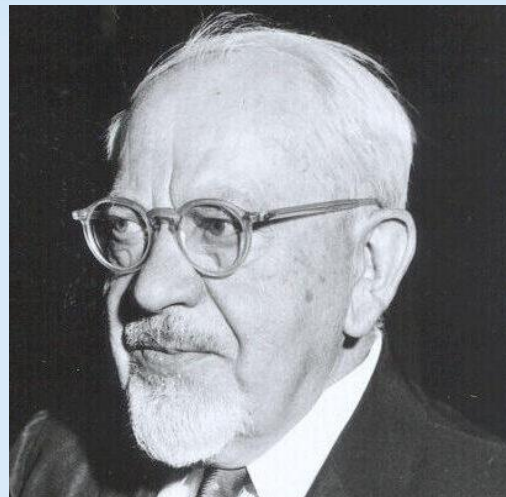




## ALL THE RICH POSSIBILITIES: KAPLANIAN STUDY IN 5785/2024-25

1. Celebration of *Judaism as a Civilization* at 90
2. Guide for Spiritual and Intellectual Honesty in the Life of Mordecai Kaplan
3. Mordecai Kaplan Through the Eyes of Ira Eisenstein
4. Study Selections from Kaplan's *The Art of the Spirit*, edited by Rabbi Richard Hirsh
5. Coffee House Conversation on *Questions Jews Ask* with Jane Susswein and Caitlin Hayes
6. Opportunities for Talmud Style Dialogue
7. *Al Regel Achat*: The Eight Core Principles of Kaplan's Philosophy
8. Rogue Hebrew – innovative way to teach Hebrew
9. Mel Scult Teen Essay Contest
10. Webinars



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## INTRODUCTION: 2024-25/5785 AS A YEAR OF KAPLAN STUDY

Over the last several years, the Kaplan Center has developed resources to facilitate the study of the teachings of Mordecai Kaplan with a particular eye towards its relevance to our contemporary Jewish life. Some of these resources come from our webinars of the past several years. Others are dialogues, particularly our new 'Contemporary Talmud Pages.'

We have organized these resources with particular sensitivity to the diversity of our audience. This diversity is vertical – depth of background in Kaplan – and horizontal, varying Jewish passions. Our approach here is to provide a rich array of possible approaches and materials and encourage the rabbinical, educational, and lay leadership team in a community to decide what fits their institution. **Our hope, though, is that some study of the writings of Mordecai Kaplan will be part of every congregation's plan for Jewish study in 5785/2024-5.**

Some of our readers are looking for a “way in” through Kaplan's lengthy and dense writings to the heart of his message. For such learners, we offer 'Mordecai Kaplan through the Eyes and Mind of Rabbi Ira Eisenstein.' These learners will benefit from the [two volumes by Rabbi Ira Eisenstein: \*Creative Judaism\* and \*What We Mean by Religion\*](#).

These resources are enhanced by the academic and pedagogic organizing notes of Rabbi Lee Friedlander and Harriet Feiner, who offered this course last winter.

Other members of our Kaplan Center community have a deeper background in Kaplan. They demand an “advanced Kaplan” opportunity. For these folks, we offer selections from *The Art of the Spirit*, a publication slated for publication in the winter based on a Hebrew manuscript written by Kaplan in the late 1930s while he was teaching in Palestine at the Hebrew University.

For readers who fall between “beginning” and “advanced” in terms of familiarity with Kaplan, we offer Dr. Mel Scult’s new publication, “[Al Regel Achat: The Eight Core Principles of Kaplan’s Philosophy](#)”. We believe this pamphlet can be pitched at different levels depending on the group and the facilitator.

We also provide resources connected to the cycles of Jewish Living. As congregations approach the High Holidays, they are regrounding their communities in the kinds of virtues that can infuse all their study for the year. The publication of our article, *Kaplan on Spiritual and Intellectual Integrity*, prepared by our Kaplan Center staff in honor of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kaplan’s yahrzeit/ anniversary of his death, offers such a grounding experience.

The year 2024 marks the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kaplan’s magnum opus, *Judaism as a Civilization*. Our December 2023 webinar with guide questions allows one to step back in time and project forward the contemporary significance of the volume.

2024 is a voting year. We suggest beginning with our webinar, [Entering the Heichal \(sanctuary\) of the Voting Booth: Reflections on Judaism and Democracy](#) with Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Rabbi Lauren Grabelle Herrmann, Sarah Hurwitz, and Rabbi Sid Schwarz (10/30/2022). This provides a useful backdrop for the Jewish significance of voting, and Jewish guidelines for discussing controversial topics.

The learning group can choose one or more of [four dialogues based on the discussion on our website](#) in collaboration with *A More Perfect Union: The Jewish Partnership for Democracy*. This material, much drawn from Kaplan’s diaries, can allow your congregants/ learners to enter the voting booth with a peaked and refined sense of democracy as the “religion of America.”

We know Kaplan Center supporters value ongoing learning. So we invite them to step into the virtual neighborhood of our President, Jane Susswein, and our Vice President for Programming, Caitlin Hayes, where you will step into the dialogues originally framed

in Mordecai Kaplan's *Questions Jews Ask* and formulate 21<sup>st</sup> century responses to these 20<sup>th</sup> century questions. To enroll, please contact Caitlin at [Caitlin@kaplancenter.org](mailto:Caitlin@kaplancenter.org).

We are vitally aware of the problematic times we are living through in regard to Israel and Zionism. Hence, there are resources through our *Contemporary Talmud Pages* that can address our contemporary understanding of Zionism. Other issues related to the core of Kaplan's Reconstructionist philosophy such as Kaplan and Creativity, Living in Multiple Civilizations, Marcia Falk's, *Night of Beginnings: a Passover Haggadah*, and Liturgical Changes in Jewish Life can also be explored through [our Talmud Pages](#).

A community might make several of the Talmud pages the center of a short course. When a community devotes study to any of the Talmud pages we invite them to send new ideas to us at [Jeffrey@kaplancenter.org](mailto:Jeffrey@kaplancenter.org). Such responses will help us add contemporary ideas and responses to the text itself. Hence we confer on our respondents the traditional title of *tosafists*, those who help the content of Jewish tradition grow.

We are making a new effort to reach our teens. This takes the form of a contest in honor of Mel Scult's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration where teens are invited to provide 21<sup>st</sup> century responses to questions raised in Kaplan's 20<sup>th</sup> century *Questions Jews Ask* and/or recreate a logo for 21<sup>st</sup> century Jewish living. Everyone between b'nai mitzvah age and 12<sup>th</sup> grade is invited to participate in this contest in honor of Mel Scult's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration (webinar on Sunday, December 8, 2024). Be in touch with Karen Morris, our educator, at [education@kaplancenter.org](mailto:education@kaplancenter.org) for further information.

Of course, one can never totally anticipate the unique needs of congregations or individuals. So we offer the full range of "boutique" offerings in all the variety of our [23 webinars of the past years](#) as adult opportunities.

Finally, a moment of candor. We need to address the way we have collectively in North America "orphaned" a core element of Kaplan's educational vision: Hebrew. For several years, we have engaged in The Great Kaplanian Report Card Project where we evaluate

our contemporary Jewish community against the five goals Kaplan articulated in *Judaism as a Civilization*. There is general consensus that the arena we have done least well in is the appreciation of Hebrew and Hebrew literature. You can see just one sampling below from our December 11, 2022 webinar.

Hebrew 0%

Boost participation in Jewish life 17%

Put Jewish values into action 42%

Craft role models of living creatively in two civilizations 33%

Enhance Jewish life through the Arts 8%

We need to employ our fullest measure of Kaplan's commitment to experimentation here, his innovative spirit and his native optimism. We are including here resources from [Rogue Hebrew](#), a project developed by Michael Getty of Minneapolis. Michael has been a professor of linguistics and developed this project "in his "free time." We share it with Kaplan Center followers. The key to his methodology seems to be to "get radical," as in getting to the *shoresh*/root of any number of our most important Hebrew value concepts. Anyone interested in the fusion of kabbalah, renewal, and linguistic sophistication marking the project is welcome to sign up for a Hebrew course being offered by Michael next year. You can register by emailing Michael Getty at [shimonides@gmail.com](mailto:shimonides@gmail.com).

# CELEBRATION OF *JUDAISM AS A CIVILIZATION'S* 90<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

**Dr. Deborah Waxman and Dr. Elias Sacks on “*Judaism as a Civilization: the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this Hanukkah Gift that Keeps Giving*”**

We'd like to help our Institutional Friends utilize this both as a webinar in their own community and as useful public relations about the place of Kaplan in their own community.

In regard to the use in your own community of the celebration of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Judaism as a Civilization*, I am suggesting a very simple format. [View the webinar](#) and have a delightful dialogue.

The version of the video you are receiving is a little more than an hour long. If you have time constraints, you might consider focusing on Dr. Waxman's introductory remarks (approximately 25 minutes).

Here are a few sample questions that might guide the dialogue:

1. Think of the famous Francis Bacon quote that only a few books are of a nature that they should be chewed and slowly digested.

Why might *Judaism as a Civilization* be one of these “slowly chewed” and “well-digested” books??

2. Have you read books that affected you the way Dr. Waxman describes Phillip Klutznick's response to *Judaism as a Civilization*?
3. Kaplan was personally rather modest but overflowing with enthusiasm about ideas. One of the greatest compliments he could pay you was if something you said or wrote was "Copernican" (i.e. turned the world upside down). What in your mind is "Copernican" about redefining Judaism as a civilization rather than a religion?

4. Suppose a visitor from Mars landed in your own synagogue. The visitor assumed that what they are experiencing about Judaism is the way things always were. How would you help the visitor understand that the version of Judaism they are experiencing was a revolution?

The communal template we will be creating builds on the partnership between the Kaplan Center and the adult learning institute *Hineini* in the Twin Cities. This institute is directed by Rabbi Debra Rappaport, an RRC grad. Together we are building a community program called "The Hidden Kaplanian Footsteps in the Twin Cities Community." The program would combine viewing the recording of our December 10, 2024 webinar with the testimonies of local rabbis and community leaders about Kaplan's influence on the architecture of Jewish life in the arenas of synagogue life, education, and the arts in our community. We think you can put together a similar program in your community that would give Kaplan his due and even more significantly enhance the status of your own synagogue in your community.

As always, we appreciate your help in getting these to the people in your community who can make the best use of them.



# SPIRITUAL AND INTELLECTUAL HONESTY IN THE LIFE OF MORDECAI KAPLAN

[“Spiritual and Intellectual Honesty in the Life of Mordecai Kaplan”](#) written by Jane Susswein, Eric Caplan, Mel Scult, and Jeffrey Schein.

Some Questions and Activities:

1. As you read through the short article, circle words, phrases, or ideas that jump out at you. Review the circled items a second time and then underline one or two that you find most engaging. Share with the group.
2. What makes intellectual and spiritual honesty so easy to praise and so hard to implement in society as a whole? In your own life?
3. Would you call spiritual and intellectual honesty the capstone or the foundation of a life well lived?
4. See the document below composed by Kaplan and his colleagues and originally appearing in the old Reconstructionist Mahzor (1943). In what ways does intellectual and spiritual honesty underscore the value and legitimacy of these 13 wants?

A prayer composed by Mordecai Kaplan in 1926 for the dedication of the new headquarters of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism (SAJ), the following were included in the Sabbath prayer book as “The Criteria of Jewish Loyalty.”

## THE THIRTEEN WANTS

1. We want Judaism to help us overcome temptation, doubt and discouragement.
2. We want Judaism to imbue us with a sense of responsibility for the righteous use of the blessings wherewith God endows us.

3. We want the Jew so to be trusted that his yea will be taken as yea, and his nay as nay.
4. We want to learn how to utilize our leisure to best advantage, physically, intellectually, and spiritually.
5. We want the Jewish home to live up to its traditional standards of virtue and piety.
6. We want the Jewish upbringing of our children to further their moral and spiritual growth, and to enable them to accept with joy their heritage as Jews.
7. We want the synagogue to enable us to worship God in sincerity and in truth.
8. We want our religious traditions to be interpreted in terms of understandable experience and to be made relevant to our present day needs.
9. We want to participate in the upbuilding of Eretz Yisrael as a means to the renaissance of the Jewish spirit.
10. We want Judaism to find rich, manifold and ever new expression in philosophy, letters and the arts.
11. We want all forms of Jewish organization to make for spiritual purpose and ethical endeavor.
12. We want the unity of Israel throughout the world to be fostered through mutual help in time of need, and through cooperation in the furtherance of Judaism at all time.
13. We want Judaism to function as a potent influence for justice, freedom and peace in the life of men and nations.

## MORDECAI KAPLAN THROUGH THE EYES OF IRA EISENSTEIN

We sponsored a class led by Rabbi Lee Friedlander and Harriet Feiner where they approached Kaplan through the lenses of *Creative Judaism* and *What We Mean by Religion*, Eisenstein's "primers" on Kaplan's most important books, *Judaism as a Civilization* and *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*.

Eisenstein's books are [now available digitally](#) on our website.

Here is the [link to the full set of communications and recordings](#) used by Rabbi Lee Friedlander and Harriet Feiner for this course.

## AL REGEL ACHAT: EIGHT CORE PRINCIPLES OF KAPLAN'S PHILOSOPHY



Enjoy Dr. Mel Scult's new publication  
"Al Regel Achat: The Eight Core Principles  
of Kaplan's Philosophy":

[flip book](#) and [PDF](#).

## STUDY SELECTIONS FROM *THE ART OF THE SPIRIT*

Study Selections from Kaplan's *The Art of the Spirit*, edited by Rabbi Richard Hirsh

The Universal Element of Kaplan's Religious Philosophy: A Three-Session Exploration

This learning opportunity is particularly well-placed around Sukkot-Simchat Torah-Shemini Atzeret as the linked dialogue about Kaplan and *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* with Mel Scult. Sukkot is also understood rabbinically as the holiday where the 70 bulls sacrificed come to represent the 70 nations of the world and our shared humanity, further enhancing the universal dimension of Kaplan's message.

### SESSION ONE

Mel Scult frames the value of an opportunity to explore the universal, religious dimension of Kaplan's thinking in the following way:

From the earliest point, Mordecai Kaplan's understanding of peoplehood and Jewish civilization was complex. There were many who attacked his ethnocentric Judaism as being regressive and self-centered. And yet he was able to hold in his mind both his love of the Jewish people and his concern for all others. He believed that at heart all the great religions were universalist.

In the statement below, which comes from his unpublished work *Soterics*, written in the mid-twentieth century, we see the most eloquent expression of his universalism.

From MMK.

Such is the mutuality of human life that none can be saved, unless all are saved. 'We are all our brother's keepers,' says Judaism. 'We are members of one another,' says Christianity. 'We must be saviors of all things,' says Buddhism. So, love your neighbors as to help them realize their highest potentialities. So, act as

to enable your freedom to be the means to a free society in which each individually and the group as a whole can act in freedom.

From *Soterics–The Art of Being Human*, by Mordecai M. Kaplan, unpublished mss, page 239. This book is being edited and will be published with the support of the Kaplan Center for Jewish Peoplehood.

Mel Scult believes this is one of Kaplan's most important works. Eric Caplan has noted this is the only manuscript where Kaplan almost entirely addresses religion generally, rather than Judaism specifically. The manuscript anticipates much of what Kaplan addressed about theology (beyond "the Power that makes for salvation" and "transnaturalism") in the 1970 *Religion of Ethical Nationhood* as well as in earlier entries in the Kaplan diaries.

A full discussion and dialogue about how participants understand this insight by Kaplan can launch this study. Some helpful guide questions might be:

1. In your experience, would a devoted Christian or follower of Islam also concur with these ideas?
2. When do you feel most "universalist" in your own experience of Jewish life? When most tribal or particularistic?
3. Does common devotion to *tikkun olam* bridge the universalist-particularist divide?
4. How is this tension between universalism and particularism playing out in the world today? In the Jewish world? In our own Reconstructionist movement?

We then suggest peeling the onion and going deeper in two successive stages.

## SESSION TWO

The deepening of the dialogue might come from the resources compiled during and after the January 30, 2024 webinar exploring this topic.

“Kaplan, *The Art of the Spirit*, and Resources” from January 30, 2024 webinar

Dear Mefarshei Hazon Kaplan webinar participant,

Please use this updated version which includes the PDF from the presentation.

Below you will find:

- 1) The [link of our webinar recording](#) from January 30, 2024
- 2) The [chat box dialogue](#)
- 3) The full pdf of resources “[Schulweis, Kaplan, and Salvation](#)”
- 4) Additional [comments and resources](#) from Richard Hirsh
- 5) [PDF from the presentation](#).

## SESSION THREE

This dialogue can go another step. We have provided here several pages from the draft manuscript of *The Art of the Spirit*. They could be explored along with an important article by Kaplan in “The Reconstructionist” magazine where Kaplan introduces us to the idea of ‘cosmic polarity,’ the process which allows for individuality of the unique human person through the same processes that allow groups and communities to flourish. They can flourish precisely because they partake of a cosmic reality larger than themselves.

There are three specific needs which arise in the course of man’s effort to fulfill his human destiny, and which can only be met by faith in God. Those are:

- 1) the need of being able to judge ourselves, and the community of which we are a part, as helping or hindering the fulfillment of the values in the other dimensions;

- 2) the need to make sacrifice for principle;
- 3) the need to sustain our morale when the going is hard.

The fuller version of the *The Art of the Spirit* manuscript is below.

### **Godhood as Spiritual Purpose**

We have come to understand personality and community as spiritual goals in our striving to be fully human. Even if they were static goals, they could hardly be conceived as attainable under the present condition of man's nature, of his social heritage and of his social environment. In addition to the momentum of a biological heredity that has to be channeled into human purpose, mankind has to overcome the momentum of the blunders it has committed in its very striving for salvation. Worst of all are the numerous relapses into minimalism and barbarism after each rise to higher levels of human attainment, and of the many disenchantments after the hopes of a better and higher world seemed on the point of realization. It is easy to lose heart. Therefore, simultaneous with our reaching for high goals, we must cultivate faith not only in ourselves and in our communities, but in the cosmic character of that which can bring authentic personality and community into being: the drive or impulsion of any organic unit to function both as means and as ends to the maximum potential inherent in it. This drive or impulsion is godhood or divinity, as an objective reality, for it is a manifestation of the universal polarity of individuation and interaction, which gives rise to motion, life and mind.

Viewed from the standpoint of man's self-conscious, or of the process of character building, the objective reality of that drive is not an accomplished fact, but rather one that is progressively apprehended and realized. Viewed as a goal, the experience of godhood, like the experience of achieved personality and community, exists in the future. Whatever idealism, hope, and morale we display in our striving to be fully human is like the income from a trust fund, partial evidence of a greater sum.

The God of religion has nothing in common with the God of metaphysics. Our interest is in the God of religion. Accordingly, the idea of God is a correlative of our idea of man's

salvation. As our idea of man's salvation advances, so does our idea of God. Human salvation calls for the metamorphosis of man into a higher order of being. The experience of Godhood as the goal of salvation must likewise be expected to undergo metamorphosis.

If we want the religious idea of God to orient us to life and the world, we should not hesitate to state specifically what we mean by the term God. It would not detract from the mystery of existence, or in any way lessen our reverence and wonderment in the presence of the unfathomable, if we were to identify the particular salvific experience that constitutes the supreme goal of our striving as a manifestation of godhood. We must be careful not to reduce godhood to a purely subjective experience. It will lose all its potency once it loses contact with the world of objective reality: the fact of individuation and interaction. That fact, when mediated by man's conscious, impels us as persons and as groups to function both as means and as ends.

This concrete identification of Godhood possesses an additional advantage. Instead of postponing the manifestation of Godhood to some infinite beyond, the proposed conception points to the fact of growth, which is a phenomenon common to all living things, as bringing God within the ambit of actual experience. Godhood as the goal of our endeavors to be fully human is, therefore, the continuous process of growth in the capacity to function both as means and as ends.

This enables us to understand why a religion without God, is inadequate. A religion with God is limited to human personality and community as the only spiritual values of purpose. A reason why so many people treat the belief in God as superfluous is that such a belief implies that God on occasion suspends the laws of nature. An alternative conception of God, that identifies divinity with the universal polarity of individuation and interaction, should be considered by those who would omit God from religion. The cosmic character of that polarity, in contrast with the merely human character of personality and community, renders it the most significant spiritual value in the



dimension of purpose. A godless humanism is likely to degenerate into a religion that celebrates power, with omnipotent man aspiring to the throne of God.

Insofar as the self-conscious renders the goals of personality and community instrumental by extending and deepening the process of individuation and interaction it creates something new. We thus have in the creative capacity of the self-conscious an actual manifestation of the divine. And when we set up the reality of God or godhood as a goal of human life, we set up creativity as the purpose and criterion of man's striving to be fully human or to achieve salvation.

There are three specific needs which arise in the course of man's effort to fulfill his human destiny, and which can only be met by faith in God. Those are:

- 1) the need of being able to judge ourselves, and the community of which we are a part, as helping or hindering the fulfillment of the values in the other dimensions;
- 2) the need to make sacrifice for principle;
- 3) the need to sustain our morale when the going is hard.

The self-conscious, in rising to the level of self-judgment, achieves not only a new quality but also a new type of reality. It transcends the ordinary states of self-conscious, and a degree of creativity which the ordinary states of the self-conscious lacks. To say that in self-detachment a person achieves a point of contact with divinity is not to indulge in mysticism. It is simply to affirm that the human person is capable of viewing himself and the world *sub-specie aeternitatis*. Such a perspective is suggestive of divinity.

But of even greater significance is the high degree of creativity which self-judgment releases. That creativity is itself a reflection of godhood, and is the source of the judgments we pass on ourselves, on our ideals and our shortcomings. Those judgments are free from self-centeredness or ethnic-centeredness. It is then that the self-conscious speaks with that voice of conscience that comes nearest to what we may identify as the voice of God.

In any system of values, whether affirmative or negative, there is occasion for sacrifice. Some kind of hierarchy, even though not necessarily fixed, has to be established among values. Even if we give primacy to power, pleasure, or security, some interests or values have to be sacrificed. Even, or perhaps especially, if we make pleasure our chief goal, we must forego achievement and success that are prerequisite to power. The same applies to power and security. It all depends upon what we regard as the chief goal of human life, for which we are ready to make sacrifices.

When we give primacy to the goal of achieving what is essentially human, and identify our salvation with the synthesis of independence and interdependence, or of freedom and mutual aid, the sacrifices to which we have to submit are far greater than those needed for the sake of goals like power, pleasure or security. To possess the capacity for such sacrifice, we need to have faith that the cosmos is so constituted as to require sacrifice from us. To have such faith is to believe in God.

Morale may be defined as the inner strength to meet difficulty. The condition of man is such that the spiritual values of personality and community are unrealizable in our singular lives, or in the times in which we live. We encounter heartbreaking obstacles within ourselves and in the world around us.

Modern man is discouraged by the incongruity between the worldly success of harmful people and the beliefs associated with divinity. A goal for modern man would be to be achieving adequate inner strength to overcome defeat and frustration, and the persistence to keep on striving and hoping in the face of the most disheartening odds. That would give him self-respect and self-satisfaction.

Compare and contrast this presentation with its practical focus with the more theoretical treatment in the Reconstructionist article *A God to Match the Universe*.

We have also provided the following resources as useful background:

[Our February webinar with Nadav Berman and Vered Sakal](#) about the underlying philosophical “realism” (as opposed to subjectivism) of Kaplan’s philosophy.

[Mel Scult on Kaplan, Sukkot, and Universalism](#)

This important article “[A God to Match the Universe: A Reply](#)” in “The Reconstructionist” by Kaplan introduces his notion of “cosmic polarities” that undergird his approach to God and religion. The article focuses on the somewhat abstract theological notion of cosmic polarity, the simultaneous existence of unique individuals and cosmic, larger than individual entities and processes in the universe. In the short selection from *The Art of the Spirit*, Eric Caplan and Richard Hirsh help us explore the practical implications of such a theology at work in everyday life.

**How well today is Judaism helping us fulfill our human destiny? How else might Judaism be supporting and encouraging us to fulfill our human destiny?**

# DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS

## The Democracy Project

It is often observed that for Mordecai Kaplan (and others) democracy was the religion of America.

The Kaplan Center appreciates our grant from the Jewish Partnership for Democracy: A More Perfect Union. This grant allows us to embark on a “religious” journey from this February through next October. Each month we will select and distribute to our friends and partners a passage from Mordecai Kaplan or one of his students and collaborators.

### **FEBRUARY 2024**

This month features Rabbi Manny Goldsmith, *zichrono l'veracha*.

*For Kaplan, the idea underlying democracy is that the interests uniting human beings, if they become truly aware of those interests, are strong enough to ward off the divisive influence of people's differences. The crucial problem of freedom is how to guard our individuality and the capacity to think for ourselves and yet cooperate with those whose backgrounds, upbringings and outlooks are different from our own. This is an art, said Kaplan, that human beings are slow to learn. Democracy should be conceived as a process of social experimentation by which people are seeking to learn that art and to apply, step by step, the wisdom acquired as a result of such experimentation. That is why the art of free, voluntary cooperation, the ultimate objective of democracy, must constantly be cultivated.*

– Rabbi Manny Goldsmith, “Reconstructionism Today,” Spring 2003

### **VOTE**

- In your own life, how do you balance authenticity and devotion to your beliefs and deeply understand the belief systems of those different than yourself?
- How do your communities engage in the ongoing “experimentation” of creating balance between these two forces?

- Why indeed are we so slow to practice “the art of democracy?”
- In your own life, when do you practice this “art of democracy” most naturally and fully?

## **MARCH 2024**

This month features Kaplan’s diary entry from Thursday, December 24, 1942.

The contribution which Judaism has made and should continue to make to democracy and the American way of life is best summarized in the motto enunciated by the prophet Zachariah. [ 4:6 ] “Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts,” and to add the supplement of Hillel’s famous summary of Judaism, “the rest is commentary, go and learn.”

The importance of Zachariah’s motto is that it furnishes the key to that inner freedom without which democracy is merely a hollow form. “Not by might nor by power but by my spirit” sets forth the mental attitude which is a prerequisite to the building of a world on the foundations of peace. Before we can have democracy in action, we must will it...

## **VOTE**

- When do you experience democracy in a “hollow form” in our political life? What accounts for its hollowness?
- When is democracy “thick and textured” as opposed to hollow?
- In 2024, is democracy more “hollow” or more “thick and textured”?
- What role does media play in “thickening” and “hollowing” our experience of democracy?

## **APRIL 2024**

This month features Kaplan's diary entry from August 10, 1939 on Fascism, Mobocracy, and Democracy.

After mentioning the two factors which have contributed to the rise of mobocracy, viz: a) the stupendous machinery of communication which unites millions into a seething sea of human emotion, and b) the failure of democracy to make good its promise of bringing special privilege under control.

The rulers in a mobocracy know that they can gain control of the masses by instilling in them hate and fears of some common enemy who has to be augmented to gigantic proportions if he is comparatively insignificant and harmless, and who has to be invented if he is non-existent. For their purposes, mankind must be treated as broken up into classes or nations or tribes that are engaged in a mutual life and death struggle. The purpose of propaganda is to fan the flames of hate.

## **VOTE**

- How do media and "mobocracy" work together to make the challenge even more severe in 2024?
- What is the difference between acculturation and propaganda?
- What are the most potent forces in today's American democracy that can provide unity rather than fragmentation?
- DeTocqueville spoke of the "tyranny of the majority". How does this play into our contemporary challenge to democracy?

## COFFEE HOUSE CONVERSATIONS ON QUESTIONS JEWS ASK

We know Kaplan Center supporters value ongoing learning. So we invite them to step into the virtual neighborhood of our President, Jane Susswein, and our Vice President for Programming, Caitlin Hayes, where you will step into the dialogues originally framed in Mordecai Kaplan's *Questions Jews Ask* and formulate 21st-century responses to these 20th century questions. To enroll please contact Caitlin at [Caitlin@kaplancenter.org](mailto:Caitlin@kaplancenter.org).

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR TALMUD STYLE DIALOGUE

[Contemporary Talmud Pages](#)

A Note from Dr. Jeffrey Schein:

*Talmud (study) consists of the Mishnah (original text or law) and Gemara, completion of the text. We emphasize the term Talmud (study) because it indicates that Mishnah and Gemara are part of a larger process of expansion of meaning that is fostered by sacred argument. Our readers are invited to serve as tosafists (commentators) suggesting other points of view.*

## MEL SCULT TEEN CONTEST

We are making a new effort to reach our teens. This takes the form of a contest in honor of Mel Scult's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration where teens are invited to provide 21<sup>st</sup> century responses to questions raised in Kaplan's 20<sup>th</sup> century *Questions Jews Ask* and/or recreate a logo for 21<sup>st</sup> century Jewish living. Everyone between b'nai mitzvah age and 12<sup>th</sup> grade is invited to participate in this contest in honor of Mel Scult's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration (webinar Sunday, December 8, 2024). Be in touch with Karen Morris, our educator, at [education@kaplancenter.org](mailto:education@kaplancenter.org) for further information.

## ROGUE HEBREW

### A GLIMMER OF THE “ROGUE” IN ROGUE HEBREW

You see, English and Hebrew are very different languages, as unlike each other in many aspects as English and Chinese or English and Swahili. You can see an aspect of this by just opening a dictionary. A decently literate English speaker will know around 30,000 of the roughly 75,000 distinct words in something like the paperback version of *The Merriam Webster Dictionary*.

The entire Hebrew Bible weighs in at something approaching 9,000 words. I often say that English words are like teeth – highly specialized, and we are born with more than we need. Hebrew words are like stem cells, or maybe neurons, capable of becoming many things, multiply linked in webs of sound and meaning and imagery.

The word *Torah* is a perfect illustration of this. We gloss this in everyday language as ‘Torah,’ but when someone asks what the word actually means, we say ‘law’ or ‘instruction’ or ‘teaching.’ It does mean these things, but if you go looking for *torah* in a scholarly dictionary like the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, you’ll be redirected to a three-letter root, a verb, in fact – ירה *yud-resh-heh*, meaning ‘shoot,’ which has more to do with archery than teaching.



# KAPLAN YOUR WAY: CHOOSE FROM SEVERAL DOZEN WEBINARS

## Past Webinars:

- [\*Democracy and Judaism: Does One Need the Other to Thrive?\*](#) with Aaron Dorfman, Amy Spitalnick, Rabbis Amy Klein and Bill Plevan, and moderated by Rabbi Elyse Wechterman (3/20/2024)
- [\*Beneath the Surface: Mordecai Kaplan's Philosophical Commitments Explored\*](#) with Dr. Nadav Berman and Dr. Rabbi Vered Sakal (2/11/2024)
- [\*The Art of the Spirit\*](#) with Rabbi Richard Hirsh (1/30/2024)
- [\*The Great Kaplanian Report Card: Valley Beth Shalom of California as a Kaplanian Playground\*](#) with Rabbis Amy Bernstein, Ed Feinstein and Jeffrey Schein on the successes and challenges of implementing the Judaism as a Civilization program. (1/7/2024: Third of a Three Part Series in Honor of the 40th Yahrzeit of Mordecai Kaplan and the 90th Anniversary of *Judaism as a Civilization*)
- [\*Judaism as a Civilization, The Hanukkah Gift to the Jewish People and World that Keeps on Giving\*](#), lecture by Dr. Deborah Waxman of Reconstructing Judaism and response from Dr. Elias Sacks of Jewish Publication Society. Moderated by Dr. Jeffrey Schein. (12/10/2023: Second of a Three Part Series in Honor of the 40th Yahrzeit of Mordecai Kaplan and the 90th Anniversary of *Judaism as a Civilization*)
- [\*What Remains Revelatory in the 21st Century in Mordecai Kaplan's Thought?\*](#) with Drs. Arnie Eisen, David Ellenson, and Nancy Fuchs Kreimer, moderated by Dr. Eric Caplan (11/12/2023: First of a Three Part Series in Honor of the 40th Yahrzeit of Mordecai Kaplan and the 90th Anniversary of *Judaism as a Civilization*)
- [\*Standing with Israel, Pursuing Peace\*](#) (10/19/2023)

- [Kaplan, Musar, Mindfulness and Morals](#) with Drs. Eric Caplan and Mel Scult, Rabbi Marc Margolius, and Elizabeth Caplan, moderated by Rabbi Les Bronstein (9/10/2023)
- [Kaplan and Israel: A New, New Zionism](#) with Rabbis Michael Cohen, Barbara Penzner, Gail Shuster-Bouskila, Dennis Sasso, and Dr. Shlomi Ravid (4/23/2023)
- [Kaplan and Hebrew](#) with Rabbis Daria Jacobs-Velde, Helen Plotkin, Professor Vardit Ringvalt, and Earl Schwartz (2/26/2023)
- [Kaplan, Creativity & the Arts](#) with Rabbi Adina Allen, Joanne Fink, Elizheva Hurvich, and Rabbi Margie Jacobs (1/29/2023)
- [Hanukkah and a Friendly Critique of the Notion of Living in Two Civilizations](#) with Rabbis James Greene, Jessica Lott, Jeffrey Schein, and Dr. Eric Caplan (12/11/2022)
- [Entering the Heichal \(sanctuary\) of the Voting Booth: Reflections on Judaism and Democracy](#) with Rabbi Elliot Dorff, Rabbi Lauren Grabelle Herrmann, Sarah Hurwitz, and Rabbi Sid Schwarz (10/30/2022)
- [God is Here in Kaplanian Context](#) with Rabbi Toba Spitzer (9/13/2022)
- [God is Here, Book Club](#) with Drs. Deborah & Jeffrey Schein (8/31/2022)
- [Role models of Kaplanian lay leadership today; A discussion among rabbis to mark the yahrzeit of Dan Cedarbaum](#) (6/27/2022)
- [Dr. Marcia Falk, Mah Nishtana Ha-Haggadah Ha-Zot: an exploration of my new haggadah, Night of Beginnings](#) (3/13/2022)
- [The Natural and Supernatural, The Human and Divine: A Dialogue about the Golem, Artificial Intelligence and Purim](#) with Dr. Jeffrey Schein, Dr. Henry Morris, and Rabbi Lawrence Pinsker (2/27/2022)

- [Dr. Tzemah Yoreh, Rabbi Sandy Sasso, and Sarah Brammer-Shlay discuss Sasha Sagan's \*For Small Creatures Such as We: Rituals for Finding Meaning in our Unlikely World\* \(1/30/2022\)](#)
- [\*God and Science, Einstein and Kaplan: a conversation\* with Rabbi Michael Cohen and Roger L. Price \(1/9/2022\)](#)
- [\*Eric Caplan: Revisiting From Ideology to Liturgy: New Insights into Mordecai Kaplan as liturgist and the current prayerbooks of Conservative and Reform Judaism\* \(12/12/2021\)](#)



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