

HUC and American Jewish Archives Honors Sally Priesand with Year Long Exhibit

By Julia Olson
Assistant Editor

Thursday, May 19 marked the opening of the AJA's year long exhibit on Rabbi Sally Priesand, the first female rabbi to be ordained at a seminary. The opening coincides with the fifty year anniversary of women in the rabbinate, beginning with Rabbi Sally's ordination on June 3, 1972.

The exhibit features artifacts from Sally's life, ranging from childhood notes and photographs to a Rabbi Sally trading card, as well as some of her own paintings and photography. Of particular interest are letters exchanged between Rabbi Sally and various administrators at HUC, dating to the 1963, when Sally was applying to HUC's rabbinical school. Sally was just sixteen years old when she wrote to the Reform Jewish movement's flagship seminary indicating her desire to become a rabbi. The letters show that the school warned

Sally that no woman had yet been ordained and that those that applied tended to lean more toward the study of Jewish education. But, as the exhibit clearly shows, Sally persisted.

The various phases of the exhibit match the phases of Sally's life and stretch from her childhood, her time at HUC, her life as a newly ordained rabbi, and her broader impact on the rabbinate. Since Sally's ordination fifty years ago this month, more than twelve hundred women have become rabbis across all denominations of Judaism. As the exhibit claims, Sally opened the door for these women and, like all good teachers, continued to hold it open for generations of women rabbis to follow her.

The exhibit opening was well attended, and featured opening remarks from Dr. Gary Zola, executive director of the AJA, as well as a keynote from Rabbi Sally herself. Both Dr. Zola and Rabbi Sally mentioned the historic nature of her

ordination, especially as it took place on the Cincinnati campus, the first reform Rabbinical school and oldest Jewish seminary in the United States, founded in 1875. On the importance of the exhibit and the AJA's preservation of Sally's papers, Dr. Zola stated, "Rabbi Priesand is a living legend of the Jewish people, and the AJA takes great pride in providing the public with a fascinating exhibit that features some of the documents she has donated. It is impossible to exaggerate the historical significance of her rabbinate, so her papers, preserved at the AJA, will be sought after by future historians and researchers."

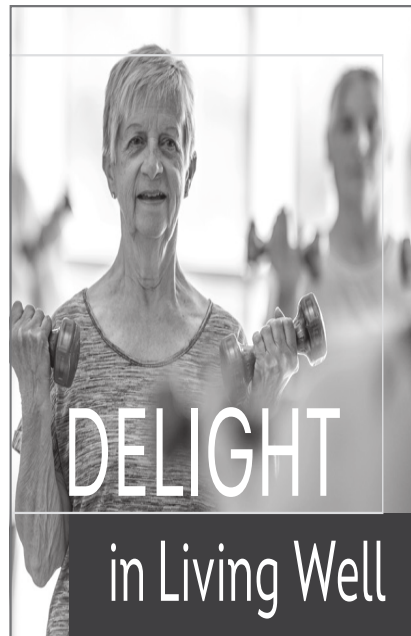
During her keynote speech, Sally reminisced on her time at HUC, especially focusing on former HUC president Dr. Nelson Glueck who played a key role in her acceptance into HUC and who had been looking forward to ordaining her. Dr. Glueck passed away in 1971, a little over a year before Rabbi Sally

would be ordained. A letter from Dr. Helen Glueck, Nelson Glueck's wife, written after his death, features in the exhibit.

The exhibit will be open for a year. It will also be available digitally for those unable to travel to Cincinnati.



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Top photo, from left to right: Dean Jonathan Hecht, Dr. Gary Zola, Rabbi Sally Priesand, Dr. Andrea Weiss, Samantha Schapera, and Dr. Andrew Rehfeld



Bottom photo, from left to right: Louise Bettman and Dr. Scott Joseph

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