

Portraits

Highlighting the exceptional contribution
of European Jewish Women

Esther Jungreis

Religious Leader
(1936-2016)

“A long life is not good enough, but a good life is long enough.”

Jungreis was born and raised in Szeged, Hungary on April 27, 1936, to Avraham and Miriam Jungreis. Her father, Abraham, was an Orthodox rabbi and operated a little shtiebl in the city.

The whole family was deported with other Jews from Szeged in a cattle wagon bound for Auschwitz. A relative arranged that when the train from Szeged passed through Budapest the wagon was opened and the entire Jungreis family was transferred onto the so-called Kastner train, which after a journey of several weeks and a diversion to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany, disembarked its 1,670 passengers in Switzerland.

In 1947 the family moved to Brooklyn, New York, where Jungreis reconnected with a distant cousin Theodore Jungreis, who was a rabbi. They married and raised four children. Due to her experiences as a Holocaust survivor, she became determined to devote her life to restore hope to her fellow survivors and other people in distress.

This led to the birth of the Hineni (Hebrew for “Here I Am”) which became, during the 70s, a worldwide movement with centres all over the world.



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/71/Esther_Jungreis_%28cropped%29.jpg

In its heyday, Hineni had considerable success on college campuses, and Jungreis spoke to large audiences across the country, including a full house at Madison Square Garden’s Felt Forum in 1973. With the years Jungreis grew her outreach efforts through her books, her website, her newspaper columns, but also as a radio host and on cable television programs. Her weekly classes at the Hineni Heritage Center in New York City (established in 1982), and her lectures throughout the world attracted thousands of followers and motivated them to reconnect to Jewish culture. In 1998 she opened a soup kitchen and youth centre in Jerusalem that provides social and support services for young people with addictions and hosted the homeless of the city.

Still a prominent figure, Jungreis returned to centre stage at Madison Square Garden three decades after her first appearance there, when she delivered a message of hope at the 2004 Republican Party convention.

In May 2008, President George W. Bush appointed Jungreis to serve on the honorary delegation that flew with him to Jerusalem for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the State of Israel.