

Rabbi Michael G. Cohen

(912) 856-4357 RabbiMGC@gmail.com

Professional Experience

U.S. Army Chaplain (Captain), Ft. Stewart, GA **2012-Present**

Perform religious services for battalion-sized elements of approximately 800 Soldiers and their families; Facilitate the organization, management, and execution of religious services for all faith groups; Host inter-faith dialogue and represent the Jewish perspective on military installations world-wide; Perform weekly Shabbat Services; Lead weekend family retreats; Teach adult Jewish education classes; Perform pastoral care and offer counseling; Visit hospitalized Soldiers; Perform lifecycle rituals; Teach classes on spiritual health, relationship counseling, suicide prevention, psychological resiliency, and overcoming combat-related trauma; Deploy with Soldiers and provide combat ministry.

Spiritual Counselor, Beit T'Shuvah, Los Angeles, CA **2015-2016**

Counselor for 5 recovering addicts at any one time. Provide pastoral counseling, spiritual counseling, and addiction recovery work with individual residents and groups; Teach adult education and lifecycle rituals classes; Teach everyday coping skills to residents.

Rabbinic Intern, Congregation Micah, Brentwood, TN **2015**

Help clergy team lead High Holy Day services for 1000+ members/attendees. Lead Shabbat services, deliver sermons on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and lead text studies.

Student Rabbi, Temple Kolot-Mayim, Victoria, BC **2014-2015**

Sole clergy member for 150+ member synagogue. Responsible for High Holy Day and Shabbat services; Provide pastoral care; Teach children's religious education; Visit hospitalized congregants; Perform lifecycle rituals.

Student Rabbi, Congregation Beth Hamidbar, Yuma, AZ **2013-2014**

Sole clergy member for 100+ member synagogue. Responsible for monthly Shabbat services; Provide High Holy Day Services; Provide pastoral care, spiritual guidance, and adult education; Perform lifecycle rituals; Design, implement, and teach curriculum for religious school.

U.S. Army Psychological Operations, Ft. Bragg, NC **2007-2012**

Conduct planned operations to convey information to foreign audiences to educate them on US involvement in their region; Design multimedia communications projects intended to inform a defined element of a foreign populace; Develop and administer surveys to evaluate the effects of planned and executed multimedia projects; Package and disseminate multimedia projects; Manage programs, resources, and budgets for multimedia communications projects.

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Education

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles, CA

Rabbinic Ordination 2017

Thesis: You Pulled the Trigger but I Bought the Bullets and Sent You
There: Our Responsibility to the Other Jewish Community in America.

Thesis Advisor: Rabbi Richard Levy

Certificate in Jewish Nonprofit Management 2016

Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters 2015

Brandeis University, Waltham, MA

Bachelor of Arts in History, and Near Eastern and Judaic Studies 2007

Continuing Education

Certificate in Intensive Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation 2019

Dwight D. Eisenhower Army Medical Center, Ft. Gordon, GA

Chaplain Officer Leadership School 2014

United States Army Chaplain Center and School, Ft. Jackson, SC

Clinical Pastoral Education 2014

United States Army Chaplain Center and School, Ft. Jackson, SC

Scholarships and Awards

Weinstein Military Chaplaincy Scholarship 2013-2017

Jewish Welfare Board / JCC Association of North America

NATO Medal for Distinguished Service in Afghanistan 2011

United States Army Special Operations Command, Ft. Bragg, NC

Humanitarian Service Medal, Disaster Relief: Republic of Haiti 2010

United States Army Special Operations Command, Ft. Bragg, NC

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Personal Statement

My father was a major influence in why I became a rabbi. In 2000, I was a typical 15-year-old, questioning rules and asking why. So, when my father was diagnosed with cancer, after being misdiagnosed 4 years earlier, I demanded to know the reason why this was happening to him. When I asked my dad, he replied, "Good question. Let's find out." For the next year and a half, we were each other's *hevruta*. We studied Torah, and Talmud, the Zohar, and every sacred text we could get our hands on. This cursed death sentence empowered us to share beautiful life experiences. One day, as we were reading over a midrash like it was some day-time soap opera, he looked at me and said, "Could you imagine doing this for a living? If I were able to go back and do it all over again, I would have become a rabbi."

At the dinner table, we would discuss Hillel, Shammai, Resh Lakish, Rashi, RAMBAM, and RAMBAN like they were comic book characters. We acted as if we really knew these rabbinic sages. I remember asking my dad questions about which rabbi would like this or that movie, and if Maimonides would have been more into Marvel or DC if he were alive today. I developed such a keen love and passion for Judaism that I could not shake my father's words from my head, "If I were able to go back and do it all over again, I would have become a rabbi." My only thought was, "Yes, I could imagine doing this for a living." My father passed away in 2001, at the age of 54. The answers we got were to the questions we never asked. We never found the answer to why this happened to him. But we learned about life, death, love, Judaism, the interconnectedness of the universe, and potentially the meaning of life. My father's death was tragic and earth-shattering. I lost my best friend, my *hevruta*, and my role model.

However, every time a teen asks me a question about Judaism, every time I crack open a tractate of the Talmud, my father is right there with me. I love Judaism and I love being a rabbi because, when I get to participate as a Jew or as a rabbi, I feel like I am home. The world gets a little quieter, a little less scary, and makes a little more sense.

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National service has always been important to me. I served in the U.S. Army for 13 years. Immediately following my college graduation in 2007, I enlisted in the U.S. Army. I ultimately attained the rank of Staff Sergeant and deployed twice. My first deployment was to Haiti, following the disastrous earthquake in January 2010. I worked for the UN for four months, distributing food, setting up shelters, providing security, and disseminating information on behalf of the Haitian government. My second deployment was a *Village Stability Operations* mission to Afghanistan, in 2010-2011. We dug wells, paved roads, built schools, and established and trained the local police force. During that time, I also served as a liaison officer between three Afghan villages and their local government.

I left the Army in 2012 to attend rabbinical school at Hebrew Union College. My first year of rabbinical school was in Jerusalem, and the next four were in Los Angeles, CA. After ordination, in 2017, I agreed to serve for three years in the U.S. Army as a Jewish Chaplain/Rabbi. As a chaplain, I have led several couples' retreats. I have counseled hundreds of Soldiers regarding their personal, professional, and spiritual issues. Almost everything I did as a chaplain was interfaith. The weddings I officiated, the funerals I led, the services I conducted, and the counseling I offered were interfaith. In 2018, I deployed to South Korea as part of the force to combat North Korea should war break out. I am very thankful that the war never started. My three years as an Army Captain is coming to a close and I am hoping to continue my career in a synagogue as a congregational rabbi.

I want people to feel happy and comfortable engaging in Judaism, and being in the synagogue. I want people to want to do Jewish things, and enjoy coming to synagogue. I want the synagogue space and congregational events to be broad enough and diverse enough to fit all those who want to be there. I want the synagogue to be the Jewish Starbucks. The success of the Starbucks franchise is the answer to the question, "Where do people go when they are not at home and they are not at work?" Every Starbucks aims to be that place. And it succeeded in doing that (everywhere but Israel). In my rabbinate, I like to ask the question, "WWSD? What Would Starbucks Do?" How can the synagogue become more accessible, more inclusive, and more desirable?