

Kansas City

JEWISH LIFE

Winter 2016



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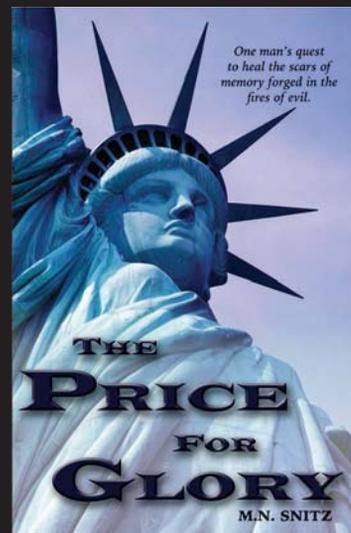
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Shaloha

By Marcia Horn Montgomery

Young rabbi from
Leawood finds her
niche on Big Island
of Hawaii





Rabbi Rachel Short is standing on the deck at Ahava 'Aina that wraps around the large, screened-in sanctuary. Her husband designed the elevated structure, and built most of it himself, that sits 14 feet in the air.

A New Age rabbi who incorporates yoga, self-healing and meditation into her services and counseling? One who writes and raps the *Divrei Torah*? That's 29-year-old Rabbi Rachel Short. Thought to be the youngest female rabbi in the United States, she studied for the rabbinate online via Skype and FaceTime through the Jewish Spiritual Leaders' Institute, which is trans-denominational.

In July, she and 11 others were ordained before a *beit din* of three Conservative rabbis in Delray Beach, Florida, under the idea of Universalist Judaism, but she considers herself "just Jewish."

ROAD TO THE RABBINATE

While still a young woman, she says it has been quite a journey to get to where she is today.

"I feel that I went a long period of time without having a connection to the divine or to God or to Judaism and I did feel a void in my life without recognizing it," says Rabbi Short.

She grew up in Leawood and went to Shawnee Mission East High School. Her Bat Mitzvah took place at Congregation Beth Shalom and she was confirmed at Congregation Beth Torah, where she was programming vice president of NFTY. Beth Torah provided scholarships for her to attend Kutz Leadership Camp and some social action weekends, which, she says, first sparked a vague idea of becoming a rabbi someday.

But that was not meant to be for a while.

At age 21 she married electrical engineer Kelly Short. They moved around from Kansas City to Denver, to Houston and then San Diego. She ran a successful internet marketing company and taught Jazzercise. After losing 80 pounds, she gave up the marketing business and taught Jazzercise full time until she sprained her ankle.



Rabbi Rachel Short is a certified yoga instructor who can often be found practicing yoga in this beautiful lava rock setting, in the ocean or on a paddleboard.

It turned out to be worse than just a sprain. She was diagnosed with complex regional pain syndrome, an incurable illness. The entire left side of her body began to shut down and swell more and more. She was told the pain would never go away — she would just have to learn to live with it.

She remembered reading the story of Louise Hay, a woman who cured herself of “incurable” cervical cancer through therapy, nutrition and the power of positive thinking. Rabbi Short began researching the brain, the sympathetic nervous system, the mind and body connection, the power of manifestation, and started seeing healers and physical therapists on a daily basis.

With a lot of time, patience and faith, she says, she healed herself and the pain is completely gone. Now, in addition to being a rabbi, she’s a holistic healer, reiki master teacher [loosely defined as rei-spirit; ki-energy], certified yoga and standup paddleboard leader, and aroma touch practitioner.

“I basically teach people to heal themselves,” she says. “I guide them to what they already know, the physical pain that’s manifesting in their body, where it’s linked to emotionally and spiritually, and uncovering the root of what created the symptom or the disease or the physical connection in the body, to go back and almost undo that root and retrain it.”

This includes meditation or yoga on a daily basis, diet, counseling with essential oils and the idea of retraining the brain.

When she was finally healed, she went on a Birthright trip to Israel. It was at the top of Masada where she made the decision to become a rabbi.

“It was a spiritual awakening after healing myself and then going to Israel and seeing the number of young Jews around my age demographic that weren’t affiliated Jewishly at all,” she says. “I felt very called to do something to get my generation more engaged and excited about Judaism.”

Rabbi Short says she believes a big part of why there are so many young Jews unaffiliated with any synagogue or movement has to do with labels and she wants to change that. She considers herself label-less.

AHAVA 'AINA

The Shorts moved near Hilo, Hawaii, nearly three years ago when Kelly Short applied for a position there. Rabbi Short says when they flew there for the interview, before they even departed the plane she turned to him and said, “This is our home, where I’m meant to open a healing/learning center; this is it.”

On their 20-acre property they cleared land and have built a synagogue/healing/learning center called Ahava 'Aina, a

Rabbi Short decided to explore the rabbinate while she was on a Birthright trip to Israel.





It's Time To Take It Out For A Spin

Happy Hanukkah From
Our Family To Yours



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blend of Hebrew and Hawaiian that means “loving what gives.” Not yet fully functioning, the rabbi holds monthly Shabbat services for anywhere from 15 to 25 people. Since it had a blessing ceremony on Jan. 1, 2016, services have also been held for Tisha b’Av, Rosh Chodesh, Rosh Hashanah and a few other occasions.

For a new synagogue in the middle of nowhere, I feel pretty good about that,” says Rabbi Short. “I’m three miles down a gravel road, so the fact that people are willing to drive that is something. We have what we call a sustainable synagogue, and the membership is coming.”

She says many Jews are donating to the synagogue in anticipation of joining once it is up and running full time.

There is no other synagogue on the east side of Hawaii, also known as the Big Island, the largest of the main Hawaiian Islands, and she says there is a huge demand. She meets a Jew every day and has an email list of about 100 people asking her to let them know when she has regular services going.

“My whole goal with it is to incorporate a lot of elements and make it almost like a Jewish healing/learning center in a way — a synagogue, but for mind, body and spirit because at the end of the day I think that’s what we’re all coming to synagogue for, to heal and connect with spirit,” she says.

There is a Chabad on the island, about a two-hour drive from Hilo, but Rabbi Short says it doesn’t resonate with Jews who were raised Reform or Conservative. Hawaii is more of a New Age place, she says.

Rabbi Short says she begins her services with yoga because she likes the idea of connecting mind and body. She studies gematria, which is the idea of Hebrew letters being the code to the universe and that every Hebrew letter has a number, a color, and a vibration and is also a yoga pose. So you can spell certain Hebrew words with your bodies.

“My services are usually yin yoga practice, which is super-restorative gentle postures that we hold for three to five minutes,” she says. “It’s more of a guided meditation where we’re spelling out simple words and we’re creating these words with our bodies. After we finish our yoga, I lead us all in a traditional Jewish worship.”

Rabbi Short and her husband live about three miles from an active lava flow, so she says the view from the synagogue overlooks a giant orange-red flow of lava.

“Not too bad for a girl from Kansas,” the rabbi says.

The daughter of Chuck and Sandi Cantor of Leawood and Susie Sachs Cantor of St. Louis says she loves being able to put people in touch with spirit and the connection to God because that’s the way to work toward tikkun olam — healing the world through love and kindness.

“I’m just grateful that I get to be sharing that, and especially in a community where it’s so desperately needed,” says Rabbi Short. “It’s one thing to be called to become a rabbi somewhere where you can get a job at an already functioning congregation. It’s a whole other thing to have the opportunity to help build a community from the ground up. So I feel really grateful and humbled that I get to do that.”