

THE 2017 GOLDEN HANASSI FELLOWS

Established by Suzanne and John Golden, Vice Chair, Board of Governors, and the Golden Family Foundation, this innovative program has placed 17 of our Israeli rabbinical students and recently ordained Israeli rabbis in North American Reform congregations for a residency that is mentored by leading North American Reform rabbis. “As we move farther away from generations with shared experiences, Israeli and American Jews need to understand more about each other,” states John Golden. “We are pleased that the Hanassi Fellowships enable our Israeli rabbinical students to be more deeply exposed to Reform Jewry in North America.” Upon their return to Israel, the Fellows are better able to engage Israelis who are seeking spiritual meaning.

Shani Ben Or, Golden Hanassi Fellow at Central Synagogue, New York City, stated: “I am learning how to be both a rabbi and a cantor, mentored by Rabbi Cantor Angela Buchdahl '99, '01 and her team. I work with *b'nai mitzvah* kids, lead Shabbat services, teach *parashat hashavua* classes, and rotate among the clergy as needed. I appreciate the open spirit of experimentation and the development toward formal structure. I am learning how to be a pioneer and how rabbis can incorporate music into their rabbinate.

Music is a means of transformation, breaking barriers, and molding relationships. Israel needs a bit of a push to advance in this arena.”

Yael Vargon, Golden Hanassi Fellow at Woodlands Community Temple, White Plains, NY, said: “I am inspired by how Rabbi Billy Dreskin '87 establishes long term, meaningful relationships with his congregants, providing spiritual guidance for a lifetime. I am learning new ways to bring Judaism into Israelis' lives beyond a singular life cycle moment and how to deepen their engagement by meeting them where they are, within and beyond the synagogue. Bringing Jewish experiences to Starbucks, people's homes, or the mall is something we should do in Israel, where the public sphere is dominated by the Orthodox. We can transform it by making it more liberal.”

Rabbi Aaron Panken (center) with 2017 Golden Hanassi Fellows: (from left) Shlomo Zagman (Temple Sholom of West Essex, Cedar Grove, NJ), Shani Ben Or (Central Synagogue, New York City), Rachel Druck (Larchmont Temple, Larchmont, NY), Yael Vargon (Woodlands Community Temple, White Plains, NY), Olya Weinstein (Temple Israel of New Rochelle, NY), and Binyamin Minich (Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester, Chappaqua, NY).

