

**Newsweek**

# The 50 Most Influential Rabbis in America

*Two rabbi watchers release their 2010 list.*

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Indranil Mukherjee / AFP-Getty Images

This year's top rebbe is Yehuda Krinsky (center), the head of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement.

In the fall of 2006, Sony Pictures chairman and CEO Michael Lynton and his pal Gary Ginsberg, now an executive vice president of Time Warner Inc., began working on a list of the 50 most influential rabbis in the U.S. The friends devised the following unscientific criteria to rank the leaders, whose specialties range from kashrut to Kabbalah: Are they known nationally/internationally? (20 points.) Do they have political/social influence? (20 points.) Do they have a media presence? (10 points.) Are they leaders within their communities? (10 points.) Are they considered leaders in Judaism or their movements? (10 points.) How big are their constituencies? (10 points.) Have they made an impact on Judaism in their career? (10 points.) Have they made a greater impact beyond the Jewish community and their rabbinical training? (10 points.) NEWSWEEK published that first list around Passover, 2007, with this caveat: "Is the list subjective? Yes. Is it mischievous in its conception? Definitely." Now in its fourth year, Lynton and Ginsberg's list includes eight fresh names and a new rebbe in the top spot.

**1.Yehuda Krinsky**—As the leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, Krinsky is the contemporary face of the Hasidic branch. (2009 Ranking No. 4)

**2.Eric Yoffie**—Yoffie represents 1.5 million Jews in more than 900 synagogues in his role as president of the Union of Reform Judaism. (2009 Ranking No. 8)



Kevin Winter / Getty Images

Marvin Hier, number 3. He founded the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

**3. Marvin Hier**—Founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, Hier is No. 3 for his tireless work combating issues such as anti-Semitism, bigotry, and hate. Hier's many connections with major world leaders, politicians, and entertainment-industry bigwigs give him an international platform from which to speak on various matters affecting the Jewish people. (2009 Ranking No. 2)

**4. Mark Charendoff**—A leading authority on the future of Jewish philanthropy, Charendoff serves as president of the Jewish Funders Network, an international organization of family foundations, public philanthropies, and individual funders. (2009 Ranking No. 3)

**5. David Saperstein**—Having just completed his term as the only rabbi serving on President Obama's White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, Saperstein continues to act as a major influence in Washington in his role as director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. (2009 Ranking No. 1)

**6. Schmuley Boteach**—Calling himself "America's Rabbi," Boteach continues to share his views on marriage, parenting, and relationships with the world, appearing on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, counseling various celebrities in their times of crisis and releasing his most recent book, *The Michael Jackson Tapes*. (2009 Ranking No. 7)

**7. Irwin Kula**—Kula, a bestselling author who serves as co-president of CLAL (the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership), is nationally known for his commitment to reshaping

America's spiritual landscape. (2009 Ranking No. 10)

**8.David Ellenson**—Under Ellenson's leadership as president, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion continues to develop, train, and support the dynamic Jewish leaders of tomorrow. (2009 ranking No. 5)

**9.Robert Wexler**—Wexler continues influencing generations of Jewish students and scholars as president of American Jewish University. (2009 Ranking No. 6)

**10.Morris Allen**—As program director for Magen Tzedek, the ethical kosher seal, Allen is changing the way the world thinks about *kashrut* and the ethical issues surrounding the hechsher. (NEW)

**11.Uri D. Herscher**—Herscher is the founder, president and CEO of the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles. (2009 Ranking No. 9)

**12.Norman Lamm**—Lamm is the chancellor of Yeshiva University in New York City. (2009 Ranking No. 14)

**13.David Wolpe**—Considered by many to be the No. 1 pulpit rabbi in America and a major leader of the Conservative movement, Wolpe is the rabbi of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles. (2009 Ranking No. 11)

**14.Yehuda Berg**—Berg is known as the world's leading authority on the Kabbalah movement. (2009 Ranking No. 13)

**15.Joesph Telushkin**—Telushkin is an internationally known bestselling author and speaker. (2009 Ranking No. 15)

**16.Menachem Genack**—In his role as CEO of the Orthodox Union Kosher Division, Genack has steadily supervised and maintained the organization's stringent kosher requirements throughout a series of recent scandals. (2009 Ranking No. 17)

**17.Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus**—As president of the CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis), Dreyfus represents nearly 2,000 Reform rabbis. (2009 Ranking No. 18)

**18.Avi Weiss**—A leading Modern Orthodox rabbi who heads the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, N.Y., Weiss recently caused a stir in the Orthodox community with his controversial decision to grant his student, Sara Hurwitz, the title of "rabba." (2009 Ranking No. 38)

**19.Jeffrey Wohlberg**—Wohlberg is president of the Rabbinical Assembly, the international association of Conservative rabbis. (2009 ranking No. 19)

**20.Steve Gutow**—Gutow is president and CEO of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the public-policy and community-relations coordinating agency of the American Jewish community. (2009 Ranking No. 20)

**21.Yehiel Eckstein**—As founder and president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, Eckstein is recognized as the world's leading Jewish authority on evangelical Christians. (NEW)

**22.J. Rolando Matalon**—As senior rabbi for Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York City, Matalon presides over a congregation of more than 1,800 families. (2009 Ranking No. 16)

**23.Dan Ehrenkrantz**—In his role as president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Ehrenkrantz is recognized as a leading expert in issues pertaining to the Reconstructionist movement and American Jewish history.

**24.Haskel Lookstein**—Lookstein is principal of New York's Ramaz School and rabbi at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun. (2009 Ranking No. 22)



Timothy A. Clary / AFP-Getty Images

Sharon Kleinbaum, number 25. She runs the world's largest synagogue for GLBT Jews.

**25.Sharon Kleinbaum**—Kleinbaum is senior rabbi of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, the world's largest synagogue for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered Jews. (2009 Ranking No. 25)

**26.Jack Moline**—Moline, the spiritual leader of Gauds Achim Congregation in Alexandria, Va., is also the Rabbinical Assembly's newest director of public policy. (NEW)

**27.Steven Wernick**—Wernick is the newly appointed executive vice president and CEO of United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. (NEW)

**28.Art Green**—As dean of Hebrew College's Rabbinical School, Green is internationally

recognized as an authority on Jewish thought and spirituality. (2009 Ranking No. 27)

**29.Peter J. Rubinstein**—As senior rabbi for New York’s Central Synagogue, Rubinstein presides over a congregation of more than 1,700 families. (2009 Ranking No. 12)

**30.M. Bruce Lustig**—As senior rabbi for Washington’s largest synagogue, Washington Hebrew Congregation, Lustig presides over a congregation of more than 3,000 members. (2009 Ranking No. 26)

**31.Sharon Brous**—Founder of Los Angeles’s progressive spiritual community, IKAR, Brous has received international attention and acclaim for her leadership and impact within the Jewish community. (2009 Ranking No. 31)

**32.Michael Siegel**—In addition to serving as senior rabbi at Chicago’s Anshe Emet congregation, Siegel is also nationally known as the co-chair of the Heksher Tzedek Commission. (NEW)

**33.Abraham Cooper**—As the associate dean of the Simon Weisenthal Center and its Museum of Tolerance, Cooper is internationally known as an activist for human and Jewish rights. (2009 Ranking No. 29)

**34.Arthur Schneier**—Known as the first rabbi to host the pope at his Park East Synagogue in New York, Schneier is also the founder and president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation. (2009 Ranking No. 36)

**35.Ephraim Buchwald**—Buchwald is the founder of the National Jewish Outreach Program, which aims to address issues such as intermarriage and Jewish assimilation. (2009 Ranking No. 35)

**36.Sara Hurwitz**—Hurwitz rose to national attention when Rabbi Avi Weiss (No. 18) bestowed her with the title of “rabba.” She is considered the first Orthodox woman rabbi ordained in the United States, and in this role she has had an impact on the roles considered acceptable for modern Orthodox women. (NEW)

**37.Kerry M. Olitzky**—As executive director of the Jewish Outreach Institute, Olitzky is one of the leading rabbinical advocates for outreach to interfaith and unaffiliated families in America. (2009 Ranking No. 34)

**38.Bradley Shavit Artson**—Artson is dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University. (2009 Ranking No. 40)

**39.Naomi Levy**—Considered a leader in the Conservative movement, Levy is a nationally recognized speaker and author as well as founder and leader of the Los Angeles-based Jewish outreach organization Nashuva. (2009 Ranking No. 39)

**40.Harold Schulweis**—In addition to being considered one of the leading voices of the Conservative movement, Schulweis is internationally known for founding Jewish World Watch. (2009 Ranking No. 21)

**41.Marc Schneier**—Schneier is president and founder of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, which seeks to strengthen relationships between ethnic communities in the United States. (2009

Ranking No. 33)

**42.Zalman Schacter-Shalomi**—Schacter-Shalomi is known as the founder of the Jewish Renewal movement in America. (2009 Ranking No. 45)

**43.Elliot Dorff**—As chairman of the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, Dorff serves as the leader of Conservative Judaism's top lawmaking body. (2009 Ranking No. 41)

**44.Bradley Hirschfield**—A nationally known proponent for interfaith dialogues and pluralism, Hirschfield is co-president of CLAL. (2009 Ranking No. 42)

**45.Steven Leder**—In addition to serving as Senior Rabbi at Los Angeles's Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Leder is also a bestselling author. (Returning from 2008)

**46.Ed Feinstein**—A noted author and speaker, Feinstein is senior rabbi of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, Calif. (2009 Ranking No. 44)

**47.David Stern**—As senior rabbi for Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, Stern presides over the largest congregation in the Southwest. (2009 Ranking No. 30)

**48.Michael Paley**—Paley is the scholar in residence and director of the Jewish Resource Center of the UJA-Federation of New York. (2009 Ranking No. 50)

**49.Jill Jacobs**—A leading expert in Jewish social-justice issues, Jacobs serves as the rabbi in residence at the Jewish Funds for Justice. (2009 Ranking No. 48)

**50.Mark Dratch**—As founder of JSafe (The Jewish Institute Supporting an Abuse-Free Environment), Dratch is a nationally recognized speaker and consultant in matters of domestic violence, child abuse, and professional abuse within the Jewish community. (NEW)