



RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF AMERICA

הסתדרות הרבנים דאמריקה



As part of our new initiative to spotlight outstanding RCA members in our newsletter, we are proud to feature Rabbi Ben Atwood. Ben brings a dynamic blend of Torah scholarship and modern education to Toco Hills, joining Ohr HaTorah as Assistant Rabbi after studying at Yeshivat Har Etzion and Yeshiva University, where he earned rabbinic ordination and a certification in mental health counseling. A former leader of OU-JLIC Greater Atlanta and current faculty member at Atlanta Jewish Academy High School, Rabbi Atwood, along with his wife Rachel and son Izzy, looks forward to shaping the community's future. We asked Ben some questions, and here are his answers – edited for clarity and length:

1. RCA: If you weren't a rabbi, what would you be?

Originally, I wanted to teach academic Judaic studies, as a professor, but several of my own professors in college actually steered me away from it — so probably that profession.

2. What's the first thing you do when you sit down to write a *shabbos derasha*?

I scavenge for engaging divrei Torah that speak to me. I read, listen, watch, etc. — probably for way longer than I should. Unfortunately, I'm very picky when it comes to finding divrei Torah I like. I have some go-to resources for my favorites, which helps.

3. Most memorable rabbinic moment?

Probably the first time an OUJLIC student called me late in the evening to talk about how they were devastated after a bad break up. That moment, I knew there was a reason I was where I was, and I clearly had developed a strong enough connection with my students that they felt they could turn to me in times of distress. It also made me realize that this may be the most important facet of the role of the rabbi: people knowing that you are there for them.

4. What is your favorite part of what you do professionally?

Meeting up one-on-one with congregants over coffee and hearing about their unique lives, their successes, and their struggles.

5. What is your favorite sefer?

That's a tough one. I'm a big fan of Rabbi Eliyahu Lifshitz's *Torat Imekha*, a collection of relatively concise, *lomdishe* yet halchically-focused sugyot on various Gemarot. Most of his material is available [online](#).



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6. Describe Shabbos at your shul with three words.

Friendly. Packed. Social.

7. Best advice you've ever received?

To not be afraid to use preexisting materials for shiurim and drashot – our job is not to reinvent the wheel, our job is to connect with and inspire people!

8. Any advice for balancing rabbinic duties and family life?

No, but I'd be happy to hear any!

9. Coffee or Tea?

Definitely coffee. With a lot of creamer. To me, it's not coffee if it doesn't taste like ice cream!

10. Morning person or night person?

I've always been a night person – that's when I'm most focused. It usually means I don't get to sleep until late . . .

11. How old were you when you knew you wanted to be a rabbi?

I'm still trying to figure out if I want to be a rabbi. (I'm kidding! Mostly.)

Since I was a camp counselor in High School, I have wanted to be involved in education and Judaic studies of some sort. I originally wanted to be a professor, but several of my own professors in college convinced me out of that, and suggested I be a rabbi instead (they claimed that would have more job security and opportunities than academia. Go figure). Once I did a couple internships and spoke in a few shuls, I was hooked.