



Mel Scult

A Living Legacy

We Love you Mel



Mel, when you asked me, more than five years ago, to transcribe some audio tapes you had made with Mordecai Kaplan in the early 70's, I had no idea of how the task would impact my life – in so many wonderful ways. To have lived with your voice, and Kaplan's – hearing his passion, enthusiasm, frustration, and delight – was an unbelievable treat. My deepening relationship with the Kaplan Center has been so enriching. Most of all, the friendship with you that ensued is a gift I will always treasure. Happy 90th birthday year – may you have many more.

Jane Susswein

Mel, Mazal Tov on your special birthday and thank you for perpetuating Rabbi Kaplan's legacy.

Sandy and Dennis Sasso

I am so pleased that we are honoring Mel Scult. He has done so much to make my grandfather's work accessible to scholars and ordinary interested laypeople. He is a fine scholar, and his work is clear and understandable. He has the keenest understanding of MMK. I have enjoyed the privilege of speaking with him on many occasions, and I wish him many more years of continued health and scholarship.

Daniel Musher

Let me count the ways! Of course, we are all in your debt for your incredible scholarly undertaking of working through ALL of Kaplan's diaries and for making so many of his gems and insights accessible to the rest of us. And for the comprehensive and empathic biography. The loving appreciation of Kaplan that infuses your work has opened up nuances that continue to guide us in the enterprise of ongoing reconstruction. And for the humility and kindness with which you have shared and guided us, thank you!

Jacob Staub

Deborah and Jeffrey Schein are delighted to honor the 90th anniversary of Judaism as a Civilization and even more our dear friend Mel Scult whose ongoing explorations of Kaplan's life keeps the volume fresh and relevant to 21st century Judaism.

With all best wishes Mel, *Jeff and Deb Schein*

Kol HaKavod to Mel Scult for being the preeminent curator of, and commentator on, the work of and life of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan! It is an honor to be your friend and student. B'yedidut, Richard Hirsh

More We Love You, Mel

Mel Scult: Scholar, Writer, and Friend,

In the early 70's. after the Reconstructionist conference in Manhattan (and before Kaplan made Aliyah to Israel), I observed a young man I had never met before, deeply engaged in an animated discussion with Mordecai Kaplan. I turned to Arthur Gilbert and asked, "Who is that?" Arthur responded, "That's Mel Scult, and he wants to study the Kaplan diaries." At that point, I knew nothing about the diaries, so Arthur explained that Kaplan had kept them for over fifty years. I introduced myself to Mel but didn't think much more of the encounter at the time.

When Manny Goldsmith decided to collaborate with Mel on a project focused on Mordecai Kaplan, my interest was piqued, and so I reached out. It was then that I realized the significant and creative work Mel had dedicated himself to. I decided that I would assist him in any way I could. Although we didn't meet face to face right away, we maintained a wonderful and enjoyable relationship over the phone.

When Mel wanted to publish the first edited edition of the diaries, I committed to Wayne State University that, should they publish, I would underwrite the printing of a minimum of 80 volumes, which would then be distributed to a select group of 80 rabbis. This gesture solidified our relationship, and from that point onward, Mel and I spoke nearly every week, discussing various ideas promulgated by Kaplan.

From the very beginning, Mel was humble in our discussions, primarily focusing on the Jewish world. Whenever I had questions or reflected on events in the Jewish experience, a phone call with Mel often turned into a half-hour conversation, pondering, "What would Kaplan say or think?"

Mel is erudite and when coming across a name he will delve further. He has done this with Mathilde Schechter, Heschel and others. His frequent scholarly epistles on current events framed though Kaplanian diary musings, (shared in emails), are appreciated by his numerous admiring acolytes.

Mel, may you continue for many years to explore that which keeps us all eagerly anticipating your next missive.

Yasher koach and as Ya instructs Joshua: *chazak ve-yamatz.*
Jack Wolofsky



More We Love You, Mel

Dear Mel, You are a treasure to West End. I have learned so much from you and look forward to hearing your enlightening talks in the future. Happy Birthday!

Dr. Ann Shapiro

Yay, Mel, and Happy Birthday!

Tonda Marton

In honor of all you have done to advance Kaplanian thought and for your 90th birthday.
Mazel tov and thank you!

With respect and love, *Dawn Rosen*

Congratulations Mel, and a huge thank you for spreading Kaplan's teachings.
I owe you more than you can imagine.

Elizabeth Caplun

Mazel! only just last week read vol 3 of the diaries of R. Kaplan z"l and
am hugely grateful for your curation, annotations, and voice as guide.

Ian McCarthy

Happy birthday Mel, I remember learning from you in Brooklyn.

The Gladstones introduced us to their and your congregation.

I miss those days.

Carol Cohen

Why Mel is Like Moses

His face shines with wisdom from long proximity to sources of Torah.

He brings perspectives from unexpected places that push us,
enlighten us, and show us how to lead a holy life.

He has pride in his work, and strives to bring it to those
who need it most.

He has humbleness to know that his interpretations are fabulous,
and there are others who will see differently than he does.

He is always willing to learn.

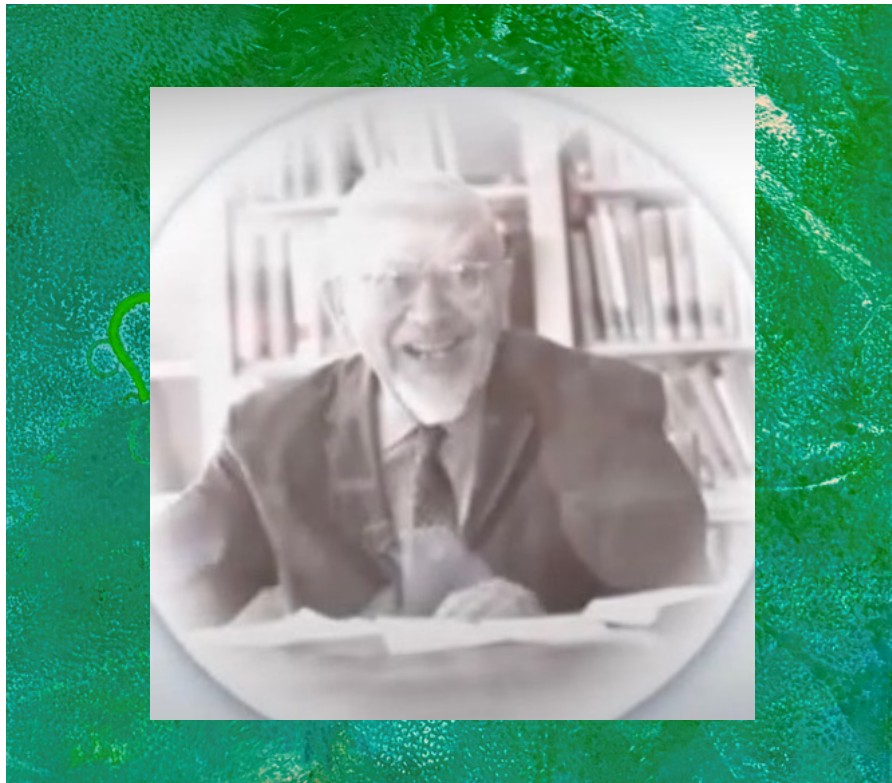
May he also live 'ad me'ah ve'esrim, to 120, in health,
joy and happiness.

And may the seeds he has sown be ever more numerous
and fill the earth with understanding.

In gratitude,

Rabbi Elisheva Salamo





**The happiest moments in my life these
days are those which I experience
whenever I receive letters from Mel Scult.
His latest letter was accompanied by a detailed outline
of the Seminar he was conducting on
“The Life and Thought of Mordecai M. Kaplan.”**

MMK's diary, February 17, 1974



Here is Mel



Mel Scult, professor, scholar, husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, was born May 28, 1934 in Paterson, New Jersey. It is quite amazing that Mordecai Kaplan's *Judaism as a Civilization* appeared in the New York Times within a few days of his birth. Scult's family were members of a Conservative synagogue, where as a teen, he participated in services and in synagogue activities, frequently serving as a cantor in the Junior Congregation. Truth to tell, however, he was much more interested in girls than in Judaism. He enjoyed ballroom dancing very much and reports that he went to dances frequently at the local Y.



At age fifteen, he received a scholarship to Camp Ramah, a camp sponsored by the Jewish Theological Seminary to encourage young people to speak Hebrew, to study Jewish sources, and to follow the rituals of Judaism. That experience transformed him in a fundamental way. Life would never be the same. He states 'I deeply wanted to be part of that group and I hoped to share their goals and their values.'

As a consequence of that camp experience, Mel entered into an illustrious stream of higher education with a focus on Judaism and the Jewish experience, past and present. At the same time that he was an undergraduate attending New York University majoring in philosophy, he attended evening classes at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Thus he received a B.A., and a Bachelor of Hebrew Letters simultaneously. Somewhat later he spent six months in the Holy Land studying at the Hayim Greenberg Institute in Jerusalem. Upon returning, he moved to Boston where he earned an M.A., attended Harvard University where he received his M.A. in teaching from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and then studied at Brandeis University where he was awarded a Ph.D. in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies from Brandeis University.



After completing his doctorate, Mel served as professor of religion at Vassar College. He then spent the next thirty years teaching at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, where he founded and directed the Program in Comparative Religion and was also a founding member of the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies. He has held teaching positions at The New School, and at Brandeis University, and most recently served as Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary where he taught rabbinical students about the life and thought of Mordecai Kaplan.

Scult's involvement with Mordecai Kaplan began after he completed his doctorate. He decided that he wanted to write a biography and thereby get intimately involved with the life and thought of one person. Looking around, Kaplan seemed like a likely candidate because of the excommunication and the first Bat Mitzvah. After absorbing the works

of Kaplan for a year, he asked his Ph.D advisor Ben Halpern to write a letter of introduction. One thing led to another and Scult began his life's journey by spending three days at Camp Cejwin interviewing Kaplan.

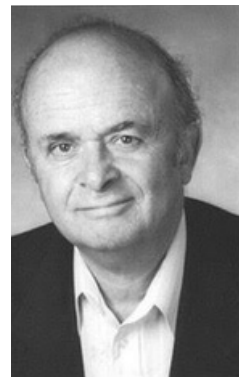
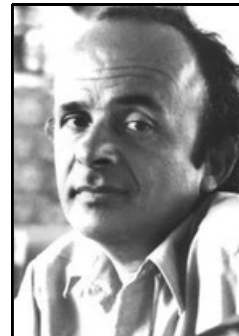
Mel continued these conversations back in New York. Kaplan showed him his twenty-seven volume diary; Kaplan's diary is one of the largest in history and has been an endless source of inspiration to Mel and to others. It has been the basis of his biography of Kaplan and three volumes of excerpts which he published. In the course of his research he also interviewed Louis Finkelstein, president of the Seminary, Robert Gordis, noted Bible scholar, and additionally Judith Kaplan Eisenstein and her husband, Rabbi Ira Eisenstein.

Kaplan as a person and as a thinker has been a model for Mel in many ways. Kaplan thought endlessly about the basic questions that any religious person might confront. These include the meaning of our individual existence, the matter of what is right and good, the belief in God, and as a Jew, the relationship to the Jewish people and their experience past and present. Mel believes that his discovery of the centrality of the individual in Kaplan's thought and the emphasis on growth is a key aspect of his legacy. Kaplan understood that the search to find one's place and what life is all about is never ending. His writings have been inspirational to Mel in his research and hopefully will be helpful to you.

Mel has continued to study and learn and publish his thinking on a variety of subjects. In addition to his work on Kaplan he has produced a major study of the early Seminary administration of Solomon Schechter and has written on the life of Schechter's wife, Mathilde Roth Schechter. He has also written about Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah, who was a classmate of his at the Seminary.

Mel is a trustee of PEF - Israel Endowment Fund and a vice president and one of founders of The Mordecai Kaplan Center for Jewish Peoplehood. He is not a rabbi but often feels like one because of his very supportive friends and colleagues at West End Synagogue and at the Society of the Advancement of Judaism. He davens and speaks frequently at both synagogues.

He has a son, ten grandchildren and thirty-one great grandchildren all of whom live in Jerusalem. He lives in New York with his wife Barbara Gish Scult.



Mel's Books about Kaplan

Goldsmith, S. Emanuel, Mel Scult, and Robert Seltzer, eds. *The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, New York NY: New York University, 1990.

A diverse collection of articles by well-informed scholars on all aspects of Kaplan's life and work. The articles by Eleazar Schweid and Harold Schulweis are particularly noteworthy.

Scult, Mel. *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century- A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1993.

This work is a full-scale biography of Kaplan although emphasis is on the first half of his life including the publication of his magnum opus *Judaism as a Civilization*. This biography is based on a mass of unpublished material including Kaplan's twenty-seven volume diary, his letters, his sermons, his teaching notes, and his speeches as well as the papers of those who knew Kaplan and also a variety of published sources. This work attempts to give an intimate look at the man, his mind and his work. Kaplan appears here as far more complex and multi-dimensional than previously imagined.

Scult, Mel. *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014.

The many influences on Kaplan are explained and detailed. Particular attention is given to the American influences on his thought e.g. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Felix Adler, William James, John Dewey, Josiah Royce, and William E. Hocking. His concept of salvation, his concept of God, his Zionism, and his attitude toward Jewish law and tradition are all explained and analyzed. There is a separate chapter on the relationship of Kaplan to his colleague Abraham Joshua Heschel.



Two Auspicious Beginnings...Beshert!



Our beloved Mel Scult was born on Monday, May 28, 1934.

Soon after, on Thursday, May 31 and on Sunday, June 3, the New York Times announced the publication of *Judaism as a Civilization*, the subject of Mel's life's work!

JUDAISM AS A CIVILIZATION. By Mordecai M. Kaplan. 8vo. New York: The Macmillan Company.
A suggested program toward a reconstruction of American-Jewish life.

JUDAISM AS A CIVILIZATION: TOWARD A RECONSTRUCTION OF AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE, by Mordecai M. Kaplan. (Macmillan, \$5.) A program for a creative Judaism which is intended to be responsive to all the valid needs of Jews living in the United States today.

A year later, on July 21, 1935, a review by Jacob J. Weinstein appeared in the New York Times Book Review. The text of the review will be posted on the Kaplan Center website soon.

JUDAISM AS A CIVILIZATION: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life. By Mordecai M. Kaplan. 600 pp. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$5.

FOR twenty-five years the author, as leader of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism and Professor of Homiletics at the Jewish Theological Seminary, has been expounding the thesis elaborated in this volume.

The Gift of Mel Scult's Kaplan

by Arnie Eisen

I met Mordecai Kaplan only once, but the encounter in his apartment on Ibn Ezra Street in Jerusalem was unforgettable. It took place in the course of my PhD work in Jerusalem on the “chosen people” idea in American Judaism, so naturally I asked Kaplan if he had ever changed his mind about his strong opposition to that concept. He rose from his chair and pronounced a vociferous, definitive “no”. When I asked if he had ever regretted making his life in America rather than in Israel, he said “no” once again. I had many more questions to ask the great man in the course of writing the dissertation and in the years following, but I never got another chance to pose them to him directly. I am left – we all are left – with his many books, articles, speeches, diaries and achievements. But, thank goodness, we have an additional legacy from Mordecai Kaplan to guide us: we have Mel Scult.

For me – a scholar of 20th-21st century American Jewish religious thought and practice, and, perhaps more important, a committed American Jew who is ever searching for greater meaning in my tradition and new ways of revitalizing my community – Mel’s work has been an indispensable gift. He opened Kaplan’s diaries to us, judiciously selecting key passages from the thousands of pages that Kaplan penned and showing us a lyrical and meditative side of Kaplan that the published writings for the most part do not reveal. Mel has translated Kaplan into language that speaks powerfully to the present cultural moment and resonates with contemporary spiritual quest, and has done so without distorting what Kaplan said in prose shaped in a different time by different cultural assumptions and prose styles. One could truly say “Dayyenu” at this point – but Mel has done more. He has repeatedly found ways of summing up Kaplan’s message – most recently in the pamphlet entitled “Eight Core Principles of Kaplan’s Philosophy” – thereby making the master accessible and applicable to a wide variety of audiences. And – perhaps most important still – Mel has demonstrated by example what it means to be a faithful student, protégé and friend without sacrifice of independent judgment and intellectual integrity. One rarely sees this in our world. For me, it is cause for thanks and for praise.



If you ever want to teach Kaplan's thought on Reconstructionism or of American Judaism as a whole, I recommend the marvelous anthology that Mel put together with Emanuel S. Goldsmith, entitled *Dynamic Judaism: The Essential Writings of Mordecai Kaplan*. It is no easy task to select key passages from the many hundreds of writings that crowd the shelves and file cabinets of devoted Kaplan students. Scult and Goldsmith succeeded admirably. The collection included not only key sections of Kaplan's best-known and most-studied works, but passages from lesser-known sources such as *The Greater Judaism in the Making* (1960) and *Questions Jews Ask* (1956). The chapter on Kaplan's lifelong wrestling with "God-concepts," for example, includes expository prose and poetry from *Questions Jews Ask* that expand and challenge the line of thought presented in *Judaism Without Supernaturalism* (1958). The brief sections devoted to Zionism and the State of Israel, offered in the context of Kaplan's ideas of Jewish Peoplehood, speak to the present moment with remarkable prescience. Kaplan worried in 1960 that Arabs "contest the Jews' right to the Land" and that "the State of Israel finds itself completely isolated." He also worried that while Israel had "succeeded in providing a precarious measure of physical security for about two million Jews," it had increased "the spiritual insecurity of all Jews," by failing to augment the "generative and self-renewing potency of Jewish peoplehood." Kaplan here and elsewhere declared that goal the very purpose of Zionism.

Mel, to see you in action with students, as I had the chance to do recently making Kaplan live for young American Jews, is to witness in real time the creative reconstruction of Judaism as a civilization. It is also, for me, sheer joy! You are a great teacher! On behalf of your many admirers in the worlds of Jewish Studies and Jewish life, I thank you with all my heart and wish you many more years of good health and good work.



Arnold Eisen is Chancellor Emeritus and Professor of Jewish Thought at the Jewish Theological Seminary and the author, most recently, of *Seeking the Hiding God: A Personal Theological Essay*.

Honoring the Keeper of the Kaplan Flame

by Richard Hirsh

Each well-deserved tribute to Dr. Mel Scult will harvest his rich career, and highlight the countless contributions he has made to the study of American Judaism in general and to the legacy of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan in particular. We are all in his debt for his diligence in pursuing the details of the Kaplan career, and for bringing to light the Kaplan Diaries.

I choose to offer tribute of a more personal nature, reflecting my appreciation to Mel for over three decades of friendship, arcane Kaplanian conversations, references and cross-references. We have a shared obsession with the minutia of decoding Kaplan's always provocative, occasionally contradictory, usually verbose, and sometimes opaque writings.

There is a Jewish term for someone whose devotion to/obsession with any and all aspects of a given subject is inexhaustible—*meshuggeh l'davar*, "crazy about something." For some people, it might be the history of a certain automobile. For others, all the details about some category of collectibles, or the history of the Civil War, or the box scores for the 1927 N.Y. Yankees. (Oops...with Mel's many years at Brooklyn College, which should have been the Dodgers!)

When Mel first came to the attention of Rabbi Ira Eisenstein z"l in the early 1970s, I'm reasonably sure Ira pegged Mel as a *meshuggeh l'davar* about Mordecai Kaplan. (It takes one to know one!) Fortunately, Mel was persuasive enough with both Ira and Kaplan to gain access to the Kaplan Diaries, archives, and other memorabilia and records, to which he then proceeded to devote the next five decades. Mel's tireless work has enriched our understanding of the life and thought of the man who would create a unique and—for those of us for whom being Jewish would perhaps be otherwise impossible—indispensable reinterpretation of Judaism.



I have too many fond memories of Mel to count. But among the most honored is that I had the privilege of being the rabbi in 1991-1992 of the congregation to which he and Barbara belonged. That this consummate scholar of Kaplanian thought imagined that I had something to say on Shabbat morning that was worth hearing was a great tribute.

I am grateful for Mel's kindness, support, and friendship. May he live in good health, and may it be my privilege, along with Dr. Eric Caplan, to present to him the edited and annotated unpublished manuscript by Kaplan (that Mel discovered) on "The Art of Living" – *bimheyra b'yameinu*, soon, and in our days!



Richard Hirsh was Executive Director of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (1998-2014) and editor of the journal *The Reconstructionist* (1996-2006).



By the Book

by Jenna Weissman Joselit

Mordecai Menachem Kaplan was known far and wide as a rabbi, a theologian, a philosopher, a teacher, a critic and the founder of Reconstructionism. He could also lay claim to being a diarist of the first order, a Jewish Samuel Pepys, but that was not common knowledge, though it wasn't exactly a secret, either. From time to time, Kaplan would invite a select number of students and colleagues into his "holy of holies" – his study at 415 Central Park West in Manhattan – throw open a closet door and, voilà, have them gaze upon shelves filled with ledger-sized, handwritten accounts of how he had come to be Mordecai M. Kaplan. Over the years, there had also been talk of publishing some of the diary's entries but, invariably, their creator pulled back at the very last moment, fearful lest their contents offend or be misinterpreted.

It was not until 1972, when Kaplan took a young Mel Scult into his confidence, inviting him to write his life story, that the prospect of airing the diary's contents became a reality.

Mel recalls having been "overwhelmed" at the imposing sight of what Kaplan himself likened to a "large mountain." Little did the aspiring biographer know what lay in store as he set about researching and writing his account, drawing on the diaries as its armature. Rich in both smart and cutting observations and in dense philosophical ruminations; awash in emotion, filled with both doubt and certitude, the diaries are a treasure trove, which Mel was the first to have exhaustively mined.

Nothing if not meticulous, he also read what Kaplan read, no matter how arcane or recherché; talked at length with family members, colleagues and congregants; and diligently made his way through Kaplan's extensive correspondence with anybody who was anybody in 20th century American Jewish life. Perhaps the only aspect of Kaplan's life at which Mel drew the line was consuming one of his subject's favorite dishes: creamed asparagus on toast.



Little wonder that the project, which resulted in the magisterial *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century*, took decades to complete. More than just a compendium of fascinating details, a cascade of revelations, its 400-plus pages argued for Kaplan as a towering intellectual figure who more than held his own with the very best thinkers in and of modern America. Though in his lifetime and posthumously, this self-styled maverick was often dismissed by critics as more sociologist than theologian, Mel would have none of that. By his lights, the founder of Reconstructionism could only be understood as the architect of an exciting new way of thinking about the relationship among God, nature and man, the weight of Jewish history, the balance between tradition and modernity, and the tension between choice and commandedness.

Mindful of Kaplan's crotchets, Mel was more inclined to soft-pedal than explore them lest they divert the reader's attention from what truly mattered, or, worse still, weaken the reputation he worked so assiduously to secure for his subject. His is an intellectual biography through and through: ideas rather than personality or incident inhabit its pages.

Kaplan would have been pleased. While he did not live to see the biography, he had a keen sense of what was to come, thanks to Mel having made a point of keeping him informed of his progress. "The happiest moments in my life these days" Kaplan recorded in his diary in 1974, "are those when...I receive letters from Mel Scult."



Jenna Weissman Joselit, the Charles E. Smith Professor of Judaic Studies & Professor of History at George Washington University, is the author of a forthcoming biography of Mordecai Kaplan to be published by Yale University Press as part of its Jewish Lives series.



Disciples and Scholars – What Does the Future Hold for Scholarship on Kaplan? by Vered Sakal

Mordecai Menahem Kaplan died more than 40 years ago, in 1983. When a great scholar dies, family, friends and pupils look for ways to keep the legacy alive. Hagiography is, oftentimes, the product of such sentiments, but it may not be the best way to honor a great thinker, as it focuses on the charisma rather than the intellectual legacy such a scholar leaves behind. The correct way, I think, is to engage critically with the late scholar's texts - the true heritage of people like Kaplan. Thus, rather than being kept in a glass coffin - where we have no real permission to use them - ideas continue to live and function, as Kaplan would have said, as a force in the universe.

Not everyone is capable of such transformation, in which the words, and not the man, become the center of attention. Especially when that person was a close student of the revered scholar. Many adherents remain within the realm of posthumous personal admiration. And while their memories serve as an important source for future generations, they lack the vitality that is needed to keep a teaching alive and relevant for those who did not know the teacher. It is therefore most fortunate that Kaplan had a student-companion who was able to take on the responsibilities of a leading scholar: Dr. Mel Scult, who dedicated his lifework not only to collecting, preserving, and publishing Kaplan's vast body of work, but to thorough and academic inquiries of the ideas these texts hold.

In his sense, Scult's work serves as an essential and indispensable bridge between the past and future of Kaplan scholarship. Strongly rooted in his personal and professional ties to Kaplan, Scult's relentless commitment to high-quality research draws scholars, who never met Kaplan, into the fascinating discourse about Kaplan's work, and its meaning to new generations. Rather than fossilizing Kaplan's heritage by striving to ensure its survival at all costs, Scult's work dares to emphasize the importance of transmission and evolution - transformative actions, without which the ideas will have no power to revitalize current and future Jewish individuals and groups.

תלמידך אנו אנומימיך שותין.

We are your students and we drink from your water.

Chagigah 3a



אנשי הכנסת הגדולה אמרו שלשה דברים:
הוּוּ מְתוּנִים בְּדִין, וְהַעֲמִידוּ תַלְמִידִים הַרְבֵּה,
וַעֲשׂוּ סִיג לַתּוֹרָה. (אבות, א)

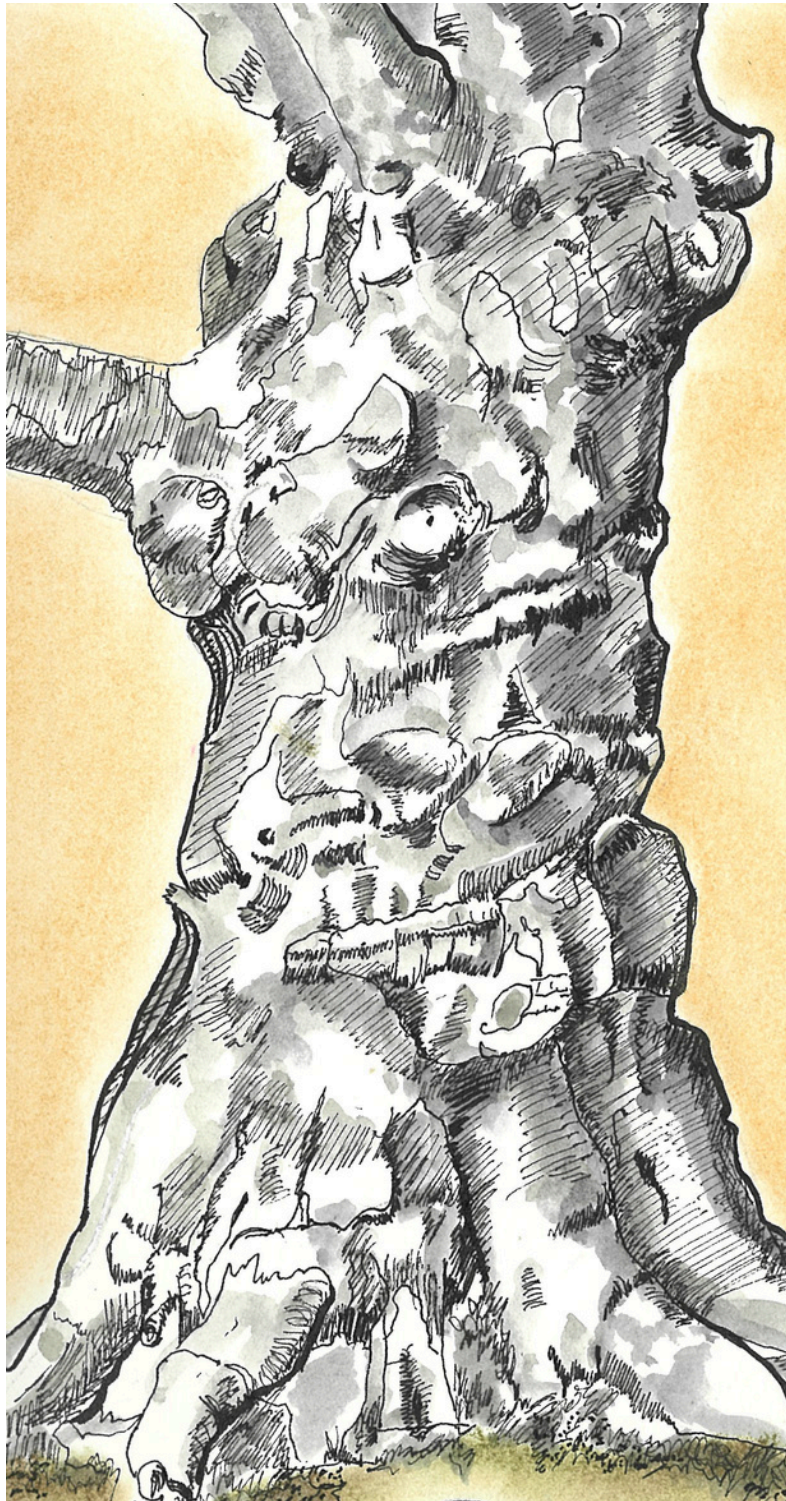
How fortunate are we to still have such rabbis-scholars among us, who have the faith and the patience to raise many disciples-students?

Thank you, Mel, for decades of labor of love.

Dr. Rabbi Vered Sakal is the Bertram and Gladys Aaron Professor of Jewish Studies at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia. Sakal holds a PhD in Jewish thought from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She was ordained as a Rabbi by Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem in 2003. Her fields of research are religious studies, modern Jewish thought, liberal theory and subaltern studies.



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מפרשי חזון קפלן

Mefarshei Hazon Kaplan

Mefarshei Hazon Kaplan is a group of rabbis committed to exploring the 21st century implications of Mordecai Kaplan's vision for creative Jewish Living.

Together we applaud Dr. Mel Scult with this message:

Mel, your biography of Kaplan and your continuous exploration of Kaplan's diaries have helped us as rabbis bring home his contemporary relevance to the Jewish communities we serve. Thank you so much, Mel! As a rabbinic community, we have been deeply enriched by your scholarship as well as, in many instances, your friendship.



Lester Bronstein
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Hillel Cohn
Fred Scherlinder Dobb
Jeffrey Eisenstat
Kevin Hale
Lauren Grabelle Herrmann
Bonnie Koppell
Nancy Fuchs Kreimer
Arnold Rachlis
Steven Carr Reuben
Seth Riemer
Dennis Sasso
Sandy Sasso
Jeffrey Schein
Sid Schwarz
Steve Segar
Gail Shuster-Bouskila
Reena Spicehandler
Robert Tabak
Shawn Zevit

We Cannot Love without Giving

I met Mel and Barbara during my tenure as the founding rabbi of West End Synagogue. The first time Mel spoke during a discussion on Shabbat morning, he took my breath away with the joy that filled his words. The short, precise comment he made was entertaining, scholarly, eclectic, and challenging. Mel invited everyone to join in examining the issue from unexpected perspectives. We were all inspired to play with the ideas he shared.

For decades, Mel has been the light illuminating the singular human achievement of Mordecai Kaplan – not only as philosopher, educator, rabbi, impassioned visionary of Jewish life for centuries to come, but as recording secretary to the encounters of Jews with this world. Mel repeatedly asks us respond to the question: What do we need to do to make the extraordinary human achievement that is Jewish civilization work for us and for the rest of the world on more than a superficial level?

At a 2014 conference titled “Architect of the Jewish Future: A Conference on Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan,” Mel delivered the keynote address and shared more of his remarkable discoveries from Rabbi Kaplan’s wild and glorious diaries, the longest intellectual record of their kind in Jewish history. In an interview over thirty years ago, Mel said, “I wanted to help people understand [Kaplan], and not just see him as a one-dimensional figure and a social scientist. He was a rabbi and he worried about God all the time.” Kaplan’s published works are not easy reading, but his diaries overflow with love for the Jewish people and our religious civilization, even when accompanied by disappointment and criticism. With incredible affection and scholarly discipline, Mel has guided us to a new reading and appreciation of *Judaism as a Civilization*, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, and his many other works.

I recall reading that it is possible for a person to give without loving, but one cannot love without giving.

Thank you, Mel, for all that you have taught and continue to teach, and for the wisdom you have generously shared.

ביז הונדערט און צוואַנציק מיט געזונט, מזל און קלאַרקייט!

Biz hundred un tsvantsik, mit gezunt, mazal un klorkeyt.

Until one hundred twenty, with health, good fortune.

and clarity of mind

Rabbi Larry Pinsker



More We Love You Mel

Dear Dr. Scult,

I was your student when I was in the 10th grade and you were teaching at Akiba Hebrew Academy. I can remember your class to this day. Your instruction in Jewish history not only opened my eyes to issues and events that were totally new to me, but the way in which you did it - especially in using the Gospels to help illuminate Jewish life in the first century - was a lesson in how to do history that I have used for my own career, never being afraid to go beyond the standard texts and seeking other voices that can help place what I am learning in wider context. While there is little relation between first century Judaism and the relations between Poles, Jews and Ukrainians in the 20th century, the example you set has been critical for my work in understanding the relations among these groups in Europe and among older refugees (my area of study) in the United States.

Thank you for your inspired teaching. I am very grateful.

Allen Glicksman

Mazal Tov Mel on the milestone of your 90th birthday! It has been a gift and honor to get to know you through the Kaplan Center, to learn from you. It's also been a pleasure to encourage our youth to share their visions of Reconstructionism in honor of your birthday.

Karen Morris

Mel, I'm truly inspired by focused studies on Mordecai Kaplan. Your devoted work shines a light on his incredible influence in shaping the Reconstructionist movement in Judaism.

Sheridan Zuther

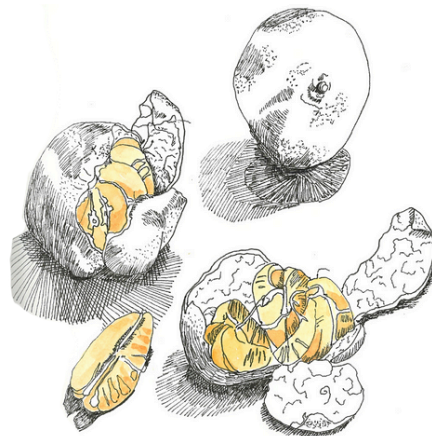
Happy 90th to the Pied Piper of all things MMK. May you continue your efforts with the same zest, persistence and scholarly rigor that you've brought to your quest until now. Mazal Tov and Yasher Koach.

Val Kaplan

Mel, This world has been all the better for having your curiosity, wisdom, *chesed*, and all-around *menschlekhkeyt* for 90 journeys around the sun. May we share many more together!

With much love and gratitude,

Peter and Marion



Even More We Love You Mel

I truly discovered Kaplan through Mel's publication of the first volume of his redacted journals. What a remarkable window into Kaplan's thinking: his journals, written, as Mel has said, both for himself and for the ages. We get to witness Kaplan's self doubts, his social commentary, his formulating his philosophy, his comments on the world at large.

Thanks to Mel's work on the journals, my own journey through Kaplanian philosophy is greatly deepened and enriched. I did not have the good fortune to know Kaplan. Thanks, though, to the journals, I've been more able to meet and converse with those who did, who hosted Kaplan in their homes and at their tables, who *davened* with him, studied with him, argued with him. Mel's work was my gateway.

Alan Marcum

In honour or in memory of Mel Scult, in honor of his 90th birthday, his scholarship, his leadership, and his editing of the diaries.

Mitchell Rothman

We are lucky that we can claim Mel Scult, married to Barbara Gish, as a member of the Gish Family. He has brought to the Family a deeper and relevant understanding of Judaism, giving us a nuanced historical context to Jewish observances that we had mainly followed by tradition. His approach has always been gentle and supportive.

In times of grieving over losing family members and times of joy over births, bar/bat-mitzvahs and weddings Mel has stepped in as a rabbi might, to enrich these experiences for us.

We are blessed indeed!

Freda Piecuch and Herb Gish

In honor of my cousin, Mel, a friend,
a scholar, and a mensch!
I am very proud of him. –

Morton

Dear Mel - May your light continue to shine
brightly on the paths of those you
encounter.

With love, *Joanne Feltman*



Institutional Members

The Kaplan Center thanks our
Congregational Institutional Friends
whose generosity helped fund the
Mel Scult Teen Prize

[See pages 25-27 for the winning entries.](#)

Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation
Bet Am Shalom Synagogue
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Congregation Beth-El Zedeck
Congregation Dor Hadash - La Jolla
Congregation Dor Hadash - Pittsburgh
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Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
RSNS - Jewish Reconstructionist Society of the North Shore
Society for the Advancement of Judaism
University Synagogue



Mordecai Kaplan and Jewish Teens

Imagine the Jewish Future

Prize Winners

Is there any reason to identify with the Jewish people?

Zora Miller - age 12

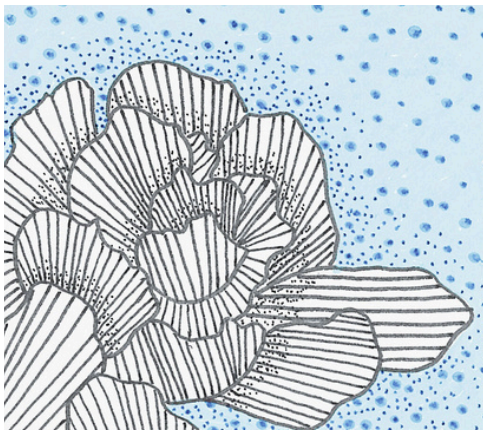
"Wrapped in a Quilt of Connection"

I'm half Jewish, but growing up, we didn't celebrate Judaism much in my family. Sure, we lit our menorah each Hanukkah, but we attended church, not synagogue, and I didn't really consider myself Jewish. But there was something about Jewish holidays that felt special. I loved singing with my relatives around the Passover table together, hearing the stories, and eating my grandmother's matzoh ball soup. It felt like I was wrapped in a quilt of Judaism, a square for each person, and all our squares woven together into one magnificent quilt of song and traditions. When I was eleven, I asked my mom to sign me up for Hebrew school, and the next summer I switched to a Reconstructionist Jewish summer camp instead of YMCA camp. I decided I wanted to celebrate bat mitzvah, which required joining the synagogue. My parents were supportive but weren't seeking to join a synagogue themselves. The board voted to allow me to become the first child in their congregation to have her own membership. I love sitting with the rabbi in her office for bat mitzvah tutoring each week, her glass figurine of Jonah sitting inside a whale watching me from its perch while I sing the prayers I practiced. Recently, my mom and I attended synagogue for the first time. I could sit at those services forever. I love wrapping myself in the words of the Torah. The Hebrew embraces me and flows through me like a song. What made me want to identify with the Jewish people when my family isn't observant? It's the feeling of togetherness with so many other Jewish people across the world. We are all connected, no matter what gender, race, or age we are. We're part of the quilt of Judaism, and I'm sewing myself a square.



Netta Ruderman - Age 12

From an outsider's perspective, the Jewish community looks like it's becoming less and less committed to their faith over time. Less often do we see youth eager to go to temple or studying the Talmud willingly. However, what the older generation fails to consider is that as our religion ages, so do the traditions associated with it. What was viewed as Jewish tradition a hundred or a thousand years ago is different from what Jewish tradition is developing into today. We're all intertwined with our ancestors and their beliefs, but a key part of maintaining that web is making change for ourselves. As we see the youngest generation develop their identities within Judaism, we have to realize that their differing perspectives are building the future. Judaism is one long conversation, and the words within can mean something else to each person. For a kid whose grandfather is the best cook they know, maybe Judaism is making an Israeli meal with him and saying a blessing before dinner. For a boy who always dreamed of having a family that stayed together, Judaism could be growing up and inviting both sides of his family to a Seder, or even a normal dinner. And for a girl whose brain works in words, Judaism can be what she feels when she writes page upon page showing and explaining anything she believes, even an essay about departing from tradition when her family itself isn't actually that traditional. Going to temple or saying blessings before meals is definitely an important part of Judaism in my eyes, but departing from tradition and creating our own versions of it doesn't decrease the likelihood of Judaism's survival at all. Actually, it's an example of how people develop, and how beneficial change sparked by youth is for Judaism throughout time.



Vanilla Shapiro - age 14

To watch this wonderful video, go to
bit.ly/TeenPrize



More We Love You, Mel

It is a pleasure to honor Mel Scult, the person who brought the thought and life of Mordecai M. Kaplan to generations of American Jews. Mel's powerful biography and elegantly edited volumes of Kaplan's diaries have carried Kaplan's living legacy into the 21st century, introducing him to new readers and reminding all of us how relevant he remains.

Deborah Dash Moore

We have been fortunate to have been members of congregations with Mel for over 50 years. We are thankful for all the insight he has provided on so many occasions over those years.

Len and Jackie Goldner

You have kept MMK alive before our eyes!

Herb Levine

Nancy Fuchs Kreimer indeed brings MMK alive and into the present (See the video of the December 8 webinar), and has done so for a whole generation of RRC students, among others – we got to be the chassidim of the chassidah of the founder! Many of us have had the same experience of Mel, too – who, alongside Ira z"l, is perhaps Kaplan's most influential and prolific 'hassid'...todah! Todah al hakol! For your birthday, Mel, in Kaplan's honor, we might say "ahd meah v'shtayim" – but as his almost-boss in the Yishuv, Ben Gurion, said when blessed with "ad meah v'esrim": "al tigbal oti, don't delimit me!" May you continue to flourish...

Fred Scherlinder Dobb

I am so happy to have the privilege of knowing Dr. Scult! I remember that first day we were kids and walking uphill both ways to and from school in blizzards with buzzards flying all around us. Were there seven of us? I can't quite remember, but those were truly the "good old days." Who knew we would still be around after all these years! But here we are and you are doing fantastically. I can't believe it, Can you?

Vince

In appreciation for your life of scholarship and commitment to Kaplan's vision.

Caryn Jacobs



More We Love You, Mel

Mel, you are such an inspiration to me and to the rest of our Kaplanian and Reconstructionist community. Thank you for your Torah!

Best, *Lauren Gabrelle Hermann*

Dear Mel,

Mazel tov on your 90th birthday! It is my honor to know you. I am deeply grateful for your years of scholarship on my Great Grandfather in terms of his biography, theology, and of course the diary! It has been my privilege to stand on your metaphorical shoulders in writing my own book about my Grandma Hadassah, which is coming out in April! Thank you!

I will never forget the moment when we were talking by Zoom and you said we should say a *shehechianu* that we had come to the place where you could guide me in my work. It was quite a beautiful moment, and I am deeply grateful for your support and guidance.

I am sorry not to be able to join in the festivities in person. Please know that I'm thinking of you and sending you best wishes.

Yours,

Sharon

Happy, happy birthday my dear Teacher and Mentor- I have been so blessed to learn from and with you.

Donna Cephas

Happy Birthday, Mel ! And Mazel Tov again. You have brought home to us Mordecai Kaplan's flexibility and growth throughout his life.

Yeshar Koach. Ad Me v'eEsrin.

Joan Sacks

Dear Mel, We celebrate you, we are grateful to you, we enjoy you. Thank you for enriching our lives in so many ways.

Love, *Julie and David Sandler-Friedman*





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