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PERSONAL STATEMENT

Though I have yet to check the records in Cincinnati, I'm willing to guess that I am the first (and perhaps only) rabbinical school applicant in the long history of HUC to beatbox during their interview. True, I had a wonderful experience being part of an *a cappella* singing group at George Washington University, but I certainly did not expect it to play such a significant role on my path to acceptance into rabbinical school. However, looking back now, I can see more clearly how my time as part of the GW Troubadours both reflects and informs how I envision my rabbinate.

One of the primary skills required to be a beatboxer is the ability to listen carefully. As the sole piece of the “rhythm section,” I had to maintain a keen ear to each element of the group in order to create balance and dynamic movement for the song as a whole. This was actually my favorite part—the feeling of being surrounded by incredibly talented and unique voices coming together as one, and doing my part to support and supplement the whole as well as the distinct parts. Sure, the performances for which we worked so hard to prepare were exhilarating and wonderful in their own right, but I enjoyed the careful listening more—the contribution of each individual to the group and the world of experiences different from my own that found expression through the music we created together.

*“It is up to you how much the immeasurable becomes reality for you”
- Martin Buber*

This is the way I see Jewish community and tradition—as an ever-growing, evolving chorus of voices. We see this clearly in communal worship, which is made all the more sacred when everyone feels moved to share their unique voice, no matter if they're on key or in rhythm. But I also see it in the many diverse forms of Jewish engagement. Each individual has their own unique gifts, their world of experience and expertise that should be valued and strengthened as a crucial part of the whole. Accordingly, I strive to help everyone find their own point of connection with Jewish life. For some it is through prayer and ritual, for others it is social action and the pursuit of justice, and for still others it is the transformative power of study. My charge as a rabbi is to listen carefully to each “part” while maintaining a sense of the whole composition. In doing so, I hope to present the diversity of what it means to live Jewishly, so that every unique piece within the larger community may find the path of engagement most meaningful for them.

“I...argued with [Rashi] and before [Rashi], and he acknowledged to me that if he had had more time, he would need to produce other commentaries according to the meanings that are created anew each day.”

– Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam) on Genesis 37:2

Jewish tradition itself is an immense, varied chorus of voices calling to us from different places and historical epochs—some profoundly resonant and others unavoidably dissonant. As Jews in the 21st century, we have unprecedented access to the vast textual and cultural inheritance bestowed upon us by our forebears. It is my privilege as a rabbi to present this heritage to those I serve in all its complexity and diversity—its bright spots as well as its dark, shadowed corners. At the same time, an essential part of this responsibility is to provide all within the community the tools to be able to navigate, analyze, and engage with our shared tradition on their own terms. To serve as an educator and rabbi is to recognize that we cannot fully know which texts, symbols, or practices might resonate with any particular individual. I am excited to guide this process of meaning-making, grounding our vast tradition in its many cultural contexts in the hope that those I serve may add their unique contribution to a Judaism that becomes more beautiful and rich with the added voices of each generation.

Recent decades have made us all the more aware of the many voices that are notably absent from the larger chorus of Jewish tradition. I strive to build and serve communities that are inclusive of all backgrounds, identities, and orientations. Certain elements of Jewish tradition neglect or, at times, condemn identities we now recognize as sacred parts of the diversity of human life. I hope to provide a safe environment where people feel free to challenge and wrestle with these difficult aspects of our cultural inheritance—to determine as individuals and as a community which might be redeemable through reinterpretation, and which must be supplanted or rejected. This means listening with empathy, teaching with honesty, and recognizing when I do not yet have the necessary tools to meet the needs of those I serve. In such moments, I will look to my senior rabbi, co-workers, mentors, teachers, and ever-expanding network of colleagues, whose wisdom and experience will allow me to continually learn and grow.

Reflecting on it now, part of what drew me to audition for an *a cappella* group in the first place was my longstanding appreciation for the power of different voices coming together as one. I first felt this power as a young camper during Shabbat services deep in the mountains of Georgia. The energy from when we sang and danced and laughed and cried together as a community still resonates with me deeply. At the heart of this power is the ebb and flow of those moments—the back and forth of words and melodies that capture a singular moment in time, while lifting the voices of the present to join in the polyphonous chorus of the past. I look forward to helping my community find their own unique voices, bringing them together in sacred harmony.