

## Rabbinic Personal Statement – Rabbi Stacy Petersohn

“How does a ten-year-old think of becoming a rabbi?” This must have been the thought running through my mother’s head when I first said that I wanted to be a rabbi. Driving home from Sunday school, the words came out of my mouth as easily as asking, “Are we there yet?” What seemed like a small moment at the time snowballed into a lifelong pursuit of my passion for Judaism and the Jewish people into the rabbinate. **Passion is the driving force that guides us to discovering who we are.**

The first time I volunteered to feed homeless people, I was nervous. What would the people we were serving think of me? How could I look them in the eye knowing that I would go home that night to my comfortable bed? What if I spilled a tray of spaghetti on myself? Then something incredible happened. As I was serving a group of children, they asked me to sit with them for a moment. After I joined them, with no prompting from an adult, the children held hands and said a blessing over the food they were about to eat and for the people who were providing it for them. This moment still brings a tear to me today. Their simple prayer of gratitude sparked a drive in me to serve others in any way that I could. **A life of service allows an individual to use her unique talents to change the world for the better.**

After finishing college, I took the opportunity to try something completely different. I decided to go to Israel for a year and study at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies. Until this point, most of my Jewish experiences were in the Reform sphere. If you had asked me why I was a Reform Jew, I would have said that it was the community in which I had grown up; where I felt the most comfortable. In many ways, Pardes, a nondenominational traditional yeshiva that allowed men and women to study together, was a shock to my system.

I was thrust into a world of intense text study, regulated by the ebb and flow of the Jewish calendar, and where much of what we studied in the classroom directly impacted our lives. Interestingly, in this diverse Jewish environment I finally understood what it meant for me to be a Reform Jew. **As a Reform Jew, it is incumbent upon me to face Jewish tradition and history head on – the good, the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful, to question in order to understand, and to develop my personal practice.**

If I could go back, I would tell my ten-year-old self that Jewish life is not easy, but it is worthwhile. Jewish life takes a passionate drive to continue learning and growing. Jewish life requires that each person do their part to serve others, to make the world a greater whole. Jewish life is constantly adapting to the contemporary world, while staying consistent in its integrity; new questions will always arise, and old questions require reexamination.

I hope to share these lessons with the Jewish community. I hope to spur others to follow their passions as they take ownership of their Judaism. I hope to motivate individuals to do their part in the great work of repairing the world we live in. And I hope to engage people with Jewish tradition, encourage them to ask questions, and to develop of a sense of sacred belonging to the Jewish community.