted a return to the beautiful roots of the Mikveh—of water as a source of renewal purification and transformation, to open the door wide and make it welcoming.”

## Further information

<http://www.thejcc.com/arts/artsinterviews/28718/interview-anitadiamant>

[http://www.interfaithfamily.com/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/popular\\_culture/Interview\\_with\\_Anita\\_Diamant\\_Author\\_of\\_Good\\_Harbor.shtml](http://www.interfaithfamily.com/arts_and_entertainment/popular_culture/Interview_with_Anita_Diamant_Author_of_Good_Harbor.shtml)

<http://anitadiamant.com/bio/biography/>



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### April Baskin

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April Baskin was raised in Sacramento, CA by a Jewish mother and converted African-American father. Baskin grew up in the Reformist movement and became very active in social action from a very early age. She studied Sociology at Tifs University and served as the President of the Jewish Multiracial Network from 2010 to 2013. Later, she would work at the Interfaith Family from 2014 to 2015.

In 2015 she joined the Union of Reform Judaism as president of Audacious Hospitality, a title that reflects the URJ's commitment to advancing the rights and inclusion of marginalized Jews in the community. She has been a leader activist at the Steering Committee and a featured speaker at the National 2019 Women's March and the designer and facilitator of the URJ's JewV'Nation

Fellowship, a leadership program of action and healing for Jews of Color and Jews committed to advancing inclusion.

April also is the former director of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, an umbrella group of 64 American organizations where she developed 10 principles connected to the values laid in the Pirke Avot, Jewish ethics compilation.

She is also the creator of Joyous Justice, her consultant platform where she focuses on helping Jewish organizations address racial issues and become more inclusive with Jews of colour. Currently based in Senegal, she works all over the world. Particularly after the killing of George Floyd, she has experienced a rise in the demand for racial justice work in the Jewish community, and she hopes this interest to continue. She states:

"As someone on the inside of this conversation, I need my fellow Jews to show up," Baskin added. "In honor of Jews across history who have been doing this work, in honor of Heschel, I implore you to attach some of that urgency and commitment to something that is going to live beyond this moment."

#### Further information

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/baskin-april>

<https://joyousjustice.com/about-april>

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## Abby Stein

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Abby Stein is one of the most well-known transgender activists, blogger, model, writer, and rabbi, the first openly transgender woman raised in a Hasidic community, and a direct descendent of the Hasidic founder, Baal Shem Tov.

Stein was born in 1991 in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, in New York City, she was the sixth son of a family of thirteen children. Her family is of Polish and Ukrainian/ Romanian, Serbian, and Israeli descent. She grew up speaking Yiddish and Hebrew, in a community highly segregated by gender. She was ordained as a rabbi in 2011. One year later, she left the Hasidic community with the help of a non-profit called Footsteps.

In November 2015, Stein made headlines when she came out on her blog as transgender and started her physical transition, being featured in major magazines and newspapers, and on international tv networks. She explains that she experienced her transition with less hate from other people than she would have expected.

Stein published her first book: *Becoming Eve: My Journey from Ultra-Orthodox Rabbi to Transgender Woman*, in 2019, describing memories and transition. Her second book will be published in 2023 titled: *Sources of Pride*, an anthology of Jewish texts on "Identity, Gender, Sexuality, and Inclusivity, in Jewish Texts.

After coming out as a trans-Jewish woman, she becomes an activist supporting trans people from orthodox backgrounds, creating online support for communities. In 2018, Stein co-founded the so-called sacred space: a feminist multi-faith and inclusive space for self-identified women and non-binary people of all faith traditions, including former Mormon feminist and human rights lawyer Kate Kelly, and Baptist preacher Eboni Mashall.

In early 2019, Stein joined the Women's March leadership, as a member of the 2019 Steering Committee stating, "expressed solidarity with other Jewish women who are supporting the march on grounds that it has emerged as an important and growing coalition of marginalized groups, including Jews, African Americans, Hispanics, and LGBT people".

## Further information

<https://www.westsidespirit.com/voices/the-journey-of-abby-stein-BY117740>

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### Gracia Mendes Nasi

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Gracia Mendes Nasi was a visionary Shipping Magnate who helped Jews find safe places to live. Gracia was born eighteen years before 1492 when Spain spelled the vast majority of its Jews Her family fled to Portugal. However, once in Portugal, the country was also forced to convert to Catholicism.

In Public, Gracia's family was forced to celebrate Christian holidays and attend Sunday Church, and at home, they secretly practiced Judaism. Gracia was a very well-educated and smart girl and she got married to a wealthy trader from another well-known and respected Converso family. He died ten years after their marriage and left her with half of his international business. Life became very hard for conversos in Portugal, who were persecuted by the Inquisition despite their conversion to Catholicism. Gracia fled north to Antwerp, where she used her company business contacts to create a fund and create an escape network helping thousands of Jews to leave Spain and Portugal.

Considered one of the world's wealthiest women, Gracia became richer when his brother died, acquiring his brother's husband's other half of the company. She was a businesswoman, and due to the continued persecution of conversos, she transferred the family assets to Italy, when she could finally live openly as a Jew. There, she became very well-known for her philanthropic work, supporting Jews who have fled the inquisition, and people started calling her Doña (lady in Spanish). However, as antisemitism started growing in Italy, she transferred again her family assets to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. There she helped use her fortune to open yeshivas, libraries, synagogues, and charities for her fellow Jews.

One century, before the political activist Theodor Herzl began to promote the establishment of the Jewish state, Garcia negotiated an agreement with the Sultan Suleiman granting her family the ruins of Tiberias to develop a center for Jewish Life, trade, and learning. She funded the rebuilding of a Jewish settlement. Unfortunately, after the Sultan died the agreement was revoked.

In 2010 concede a state medal honoring the 500th anniversary of her birth.

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## Anetta Kahane

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Anetta Kahane is a German left-wing journalist, author and activist against antisemitism, racism and right-wing extremism. Her parents were secular Jews who fled from Nazi Germany in 1933. Like other Holocaust survivors her parents did not speak about their experience of persecution, but their psychological traumas influenced Kahane. In school Kahane was open about her Judaism, against her parents' will.

From 1988 Kahane was active in the civil rights movement of the German Democratic Republic opposition, and supported foreigners and minorities. In 1990 she was appointed to be the first and last official for foreigners of the East Berlin Senate. After witnessing street violence and attacks on Sinti, Romani people, Africans and Vietnamese, she engaged constantly against daily racism. She pressured the city leadership to transform former military barracks into housing for eastern European migrants and refugees.

Since 1989 Kahane has initiated many associations for issues of foreigners, and became a respected expert on this topic. Responding to increased racist violence in the former East Germany, in 1998 Kahane initiated the Amadeu Antonio Foundation as an organised effort to combat xenophobia, antisemitism and right-wing extremism. In 2002 she was awarded the Moses Mendelssohn prize of the state of Berlin for her work. In July 2015, she openly supported the suggestion of the Minister-President of Baden-Württemberg Winfried Kretschmann to send more refugees to the new states of Germany because, according to her, the number of people of color is too low there. In December 2015, she followed an invitation of the German Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection to take part in a task force against hate speech on social media.

## Simone Veil

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Simone Jacob was born in 1927 to a Jewish family in Nice, France. She was sent to the Nazi concentration camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau and finally Bergen-Belsen. While she and her two sisters survived, her parents and brother died in the camps. She returned to Paris in May 1945 and began her studies in law and political science.

She joined Giscard d'Estaing's government as Minister for Health. Soon after her appointment, she fought a bitter battle to legalise abortion in France and only succeeded when the opposition in the national assembly joined her cause to push through the law in 1975. It was seen as a significant achievement and the law would become widely known as the 'Veil law'. As her political career in France progressed, she became more committed to the idea of a Europe in which such atrocities could never happen again. Veil was duly elected to the European Parliament, which chose her as its President, thus becoming

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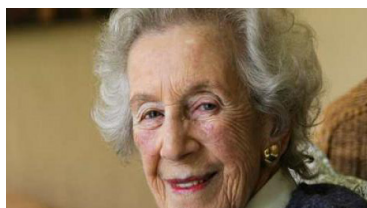
leader of the first directly elected European Parliament and the first woman at the head of any EU institution. She also served as chair of the legal affairs committee and as a member of the environment, political affairs, foreign affairs and security committees, and the subcommittee on human rights. She won the Charlemagne Prize in 1981, the award given to honour a person's contributions to European unity.

From 2001 to 2007 she served as the first president of the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah.

When Veil was elected to the Académie Française in 2008, one of only a handful of women to receive such an honour, she had three things engraved on the ceremonial sword that is crafted for each member of the academy. These were: her Auschwitz tattoo number, 78651; the motto of the French Republic, 'Liberty Equality, Fraternity'; and the European Union motto, 'United in Diversity'.

## Helen Suzman

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She was born in South Africa in 1917, the daughter of two Lithuanian immigrants. She attended university and earned her Bachelor of Commerce degree, going on to become a lecturer in economic history. When the National Party came to power in 1948, she became more active in politics and in 1953 she won a position as a Member of Parliament.

During her thirty-six years as a parliamentarian, she fought against the hostile apartheid system and those who sought to maintain it and concerned herself with apartheid's erosion of civil liberties and violations of human rights. Additionally, she sought to abolish capital punishment and gender discrimination. Suzman's achievements made her a powerful symbol of opposition in South Africa and across the world. She remained active in politics even after her retirement, until her death in 2009.

When Helen Suzman retired from politics in 1989, she had been a member of the South African Parliament for thirty-six years, during which time she had tirelessly opposed the National Party government and its apartheid policies. For thirteen of those years (1961–1974) she was the only member of the Progressive Party, resisting the apartheid government against great odds. Suzman's courage, dedication, and great ability in the parliamentary opposition to apartheid won her worldwide recognition. She had fought in and out of parliament for social and political justice and has twice been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

She was a consummate parliamentarian, never losing an opportunity to speak, to put questions and to intercede on behalf of those who were caught up in the merciless apartheid system. Although Helen Suzman bore an enormously heavy parliamentary burden, she never failed as far as possible to investigate the often-tragic consequences of apartheid legislation. While Helen Suzman's main concern lay with apartheid's erosion of civil liberties and the rule of law, and its appalling human costs, she also concerned herself with the abolition of capital punishment and gender discrimination, particularly as it affected African women whose status in customary law was that of "perpetual minors."



## HANDOUT

## Role Models

Helen Suzman grew up in a non-observant home although her father contributed to Jewish charities. Her sense of Jewishness has an ethnic rather than a religious base and, while not an ardent Zionist herself in the sense of wanting to live in Israel, she totally supported the existence of the State of Israel. She believed in the Jewish value of the individual assuming responsibility for the Jewish community at large.

### Regina Jonas

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Regina Jonas longed to become a rabbi for most of her life but struggled with the restrictions against women in higher education and rabbinical studies. Regina Jonas was born in Berlin on August 3, 1902, the daughter of Wolf and Sara Jonas. She grew up in the Scheunenviertel, a poor, mostly Jewish, neighborhood.

Her father, a merchant who died of tuberculosis in 1913, was probably her first teacher. Early on, Regina Jonas felt her rabbinic vocation. Her passion for Jewish history, Bible, and Hebrew was apparent even in high school, where fellow pupils recall her talking about becoming a rabbi. Her 1930 thesis argued that there was no law forbidding women to become rabbis and that there were many biblical and historical examples of women teaching and arbitrating Jewish law.

Despite her professors' praise for her thesis, Jonas was only granted a teaching degree. Jonas was the only woman who hoped to be ordained as a rabbi. All her fellow women students were studying for an academic teacher's degree. She continued to lobby for ordination, which she achieved in 1935. Jonas's final thesis dealt with the topic "May a woman hold rabbinic office?" Submitted in June 1930, this paper is the first known attempt to find a halakhic basis for the ordination of women. On the opening page of her thesis, Jonas writes: "I personally love this profession and, if ever possible, I also want to practice it."

On the last page she concludes: "Almost nothing halakhically but prejudice and lack of familiarity stand against women holding rabbinic office." In Jonas's opinion, women are especially fit to be rabbis, since "female qualities" such as compassion, social skills, psychological intuition, and accessibility to the young are essential prerequisites for the rabbinate.

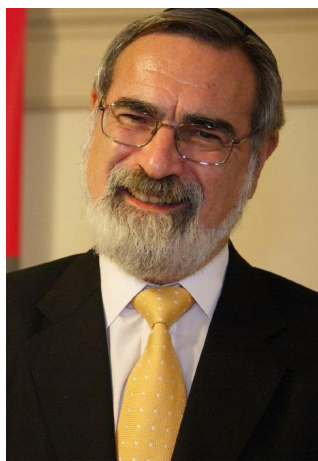
Therefore, she argues, female rabbis are "a cultural necessity." She worked as a pastoral counselor at the Jewish Hospital in Berlin and preached at liberal synagogues as the deportations of rabbis began. Even after her deportation to Theresienstadt she continued to preach, teach, and inspire her fellow inmates until her final deportation to Auschwitz.

Regina Jonas, the first woman to be ordained as a rabbi, was killed in Auschwitz in October 1944. From 1942 to 1944 she performed rabbinical functions in Theresienstadt. Survivors report that her sermons and her pastoral work were especially uplifting and encouraging.



## Role Models

### Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks



#### “A Judaism Engaged with the World” - Torah v’Chokhma

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, inspiring intellectual and spiritual leader, left an indelible mark on the world through his profound insights, admirable writings, and remarkable contributions to interfaith dialogue. Born on March 1948 and passed away in November 2020, Rabbi Sacks was a renowned British Orthodox rabbi, philosopher, and theologian who served as the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 to 2013.

While a student at Cambridge, he traveled to New York City, where he met with rabbis Joseph Soloveitchik and Menachem Mendel Schneerson (known to many as the Lubavitcher Rebbe or simply the Rebbe) to discuss a variety of issues relating to religion, faith, and philosophy. He later wrote, “Rabbi Soloveitchik had challenged me to think, Rabbi Schneerson had challenged me to lead”. Sacks subsequently continued his postgraduate studies at New College, Oxford and King’s College London, completing a PhD at the University of London. He received his rabbinic ordination from the London School of Jewish Studies and London’s Etz Chaim Yeshiva. After stepping down as Chief Rabbi, in addition to his international traveling and speaking engagements and prolific writing, Rabbi Sacks taught at New York University and at King’s College London.

Rabbi Sacks was widely respected for his ability to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. He had a unique talent for articulating complex Jewish teachings in a way that it resonated with both a religious audience and the broader public. His work includes books, articles and speeches that explored ethics, faith, leadership, and societal challenges.

The favoured phrase of Rabbi Sacks was Torah vehokhma (Torah v’Chokhma), ‘Torah and Wisdom’. “Torah, for Jonathan Sacks, represents the particularistic, inherited teachings of Judaism, while hokhma (wisdom) refers to the universal realm of the sciences and humanities. “Chokmah is the truth we discover; Torah is the truth we inherit. Chokmah is the universal language of humankind; Torah is the specific heritage of Israel [...]. Chokmah tells us what is; Torah tells us what ought to be.”

Rabbi Sack’s legacy also included the exploration of the concept of “covenant”, a central theme in Judaism. He argued that societies function best when individuals see themselves as part of a shared covenant that transcends individual interests. This idea had implications not only for religious communities but also for society in general. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks was a brilliant mind and a dedicated bridge-builder between faiths and cultures.

#### Further information

Goldman, Ari L. (9 November 2020). “Jonathan Sacks, the U.K.’s Inclusive Former Chief Rabbi, Dies at 72”. *The New York Times*.

Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2009), p.221