

# *Soaring Wisdom*

Moves us toward  
the Holy One

Artist: ZACHARY OXMAN

This artwork installation, dedicated on December 1, 2021,  
honors Rabbi Dan Levin's 25 years of service to our  
congregation, to our community and to the Jewish people.





Join us on this journey  
through artist  
*Zachary Oxman's*  
*extraordinary vision*

Open your eyes to the  
wonder of learning and the  
*all-encompassing magnitude*  
*of Torah.* The sculpture's  
soaring pages evoke the  
wisdom of those who  
have taught us for centuries.

*Artist's original digital rendering*



ABOUT  
THE ARTIST

Zachary  
Oxman

Zachary is a contemporary sculptor, and artist who fashions his works in brass, stainless steel, aluminum, and wood, was commissioned by Temple Beth El's Art Task Force to create a one-of-a-kind piece of art for the Schaefer Family Campus in commemoration of Rabbi Dan Levin's 25 years of service to our community and to the Jewish people.

Selected by President Clinton to create menorahs for the White House and commissioned by President Obama to design and fabricate gifts for the son and daughter of Prime Minister Netanyahu and a gift for Pope Francis, Oxman's monumental works additionally grace many public spaces, hospitals, corporate buildings, synagogues, and private collections throughout the United States.


Oxman's artistic vision and his creative path are grounded in his own upbringing. Born in Reston, Virginia, his father, an architect, and his mother, an artist, influenced his dedication to sculpture. Oxman honed his technique (the lost wax casting process) during his studies at Carnegie Mellon University and in Florence, Italy. Upon graduating, he built his own foundry where Oxman continues to cast his bronzes himself.

Thus, Oxman controls every step and attends to each detail, giving him an in-depth understanding of the process, an understanding that allows him to transcend the medium and create his extraordinary work.

The first Mishna of tractate Peah teaches that there are certain things that lead one not simply to experience blessing and joy in our own days but lead our world on the path to redemption. They include honoring one's father and mother; the performance of righteous deeds; and the making of peace between a person and his friend; but the study of the Torah is equal to them all.

Jewish learning has always been the portal to wisdom and understanding, the gateway to the spiritual experience of God's realm. Words were the tools God used to create the universe. Thus, our understanding of our world, and our place in it, is found through delving into the texts of our tradition. Beginning with the Torah and the Tanakh, our ongoing dialogue with the Holy One is found in the pages of Jewish lore and literature.





*From the core texts of our tradition,  
the spirits of our people take flight.*

The pages soar in different directions, reminding us that there is no uniformity in Jewish belief, and that as we learn in Pirke Avot: “Every argument that is for the sake of heaven, its wisdom will endure.”

*The texts take wing and flow through history,  
launching the works of commentators and philosophers,  
poets and novelists, scholars, and sages.*

They capture the experience of both men and women, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, ancient and modern, mystical and rational.

*The soaring words lead us into two places*

the sacred precinct of our worship space,  
the **Rabbi Merle E. Singer Sanctuary**, and the  
**Barry and Susan Podolsky Community Recognition Wall**,  
where we are reminded “The World stands on three things:  
On Torah, on Worship, and on Acts of Lovingkindness,”  
in the words of Pirke Avot.

*Explore the touchscreens on the  
Community Recognition Wall*

where you will discover the history of Temple Beth El.  
Get to know the members who built and continue  
to make our congregation a flourishing center  
of Jewish life with their hands and their hearts.





*This extraordinary sculpture, Soaring Wisdom, highlights the place of learning in our congregation's consciousness*

as part of our Learning Living Room corridor. The magnificent books sculpted in wood and mixed metals open our eyes and our souls to the wonder of learning and to the all-encompassing magnitude of Torah. We take in the soaring pages that evoke the wisdom of all who have taught us for centuries.

*The installation also features books to  
browse and explore.*

We invite members and guests to indulge their curiosity and pull a book off the shelf and sit down to read on one of our sofas in the Learning Living Room. Please encourage your children to take a book and read with you on one of the stools. Our books will periodically change to reflect the calendar. We invite you to return often to our celebration of learning and Jewish literature.

# AUTHORS AND WORKS

*Commentators  
and philosophers,  
poets and novelists,  
scholars, and sages.*



# Talmud

the compilation of the Sages' dialogue and debates surrounding the corpus of the Oral Law. The Talmud comprises the Mishna, the rabbinic compendium edited by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi around 200 CE, and the Gemara, the discussions of later generations of sages in the academies of Babylon, compiled around 550 CE. The Talmud forms the foundation for Halakha – the body of Jewish law.

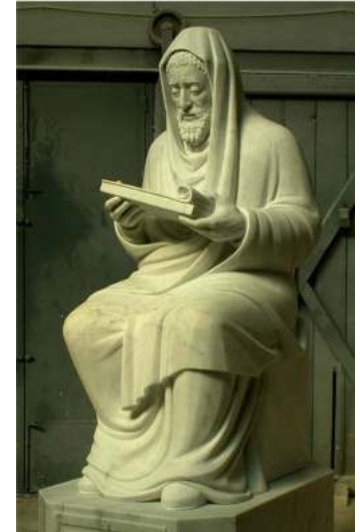


## Beruriah

a daughter of the great sage Rabbi Hananiah ben Teradion, was an accomplished scholar. It was said she learned “three hundred laws from three hundred teachers in one day” (B. Pesahim 62b). She married Rabbi Meir, one of the great sages of the Mishnaic period. Beruriah endured tragedy in her life, losing her father to Roman martyrdom, her mother and brother to violent death, and the loss of her two sons in a single day. She symbolizes that both women and men can be great Jewish scholars.

## Judah HaLevi

one of the great poets and thinkers of the Golden age of Spain. Born in Tudela, he moved to southern Spain, authoring more than 800 poems and became well known as a talented philosophical theologian. He authored *The Kuzari*, one of the foundational works of Medieval Jewish philosophy. Eventually, he left the comforts of Spain for the Holy Land, the country of his dreams.





# Baruch Spinoza

one of the pioneers of modern Jewish theology. Born in 1632 in Amsterdam to a family of Portuguese Jewish refugees, he learned Talmud and Kabbalah before turning to philosophy. His abstract notions of God as nature were seen as heretical and Spinoza was excommunicated by the Amsterdam Jewish community. His writing paved the way for new Jewish philosophical explorations of theology.

# Josef Karo

Born in Spain in 1488, Joseph Karo moved to Turkey with his family. He became a brilliant Jewish legal scholar and student of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. His major work, Beit Yosef, explored the sources for all of Jewish law and took twenty years to complete. Moving to the mystical city of Tsfat, he created a digest of this masterwork known as the Shulchan Arukh, which later became the most authoritative code of Jewish law.





# Theodor Herzl

the Austrian lawyer and journalist became the pioneer of political Zionism. Through his passionate diplomacy, Herzl convened the first Zionist congress and began the visionary work that would lead to the creation of the State of Israel. The Jewish State and Old New Land, among his many other writings, created the vision for a utopian nation state for the Jewish people.



## Regina Jonas

born in Berlin in 1902, she felt a call to the rabbinate from a young age. She studied at the famous Hochschule and endeavored to become the first woman to be ordained as a rabbi. Her thesis taught that nothing in Jewish law prevented women from serving as rabbis. Finally in 1935, she was ordained a rabbi and served in a variety of communities as a “pastoral-rabbinic counselor”. In 1942, she was deported to Theresienstadt where she served as a teacher and rabbi for two years. In October 1944, she was sent to Auschwitz and killed on arrival.

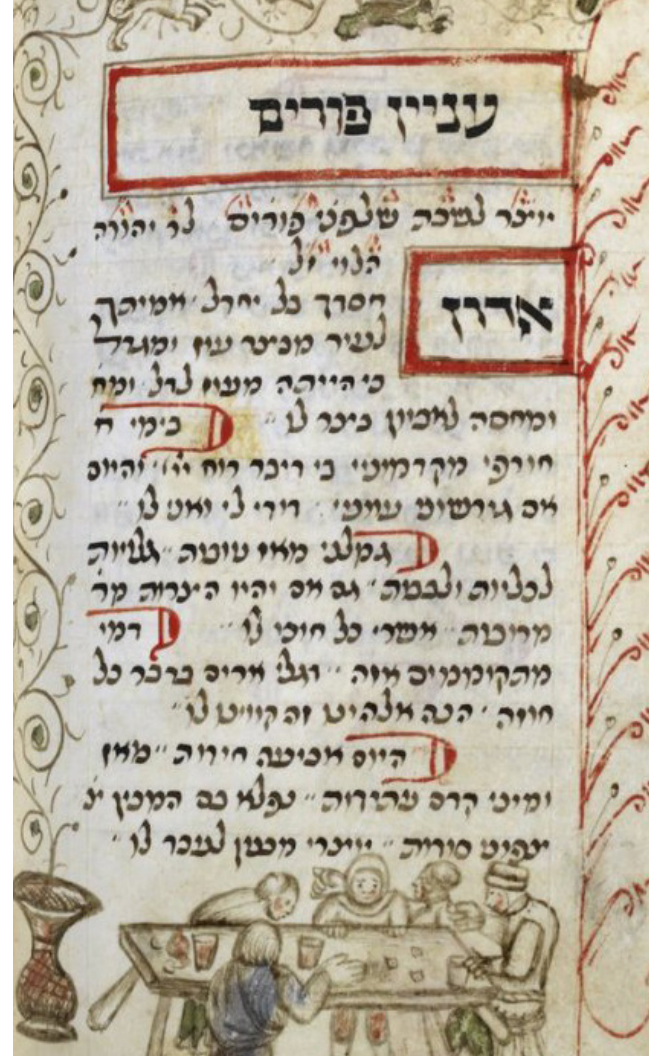


## Hannah Arendt

born in Hanover in 1906, Hannah earned her doctorate in 1929. She became an anti-Nazi political activist, and helped with Youth Aliyah to rescue children from the Third Reich. After fleeing France for New York in 1941, she became the first woman named full professor at Princeton University. Her work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and several works of political philosophy established her as a thinker and a writer. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* Arendt wrestled with the controversy surrounding the Adolf Eichmann trial in a subtle yet probing reflection on the experience of the human condition in the face of evil.

# Midrash

Aggadic or narrative literature that interprets and elaborates upon the truths discovered through delving into biblical texts, mostly compiled from the fifth century CE through the medieval period. Using standard interpretive modes, Midrash employs rabbinic imagination to explore the “white space between the letters”, to draw out the deeper meanings to be found in the biblical text.





# Maimonides

born in Spain in 1134, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (RAMBAM) spent most of his life in Egypt. In addition to his life as personal physician to the Vizier of Egypt, he was the most prodigious Jewish legal mind and thinker of his age. Among his monumental works, the Mishneh Torah was the first formal code of Jewish law designed for the broad masses of the Jewish people. His Guide for the Perplexed served as the foundational work of rationalist Jewish thought.



# Zohar

the “Book of Splendor” - the principal work of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. Written by Moshe de Leon in the 13th century, he ascribed authorship to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who taught toward the end of the first century CE. The Zohar is a mystical commentary on the Torah that contains discussions of the nature of God, the origin and structure of the universe, the nature of souls, and how we can participate in the unification and repair of the physical and spiritual world.



# Rashi

born in France in 1040, Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak authored the most famous and foundational commentaries on the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. His “P’shat” commentaries focus on the “simple” or direct meaning of the text and are considered the basic indispensable tool for Torah and Talmud study.

# Isaac Luria

16th century master of Jewish mysticism. Born in Jerusalem, Luria grew to become the leading Kabbalist in the city of Tsfat in the Galilee. His spontaneous oral teachings, compiled and written by his student Chayim Vittal, came to be called Lurianic Kabbalah, and formed the foundation for modern understandings of Jewish mysticism.





## Gluckl of Hameln

born in Hamburg in the mid 17th century, her writings illuminate daily life for Jews in northern Germany. Gluckl was married at age 14 and bore 14 children. She began her Yiddish diaries as a means to find comfort in her widowhood at age 44. They serve as a Tsava'ah - an ethical will; a book Tekhines – women's petitional prayers; Musar – moral instruction; and a Mayse Buch – Yiddish storybook.

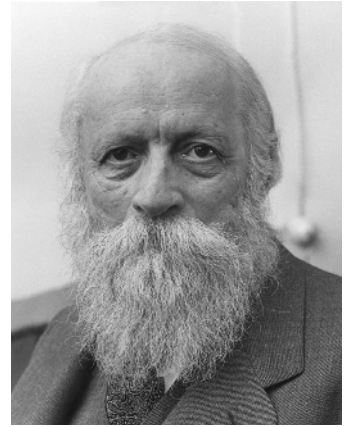
## Ba'al Shem Tov

founder of Hasidic Judaism. A mystic and healer born at the turn of the 18th century, he was orphaned at the age of five, and adopted and educated by the Jewish community of Tluste. After years as a children's teacher and student of Kabbalah, the Ba'al Shem Tov became a preacher and charismatic leader, teaching his followers to achieve Devekut, unity with God, through transforming any individual physical act into an act of worship.



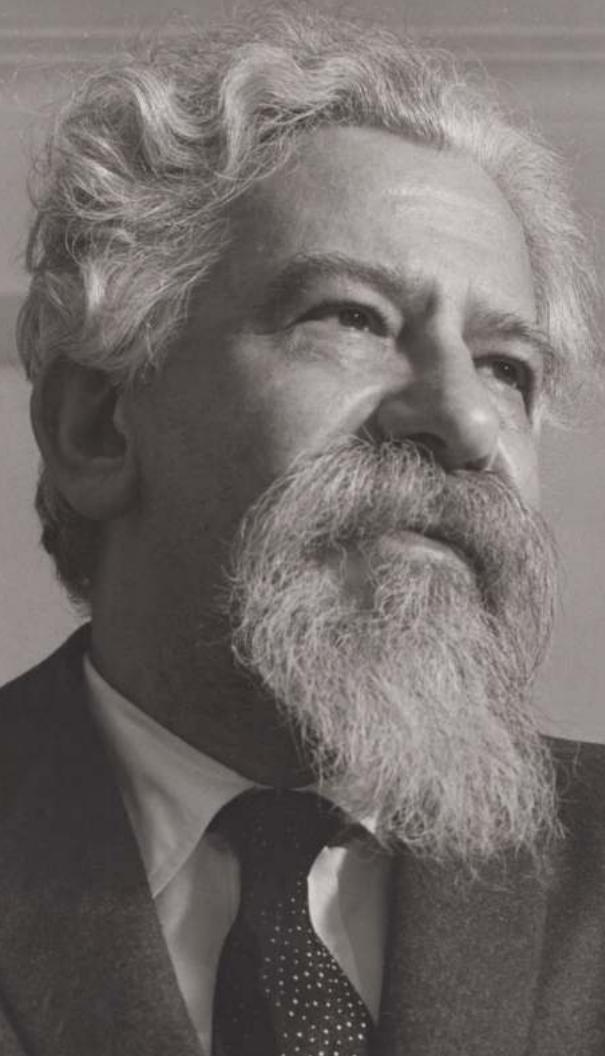
# Martin Buber

one of the leading Jewish existentialists of the early 20th century. His seminal work *Ich und Du* (I and You) served as the foundation for his philosophy of dialogue. He later fled Nazi aggression and came to Jerusalem, where he advocated collaboration between the Jews and Arabs of Palestine. Railing against what he saw as the mindless observance of traditional ritual, he drew inspiration by the spiritual passion of early Hasidic Judaism and called for a rejuvenation of Jewish spiritual practice.



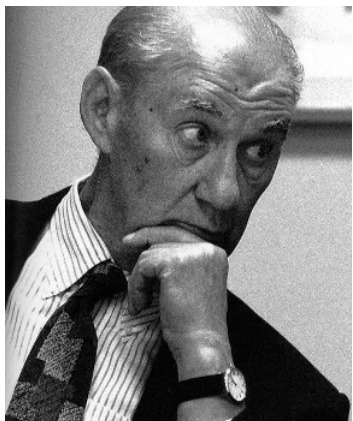
# Franz Rosenzweig

born in Kassel in 1886, Rosenzweig initially thought to convert to Christianity. After a mystical experience in an orthodox synagogue on Yom Kippur in 1913, he turned back to traditional Judaism. His masterwork *The Star of Redemption*, began as postcards he mailed home during his service in World War I. He founded the famous *Lehrhaus*, a new school for Jewish learning seeking to inspire a renewal of passion for Jewish life. In the fall of 1921, he noticed symptoms of ALS, and continued to work and write until his death in 1929.



## Abraham Joshua Heschel

born in 1907 as a scion of a Hasidic dynasty, he earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Berlin. Heschel was among the scholars rescued by the Hebrew Union College and brought to the United States. He eventually went to teach at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He taught that we can seek a relationship with God as did the prophets, through cultivating a posture of “radical amazement”. His astonishing eloquence is found in his many works, including *God in Search of Man*, *The Prophets*, *The Sabbath*, and *Torah From Heaven*. He also invested himself in work for civil rights and the movement against the war in Vietnam.



## Eugene Borowitz

the most impactful thinker and theologian in 20th century Reform Judaism. Growing up in Ohio, Borowitz attended the Hebrew Union College and was ordained in 1948. His work *Renewing the Covenant* explored “covenant theology”, a system that sought to integrate individual autonomy with God’s commanding voice heard through Torah, Jewish life, and the Jewish people. He founded the journal *Sh’mā: a Journal of Jewish Responsibility*, which created a forum for voices from across the Jewish spectrum to be heard on subjects of the day.

## Judith Plaskow

born in 1947 and raised in classical Reform Judaism, Plaskow earned her Ph.D. in theology from Yale. Through the 1970s and 80s, she became one of the leading thinkers in Jewish feminist thought. She founded *B’not Esh* (daughters of fire), a feminist collective dedicated to feminist transformation of Jewish life. Her work *Standing Again at Sinai* was the first complete work of Jewish feminist theology, and sought to bring women’s voices and experiences from the periphery of Jewish life into the core.



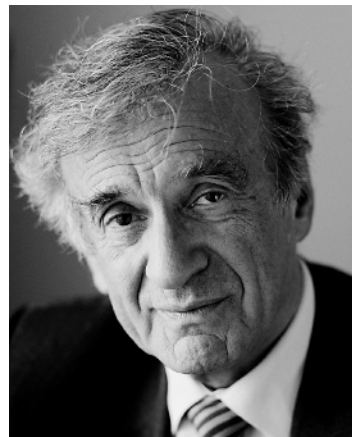


## Nechama Leibowitz

born in Riga in 1905, she earned her doctorate from the University of Marburg in Biblical translation. In 1930 she moved to Mandatory Palestine and taught at Tel Aviv University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her radio commentaries and study sheets on the weekly Torah portion brought the power of Torah study to all segments of Israeli society.

## Elie Wiesel

born in 1928 in Sighet, Romania, he survived Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Following the war, Wiesel moved to Paris and became a journalist and Zionist. He was a correspondent in Paris for the Israeli paper Yediot Ahronot for ten years. In 1955, he published *Night*, his memoir of his journey through the Holocaust, which was eventually translated into 30 languages. After moving to the United States in 1955, he went on to publish more than 40 books, including non-fiction Holocaust literature, novels, and explorations of classic Jewish personalities. His passionate advocacy to memorialize the Holocaust led to many prizes, including the Nobel Peace Prize.





*Rabbi  
Dan Levin*

Rabbi Dan serves as the senior rabbi of Temple Beth El, the congregation where he began his career in 1996. As the congregation's leader, Rabbi Levin works to create a community where each member is inspired to lead a life of spiritual richness, meaning, purpose, and service. He seeks to build a congregation whose mission is to synthesize the innate questions and moral challenges of the world in which we live with the wisdom and power of centuries of Jewish tradition. It is this synthesis of tradition and the modern world that guides his teaching, worship, and pastoral care. Rabbi Levin believes that God is found in the intimacy of relationship, and seeks to build in the congregation a web of care, love, and oneness with each other, the community in which we live, and with the Jewish people here, in Israel, and throughout the world.



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