Elana Friedman

Elana grew up on Long Island immersed in Jewish life through the Conservative movement. Her family’s havurah was a great source of intentional community and prayer. Elana is forever grateful to the staffer at Camp Ramah for telling her, after a theological crisis during her teens, that she could “just keep the borrowed books” by Rabbis Mordecai M. Kaplan and Eugene Kohn.

Upon graduation from Washington University in St. Louis, Elana worked on campaigns for progressive causes for seven years. Ultimately, Elana’s longing to merge her passion for Judaism with working for the greater good led her to pursue the rabbinate at RRC. Elana worked as a rabbinic intern at Temple University Hillel, Abramson Center for Jewish Life, Walking the Walk, Camp JRF and T’ruah. She was privileged to serve as president of the Reconstructionist Student Association and twice as Purim Shpielmeister. She proudly served as a Cooperberg-Rittmaster Rabbinical Intern at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah in New York.

Elana is indebted to the remarkable staff at RRC for their vision and encouragement and to her classmates for their support, wisdom and humor. She also thanks her Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore mentors, her friends and her family for their kindness, laughter and inspiration. She thanks her parents, for creating a loving Jewish home and for being the best editors, guides, and sources of warmth during even the coldest days. Finally, Elana thanks her beloved Jamie, her kalah, for taking this momentous leap; for being an infinite source of love, good food and elation; for being the greatest confidant and for never being shy about putting her back in her place or lifting her up.

You speak with people, you should ask them: What? WHAT??

Put this question to people who don’t think about their purpose in life: What? Life is full of needless friction, distractions, complaints, claims and counterclaims. You have reasons why you are far from God. Even so, at the end of everything—What’s going to be with you? What will you answer to the One who sent you? You know you are but a stranger on this earth. All the days are “like a passing shadow and a scattered cloud.” And yet, what do YOU think? Heed these words and bring them deep inside your heart. Don’t throw them behind your back. “Turn them and turn them over and over again” so that you may gain your soul as your prize.
—Rabbi Nachman of Breslov

This teaching speaks to a major part of my rabbinate—to ask questions of a greater purpose and complexity, to push and pull, to inspire and politely provoke, to struggle and get closer to the Source of Life in order to acquire our souls as our prize. May we search for answers and depart from emptiness, and may the journey be as sweet as the prize.