

America's Top 50 Rabbis

In their spare time, three good friends got together over a labor of love: ranking the country's rabbis.

April 2, 2007 issue - Last fall, Sony Pictures CEO and Chairman Michael Lynton got together with his good friends and fellow power brokers Gary Ginsberg, of Newscorp., and Jay Sanderson, of JTN Productions and started working on a list of the 50 most influential rabbis in America. They had a scoring system: Are the rabbis known nationally/internationally? (20 points.) Do they have a media presence? (10 points.) Are they leaders within their communities? (10 points.) Are they considered leaders in Judaism or their movements? (10 points.) Size of their constituency? (10 points.) Do they have political/social influence? (20 points.) Have they made an impact on Judaism in their career? (10 points.) Have they made a "greater" impact? (10 points.) This system, though helpful, is far from scientific; the men revised and rejiggered their list for months, and all three concede that the result is subjective. Here, then, published for the first time, the top 50 rabbis in America:

The List: Choosing the Chosen

1. Marvin Hier (Orthodox)

Hier is one phone call away from almost every world leader, journalist and Hollywood studio head. He is the dean and founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, the Museum of Tolerance and Moriah Films.

2. Yehuda Krinsky (Lubavitch)

Krinsky has truly built a *shul* on every corner and brought the Chabad movement mainstream prominence. He is the leader of Chabad and its CEO.

3. Uri D. Herscher (Reform)

Herscher has built arguably America's most culturally relevant Jewish institution and his passion has already touched hundreds of thousands of Jews and non-Jews of all ages. He is the founding president and CEO of the Skirball Cultural Center.

4. Yehuda Berg (Orthodox)

Berg has made wearing the red string a popular phenomenon in America and around the world and turned on everyone from Madonna to club-hopping young Jews to the power of the Kabbalah. He is an author and spiritual adviser at the Kabbalah Centre.

5. Harold Kushner (Conservative)

Kushner has written nine inspirational books including the international best seller that helped millions grapple with "When Bad Things Happen to Good People." He is one of America's truly gifted speakers and teachers.

6. David Ellenson (Reform)

Ellenson is a trailblazer committed to bringing this generation's Reform Jewish rabbis and teachers closer to traditional Judaism. He is the president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

7. Robert Wexler (Conservative)

Wexler has re-envisioned Jewish education and created the largest Jewish continuing-education program in America while building a premier rabbinical school and liberal arts college. He is the president of the University of Judaism.

8. Irwin Kula (Conservative)

Kula is committed to "taking Jewish public" and reshaping America's spiritual landscape. He is the copresident of CLAL, a public television host and the author of "Yearnings: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life."

9. Shmuley Boteach (Orthodox)

Boteach has been called "the most famous rabbi in America" and his 17 books, TLC television series and celebrity friends help make that case. His book "Kosher Sex" introduced this Hasidic rabbi as a cultural phenomena.

10. M. Bruce Lustig (Reform)

Each year on Yom Kippur, Lustig has an audience that even the president of the United States would envy. He is the rabbi of Washington Hebrew Congregation, the largest congregation in Washington, D.C.

11. Peter J. Rubinstein (Reform)

Rubinstein is the spiritual leader of New York's Central Synagogue.

12. Eric Yoffie (Reform)

Yoffie is the president of the Union of Reform Judaism.

13. Harold M. Schulweis (Conservative)

Schulweis is considered the leading Conservative rabbi of his generation.

14. Saul J. Berman (Orthodox)

Berman is considered one of the most forward thinking Jewish scholars of his generation.

15. Zalman Teitelbaum (Hasidim)

Teitelbaum is the new leader of the Satmar Hasidic community in Williamsburg.

16. David Saperstein (Reform)

Saperstein is the director of the Religious Action Center and a leading Washington lobbyist.

17. J. Rolando Matalon (Conservative)

Matalon is the spiritual leader of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun.

18. David Wolpe (Conservative)

Wolpe is now considered one of the most dynamic pulpit rabbis in America (also an author).

19. Sharon Kleinbaum (Reform)

Kleinbaum is the senior rabbi of the world's largest synagogue for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Jews.

20. Dan Ehrenkrantz (Reconstructionist)

Ehrenkrantz is the president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

21. Joseph Telushkin (Orthodox)

Telushkin is a best-selling author and speaker.

22. Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (Renewal)

Schachter-Shalomi founded the Jewish renewal movement in America.

23. David M. Posner (Reform)

Posner is the spiritual leader for New York's Temple Emanuel, the largest congregation in America.

24. Ephraim Buchwald (Orthodox)

Buchwald is the founder of the National Jewish Outreach Program.

25. Avraham Weiss (Orthodox)

Weiss is known as the Orthodox's leading activist and leader of the Modern Orthodox community.

26. Irving Greenberg (Orthodox)

Greenberg is the president of Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation and the founder of CLAL.

27. Kerry M. Olitzky (Reform)

Olitzky is one of the leading rabbinical advocates for outreach to interfaith and unaffiliated families in America.

28. Michael Lerner (Reform)

Lerner is the editor of Tikkun and a leading progressive political activist.

29. Abraham Cooper (Orthodox)

Cooper is the associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

30. Elliot Dorff (Conservative)

Dorff is the leader of the top lawmaking body in Conservative Judaism.

31. Marc Gellman (Reform)

Gellman is an author and television personality.

32. Rachel B. Cowan (Reform)

Cowan is the director of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality.

33. Marc Schneier (Orthodox)

Schneier is the president and founder of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and Chairman of the World Jewish Congress.

34. Janet Marder (Reform)

Marder is the first woman to ever head the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

35. Arthur Waskow (Renewal)

Controversial activist, author and founder of the Shalom Center.

36. Nachum Braverman (Orthodox)

Braverman is Aish Hatorah's leading American leader.

37. Bradley Hirschfield (Orthodox)

Hirschfeld is the copresident of CLAL and an outspoken proponent of interfaith dialogue.

38. Hayim Herring (Conservative)

Herring is executive director of STAR (Synagogues: Transformation and Renewal).

39. Daniel Lapin (Orthodox)

Lapin is a radio host, conservative commentator and cochair of the American Alliance of Jews and Christians.

40. Lawrence A. Hoffman (Reform)

Hoffman is the Reform movement's leader in spirituality and prayer.

41. Sidney Schwarz (Reconstructionist)

Schwarz is the founder and President of panim: The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values.

42. Naomi Levy (Conservative)

Levy is a popular author and a leading woman in the Conservative movement.

43. Lawrence Kushner (Reform)

Kushner is a leading teacher, writer and the innovator behind the Havurah movement.

44. Norman Lamm (Orthodox)

Lamm is the chancellor of Yeshiva University.

45. Nosson Scherman (Orthodox)

Scherman is the general editor for ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications, one of the largest publishers and sellers of Jewish books in the world.

46. Stephen Pearce (Reform)

Pearce is the leader of San Francisco's largest congregation with 2,700 families.

47. Harold Loss (Reform)

Loss is the leader of the largest synagogue in the Midwest (Detroit, 3,200 families).

48. Toba Spitzer (Reconstructionist)

Spitzer became the first openly lesbian rabbi to head a national Rabbinic Association in March 2007.

49. Michael Paley (Conservative)

Paley is the scholar in residence and director of the Jewish Resource Center of the UJA-Federation of New York.

50. Mordecai Finley (Reform)

Finley is the founder and Co-CEO of Ohr HaTorah, an innovative and progressive synagogue.

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