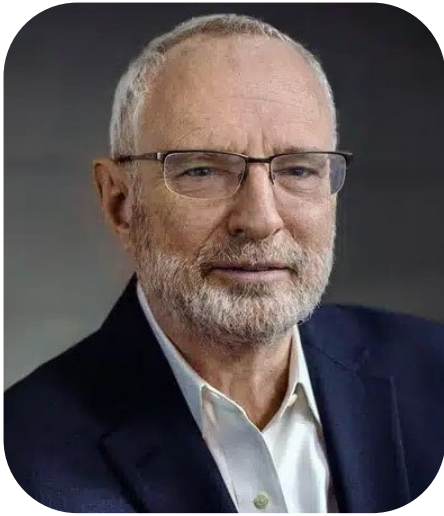




Rabbi David Saperstein,
4th United States Ambassador-at-Large
for International Religious Freedom
and
Emeritus Director at the Religious
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From the very beginning of my career in 1973, one of the blessings of my life was engaging with the extraordinary Kaplan family: with Ed Kaplan and his sister Sylvia and their families, and with Ed's unforgettable parents, [Kivie and Emily Kaplan](#). The legacy of these influential champions of Jewish social justice, of civil rights, of Black-Jewish relations and of interfaith relations, was inspiringly carried on by Ed in his own distinctive way. Kivie drove the creation of [The Reform Jewish Movement's Religious Action Center](#) (the RAC, as it is known – which I was honored to head for four decades), bringing the Movement's social justice voice to the nation's Capital. Ed remained close to the Center and its work throughout his own life. Kivie and Emily's social justice philanthropy and Kivie's civil rights leadership helped shape [The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#) (NAACP) he served as President as well as the broader civil rights agenda of the '50s and '60s. Ed proudly carried that focus into his own work: his ground-breaking writings on Heschel's social justice and civil rights writings and work; his involvement in the RAC's Black-Jewish work over the decades; and his rich commitment to interfaith understanding and cooperation.

To Ed, interfaith was the quest for the common ground in human unity that crossed the boundaries and the minutia of divisions between peoples of different race, nationality, and religion, yet done with respect for the distinctive characteristics and contributions of each religious community's theology and traditions. Over and above our numerous conversations on interfaith issues writ large, we were bound by our common commitment to the prophetic role of religion in shaping the moral character of our national policies and values.

Through it all, it was not only Ed's brilliance, his eclectic academic knowledge, his passions for social justice, for interfaith comity and understanding, and for the strength and effectiveness of Black-Jewish relationships and cooperation that was source of such pleasure when we were together, it was Ed's *menschekeit*, his ability to really listen, to empathize, to offer quiet wise guidance that I cherished most.

Ed's Memorial Lectureship offers a meaningful opportunity to honour the passions that shaped his life and to carry forward the substance of his academic inquiries. It will enrich those of us who knew him, while extending his influence to many more in the years ahead.

July 1, 2026