Blessed be the flight delays and blessed be the jet lag. They made it happen—half the sweetness of my four days in Israel. The El Al flight taking off for Israel was delayed 90 minutes by a freak rain storm that descended upon Newark Airport, but nowhere else in the vicinity. Which means I arrived in Israel 90 minutes late, at 8:30 a.m. rather than 7 a.m.

Which means that by the time I arrived in Ramat Bet Shemesh all of the morning minyanim were finished, save one. It began at 9:40 a.m. I had never been in this synagogue and might never be again. Technically, one person was the leader of the prayers, but the energy, the sounds, the real leadership came from the person sitting next to him. He was the rabbi of the synagogue, facing forward. Even the back of him could not be seen, as his head was covered by his tallit. His sounds! Sharp, piercing cries. Frequent outbursts of pleas and praises. Clearly this was not a place.

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The Western Wall at sunrise, Jerusalem

By HILLEL GOLDBERG
IJN Editor and Publisher

WASHINGTON — When President Donald Trump nominated Brett Kavanaugh, a federal appeals court judge in Washington, DC, to replace Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, the pick disappointed Jewish liberals concerned about reproductive rights and civil liberties, but was welcomed by Jewish conservatives.

Kavanaugh, 53, is respected by the Republican establishment, although some on the right have said he is not conservative enough. Trump reportedly was wary of Kavanaugh’s close ties to George W. Bush, who nominated him to the current position in 2003.

“A judge must interpret the law as written, informed by history and tradition and precedent.”

He also thanked Associate Justice Elena Kagan, who hired him to teach a course on the Supreme Court when she was the dean of Harvard Law School.

Kavanaugh is a graduate of Yale Law School and he clerked for Kennedy on the Supreme Court.

He helped draft the Starr Report, which called for President Bill Clinton to be impeached because he lied about having had an intimate relationship with Monica Lewinsky, a White House intern.

He fought on the legal team urging Florida not to have a recount in the 2000 presidential election between Bush and Al Gore. Clinton’s vice president. The Supreme Court decision not to do so led to Bush becoming the president.

Kavanaugh served in the Bush administration, including as the president’s staff secretary. His wife, Ashley Estes, served as personal secretary to George W. Bush.

In 2015, Kavanaugh, a Roman Catholic, filed a dissent in a case involving religious employers and reproductive rights. The case said that religious employers did not have to provide contraceptives but had to file a form telling the government they were not doing so, but Kavanaugh argued that the requirement violated religious freedom.

He thanked Associate Justice Kagan, who hired him to teach at Harvard Law

Kavanaugh has stated that he considers Roe v. Wade binding and would seek to uphold it, though he has ruled in some cases to place restrictions on abortion.

IJN Senior Writer
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married to non-Jewish spouses: 47% of women, and 41% of men.

Among US adults age 65 and older who had one Jewish parent, 25% remain Jewish — but 59% of adults younger than 30 with one Jewish parent still identify as Jewish.

Black says that has refusal to officiate at intermarriages would eject young interfaith couples out of Judaism’s orbit.

“I had that gradual awareness that there were households, families, individuals for whom the answer ‘no’ was pushing them away from our community and I understood this for a long time.”

Black notes in data suggesting that the presence of a rabbi at an interfaith ceremony is a stronger indicator that Jewish children will remain Jewish as another factor in his decision.

“No matter how encouraging I was to them, to an interfaith couple, their relationship and the marriage. That’s why they’re coming to a rabbi.”

Black says interfaith partners who are serious about perpetuating Judaism in their relationship want to be married in a sacred space imbued with holiness with an officiant who understands this desire.

“If they just want to be married and don’t care about Judaism or G-d’s presence, they won’t come to me.”

The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the Reform rabbinical body, opposed intermarriage and Reform officiation at these unions until 1980. That year, CCAR passed a resolution strongly encouraging its members not to officiate at intermarriages but did not place prohibitions on rabbis who conducted them.

A number of Denver-Boulder area Reform rabbis have officiated at interfaith unions for about 10 to 15 years. Other Reform rabbis, especially those at major and mid-size synagogues, abstain from participation.

Rabbi Black’s reversal is noteworthy because Temple Emanuel is the oldest and largest Reform congregation in the intermountain region. His potential influence on other Reform rabbis is significant. But Black maintains that his personal resolve to officiate is in no way intended as a message to his colleagues, either internal or in the interfaith community that formed the mosaic at the Wall?

“You don’t want any mention of G-d’s ‘I can’t do a ceremony that way. It must be a Jewish ceremony, ‘I betroth you to my beloved’s and beloved is mine’ or use other words. I would still help the couple sanctify their chuppah, but I wouldn’t officiate.”

Despite his conviction that intermarriage officiation establishes a genuine portal into Judaism and Jewish life, Black refrains from making any concrete promises. “Saying ‘no’ turns people away,” he says. “Saying ‘yes’ does not guarantee that they will have a Jewish home. But it gives me an opportunity to have a relationship with them as their rabbi. And they can be part of my congregation.”

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The interfaith couple must agree to a list of specific conditions for Black to officiate at the wedding — including meeting regularly for study and counseling.

“They must agree to raise their children as Jews,” Black says. “They must affiliate with the congregation and be part of the Jewish community. It must be a Jewish ceremony. I will not co-officiate with Chris- tian clergy, and I don’t do weddings on Shabbat.”

Black is equally clear on what differentiates a traditional ceremony between Jews and Jews. “They say, ‘We don’t want any mention of G-d’s name in the ceremony. That’s homosexual or something. ‘I don’t want that either.”

‘I don’t speak for any of my colleagues’

Rabbi Black now performs intermarriages;