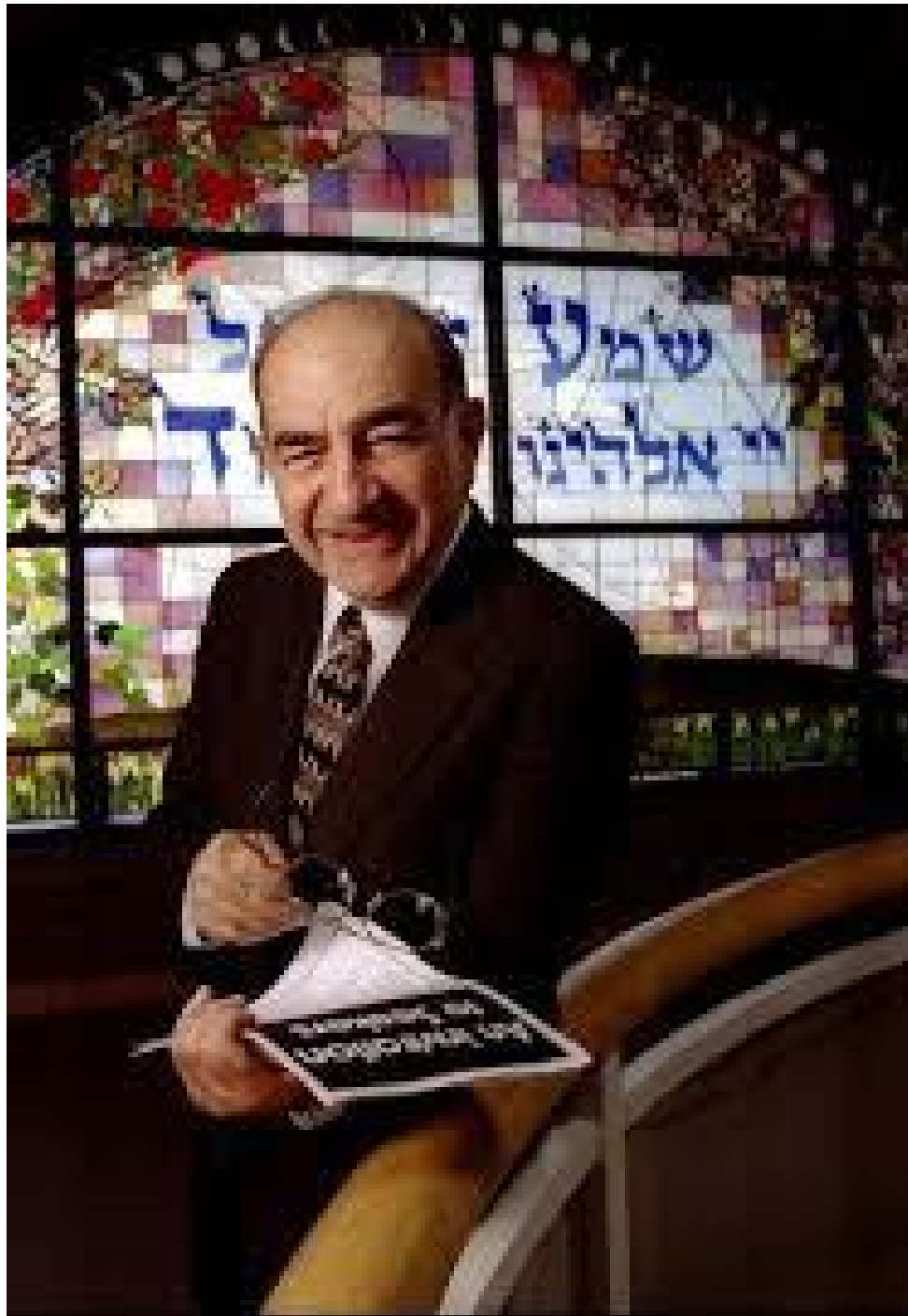


Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis
April 14, 1925 - December 18, 2014



Congregation Shir Ami
December 16, 2017

Rabbi David Wolpe, Sinai Temple:

Harold Schulweis was unparalleled in his range of his gifts, the depth of his passion and the creativity he brought to the American Rabbinate. Capable of recognizing the good without being pollyanish, of condemning the wrong without being narrow or scolding, his was a voice of hopeful conscience. Everyone in the rabbinate and indeed in the entire Jewish community is better because he made us better, and his memory continues to bless us with a vision and a model sorely needed in our fractured times.



Rabbi Stewart Vogel, Temple Aliyah:

Rabbi Schulweis was clearly one of the most important rabbis of the late 20th century. His prophetic vision allowed him to see Jewish and synagogue life in ways that no one else could. When synagogue dress codes were uninviting to the generation of the 60's and 70's, Rabbi Schulweis said, "come as you are." In general, that was his philosophy of synagogue life, "come as you are." He would meet people where they were, inviting questions and an openness to make Judaism a personal experience. When it came to synagogue life he was an innovator and Valley Beth Shalom became an incubator of so many important programs that eventually went national. When it came to God, Rabbi Schulweis made God more accessible with his concept of Godliness.



While many people revered his public persona and impact, for me as a new rabbi, I was inspired by his work ethic and his humility. Rabbi Schulweis never came to synagogue with the idea that his wisdom and oratory skills could allow him to get by with extemporaneous comments or sermons. When he came to services his comments were always prepared in outline form and his sermons always typed out in full. In the book of Numbers (12:3) we read, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth." These words perfectly describe the character of Rabbi Schulweis. He always marveled at how his words and writings would receive national attention. Unquestionably one of the greatest thinkers and Jewish innovators of his generation, he never saw himself as such. Every so often I would have to remind him when he would wonder about such attention, "just remember you are Rabbi Harold Schulweis." *Zichrono leev'rakha*- may his memory always be a blessing and his legacy an inspiration.

Rabbi Ed Feinstein, Valley Beth Shalom (from his 5776 Rosh Hashanah sermon):

In our history, there is a rare and special tradition of Jewish spiritual revolutionaries who were called upon to rescue Judaism at moments of profound disruption: **Yohanan ben Zakkai** after the destruction of the Temple, **Maimonides** when philosophy shook the foundations of Jewish faith, the **Baal Shem Tov** addressing a generation deeply disillusioned and despairing of faith. At these extraordinary moments, Jewish existence reached a crisis – when the sacred narratives of the past expired, and new narratives were yet to be born. These were the singular personalities who perceived that the survival of the community depended on its ability to transcend, to transform, to reinvent its ideas and institutions. They provided resilience, the courage and the inspiration to let go of the old, and to imagine the new. Rabbi Schulweis stands within that extraordinary tradition. As we sing at Hannuka: *Hen b'chal dor, yakum hagibor, goel ha-am*. In every generation, a hero arose to save our people.



He didn't grow up in synagogue. Far from it. His father rebelled against religion, and raised him in a rich tradition of secular Yiddish culture. He didn't set foot in a synagogue until he was 12 years old. It was Rosh Hashanah, and school was out in his Bronx neighborhood, so he was wandering the boulevard when he heard the most remarkable music coming from one of the storefronts. He entered, and because he was small, they assumed he was a kid looking for his mother, so sent him upstairs to the women's section, where he sat transfixed by the majesty and melody of the service. And so for the past 45 years he has sat here, again, transfixed by the majesty and melody, the prayers and yearnings of the Jewish people.

Yehi Zichro Baruch. May his memory be our blessing.

Rebbetzin Malkah Schulweis (from her Harold M Schulweis Institute website www.hmsi.info introduction):



Rabbi and I both saw the rabbinate as a sacred unfolding of the value of life, both public and personal. Rabbi never wavered in his belief that moral purpose is the ethical core of our tradition. Better than the first words of Creation that we read over and over ... it is good, good, good. And that recognition has consequences to him. It meant that his continual energy should be poured into the value of every human being in every circumstance of life.

... He developed his conception of Sovereign. It resulted in a shift from vertical instruction in the congregation to a horizontal process of discussion, question and answer, were all present. Prayer, poetry, song; everything had to testify to its meaning. It was not merely his speaking that gave testimony to sanctity. It was his unconscious way of dissolving the empty space between himself and any other. When he spoke to you no one else existed in public or private expression. We have yet to catch up to him.

Miriam Alperin: *Editor's note: I invited Miriam who is a member of a Reconstructionist Havurah with which I have a connection to speak at our service. Stan Schroeder*



When I was asked to say a few words about Rabbi Harold Schulweis, I was honored and humbled because it was almost 70 years ago when I first encountered Harold at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. He was in his early 20s studying to become a rabbi at the Rabbinical School, and I was a bit younger studying at the College of Jewish Studies in the same building. We became close friends.

We all knew then decades ago that Harold was an extraordinary young man. An original creative thinker in a class of future rabbis, he stood out. We would gather round him as he spoke, hanging on his words of wisdom. And he had the best sense of humor: witty, clever, and laugh-out-loud funny. We felt even then that his profound mind was destined for greatness.

The Jewish Theological Seminary graduated rabbis for Conservative synagogues, yet the whole Reconstructionist movement started right there and not as an offshoot of the Reform movement as many people think. Harold was very much influenced by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, who started Reconstructionist thinking. I, myself, had the honor and privilege to have Mordecai Kaplan as my teacher and friend of the family. I was also privileged at the time to have Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel as my teacher and personal friend.

There was a magnetism and inclusiveness about Harold Schulweis that few leaders ever achieve in their lifetime. It took a Jew, a committed Jew, a learned Jew, a rabbi, a mensch, a man who lived Mitzvot rather than preach them to start Jewish World Watch – a worldwide movement to actively help the oppressed and maltreated of Africa. While the world watched silently as thousands of men, women, and children died of starvation, Harold Schulweis took action against horrific injustice. While we never sufficiently thanked non-Jews for helping to rescue Jews, it was Harold who started the movement for the Righteous Gentiles. When addressing audiences who complained that too few Gentiles helped Jews, Harold neither defended or condemned, but asked if you were the Gentiles, *how many of you would hide Jews from the Nazis in your home – knowing what would happen to your children if you were found out?*

Harold was one of the first rabbis who ever spoke up for homosexuals – saying that they are not on the periphery of society, but they are us and we are them. They did not choose to be outcasts in our society and we must never let it happen. They are our omnipotent God's creations, as all of us are. They are everybody and anybody, your son, your daughter, sister, brother, nephew, niece, grandchild, cousin, aunt, uncle; doctor, teacher, lawyer, rabbi, fireman, policeman, trash collector, soldier, politician, friend, and YOU. That was what Harold said.

Miriam Alperin (continued):

I taught in Jewish Education for 53 years, teaching teachers how to reach each individual student through the informal component of teaching. I taught a course for several years to the teachers of Valley Beth Shalom Day School. With Rabbi Schulweis at the head and excellent Education Leaders, it was an outstanding school, a place where you wished your children or grandchildren could have attended. What made this experience so special and unforgettable for me was that after the class Harold would set aside time from his busy schedule just for me. We would meet in his office to talk together; to discuss Torah, Judaism, the world, our families, conflicts, anything. Harold always made me feel smart, and that was ironic because I was sitting at the feet of one of the wisest, most learned men I have had the privilege to know.

Harold Schulweis was the ultimate consummate Rabbi, feeling the pain of every suffering tormented soul in the universe. I am proud to have called this mensch my friend.

Rabbi David Vorspan:

Following my ordination I worked two years at Temple Beth Emet in Anaheim. When the position I had was being phased out in the mid-70s, I applied for two rabbinic positions in the San Fernando Valley. The first was at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino where I was interviewed by Rabbi Schulweis. He told me he had errands to run and would I mind if the interview was conducted in his car. I agreed and Rabbi Schulweis focused his questions on my theology and what philosopher/theologians I had read. I believe he felt my relationship with God was of primary importance to serving as a rabbi at VBS. As it turns out, I accepted the position at Temple Beth Ami in Reseda. However that time with Rabbi Schulweis has been with me ever since.



Rabbi Schulweis has had a profound influence on Conservative Judaism. His emphasis on human responsibility is evident in how he personally prayed. He would end his prayers of appeals to God with the two words: “through me.” I encourage us to end our prayers likewise and accept responsibility for the required actions.

Stan Schroeder:

I had an opportunity to have some private time with Rabbi Schulweis in 2010. I had previously purchased one of his books at a Simchat Torah auction at VBS. I told him I hoped to be able to discuss it with him after I read it. I called him a few weeks later and picked him up at his home in Mountain Gate and drove him to his office at VBS. We talked in the car about my interests and involvement in Reconstructionism. He had been a student of **Mordecai Kaplan** at the Jewish Theological Seminary and adapted many of Kaplan’s ideas into his theology. Then we talked for a while in his office. I don’t really understand *Evil and the Morality of God*, but I understood the author - a brilliant man of principle who brought God’s qualities to the world and brought out the best in those he touched.

