

Rabbi Uri Barnea
A concise biography

Rabbi Uri Barnea entered the rabbinate as a second career. A son of Holocaust refugees and a native of Petah-Tikvah, Israel, Rabbi Barnea's first career was in music – conducting, composing, and playing the violin and viola. Growing up in Israel, he served in the IDF for ten years in both regular and reserve commando units. He parachuted five times, was a young lieutenant on the Syrian border during the Six-Day War, and was injured during the war of attrition (1968-1971.) He showed musical talent from a tender age and at ten the violin became his chosen instrument. After his initial military service, he received his B. Music degree from the Rubin Academy of Music in Jerusalem, with a minor in Biblical and Jewish studies at the Hebrew University.

In 1971 he was invited to serve as Music Director at the JCC in Minneapolis. As well, he enrolled at the University of Minnesota, with a major in conducting and composition, and a minor in Middle Eastern studies. He was appointed Assistant Conductor of the U of M Symphony and Chamber Orchestras, was Music Director of the First Unitarian Society and the Kenwood Chamber Orchestra, and received his M.A. ('74) and PhD ('77) degrees. In the same year he married his wife, Lizbeth. In 1978 they moved to Galesburg, Illinois, where Dr. Barnea was Assistant Professor of Music at Knox College and Music Director of the Knox-Galesburg Symphony. In 1984 they moved to Billings, Montana, where Barnea conducted the Billings Symphony (1984-2004) and the Montana Ballet Company based in Bozeman (1993-2004.) Their two children, Avital and Jonathan, were born in Billings. Among Barnea's accolades are the first composition prize from the 1976 Aspen Music Festival for his String Quartet, an honorary citation from the Montana Human Rights Network, an honorary doctorate from Rocky Mountain College, and the Montana Governor's Arts Award in music.

Along with his musical career, Barnea has also been very active in the synagogues in Galesburg and Billings. Over the years, his interest in Judaism continued to grow, and in 2004 he left his musical career and enrolled in the Rabbinical School at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was ordained in a record time of three years, during which he also served as Teaching Assistant in Mishnah and Post-Talmudic Halakhic Codes, and served as intern and student rabbi in Nashville, TN, Winnipeg, MB, and LaSalle, IL.

Rabbi Barnea is fluent in Hebrew, and his rabbinic thesis is a translation and annotation of an autobiography by the JTS Hebraist, Zevi Scharfstein. Barnea has a brother, nieces, a nephew, and a large family in Israel, and a sister who lives with her husband in Indiana.

On July 1, 2007, Rabbi Uri Barnea assumed his position as full-time rabbi with Congregation B'nai Israel in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.