



## Rabbi Moshe Smolkin

**RABBI MOSHE SMOLKIN** was born in Atlanta, GA but grew up in Clear Lake City outside Houston, TX, and then Albuquerque, NM. Rabbi Smolkin felt like a bit of an outsider in Texas for not having been born there, but remembers with fondness growing up in the community just outside NASA, near his mother's parents. The family regularly celebrated Shabbat on Fridays with these grandparents but his parents were divided about what ritual aspects to follow in their own home. After his bar mitzvah, he began his own journey to understand religion:

"After I had my bar mitzvah, I really kind of pulled away from Judaism in many ways. I had this idea of we-- we're all humans, why can't we all just be human? Why can't we move past all of these labels, and things like that? And I ended up as an adolescent, actually, getting interested in Buddhism, uh, specifically Zen... but I also... liked learning about religion, and so I read all these different books about Buddhism, and Hinduism, and Islam, and Christianity... There's a book by Huston Smith called *Hidden Truth*, and I thought, 'Oh, maybe there's kind of a hidden truth that's something about reaching a closeness with the divine, where different religions put, in some ways, different garments on that, and then-- they have their own practices, but there's a real connection there that

everyone can kind of have access to.' So, at that point, um, I really kind of was centering around the mystical tradition, and-- and I was looking at Sufism, and I was looking at just different mystical traditions, and only at the end, I kind of said, 'Okay, finally, just to be consistent, I'll go back and I'll look at what does Judaism have to say?'"

Rabbi Smolkin went to the University of New Mexico for his first year of college, then transferred to Brandeis University where he majored in mathematics. Rabbi Smolkin joined Chabad early in his undergraduate career and participated in Jewish daily life through the Hillel at Brandeis, before again becoming secular. After receiving his master's degree in teaching and secondary mathematics education from Tufts University, he taught high school math for several years. While at a pluralistic Jewish high school in Waltham, Massachusetts, Rabbi Smolkin found himself drawn back into Jewish life and learning, and so decided to enroll at the Conservative movement's rabbinical school in Los Angeles. Rabbi Smolkin's year of study in Jerusalem, required by his rabbinical program, was his first time going to Israel. He was so enraptured with the land and the people that he considered making aliyah to settle there.

After completing his studies and serving for a year as the intern rabbi at Mishkon Tephilo in Venice, California, Rabbi Smolkin was hired by Ohavay Zion Synagogue in Lexington, Kentucky. Since joining OZS in 2009, Rabbi Smolkin has been committed to developing programs for children and young adults to connect with their Judaism and with each other. He has also played a pivotal role in interfaith outreach in the Lexington area by collaborating with other faith leaders for educational and social events.