



## Meet Israeli Reform Rabbis

# Rabbi Dr. Ayala Ronen Samuels



**Community Position:** Founding Rabbi of Kehillat Tefilat Ha'Adam, Caesarea  
**Born:** Kibbutz Shamir, Israel  
**Ordination:** HUC Jerusalem  
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**City/region:** Caesarea is a small town but the community serves people from around the area. I also serve as a “regional rabbi” in the regional council and am very active in “Hofim – Israeli Judaism on the Carmel Coast,” a program that operates within the regional council and offers Jewish educational and cultural activities to the whole area.

**Special activities in my community:** Involvement with residents of the Arab community of Jisra-Zarqa. Creative family programs for the general public in Caesarea, including people who do not come to our prayer services.

**Formative event in my history:** I grew up on a Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz in the Upper Galilee, and that’s where my personality and identity were shaped. My work as a Reform rabbi is built on and enriches this foundation. This combination is reflected in the way I work and practice as an Israeli rabbi.

**Dreams for personal and professional future:** My dream is to see a strong and stable liberal community in Caesarea, with our own home, attracting children for their Bar/Bat Mitzva and families to celebrate lifecycle events, festivals, and Shabbat. On the regional level, I dream and work

to ensure that Israeli Judaism becomes a natural part of life on the Carmel Coast, with large numbers of residents participating in activities. My goal is that the residents of the area will be familiar with a pluralistic, community, and dialogue-based Judaism.

**A place in the world which is special to me:** We have a big and loving family in Houston, Texas. I particularly like to visit Congregation Shma Koleinu there.

**Unusual experience in the Diaspora:** Years ago, I moved with my family to live in Luxembourg, in central Europe. We didn’t know anyone there and didn’t speak the language. We sent our children to the American School, and learned that there was an English-speaking Jewish congregation in the city. I got in touch and went along. The congregation included sojourners, who were in Luxembourg for various reasons.

They didn’t have a rabbi or a synagogue, though occasionally a rabbi would visit from England, particularly to run Holiday services. Most of the activities were held in private homes. I offered to teach a lesson ahead of Hanukkah. By the time the festival arrived, I was already part of the team preparing the party. Shortly, I became one of the congregation’s leadership. This strange little community became our home and a place where we could celebrate our Judaism and enrich our children’s Jewish identity. When the time came to return to Israel and say goodbye, people there advised me to study for the rabbinate, and said they would be delighted to welcome me back as their rabbi. It took another ten years, but eventually I was ordained as a rabbi. I never got a chance to thank the people who first planted this idea and taught me that a community doesn’t need formal leaders or a synagogue. These can come at a later stage...