

Installation Address
Rabbi Jordan M. Ottenstein, RJE
November 10, 2017

On this Shabbat, we read Torah portion Chayei Sarah, and while I am not going to give a full sermon tonight--you are all invited tomorrow morning as we celebrate Anna Shakhnovsky become a bat mitzvah to hear much more about this parshah,-- and I am also not going to lay out my full vision for the future of Congregation Dor Tamid—I began that on the High Holy Days and, God willing, we will have many years to work together on developing and realizing that vision—I do want to share a few words tonight.

The parshah, named Chayei Sarah, has a very peculiar title. The life of Sarah. It is peculiar since, in the second verse we read of her death. And the Torah tells us, as you can see in your service handouts that Sarah was one hundred and twenty seven years old when she died. However, the Torah writes out the years of her life in a very particular way. We read this evening:

וַיְהִי לַחַיִּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַ שָׁנִים שָׁנֵי חַיֵּי
: שָׂרָה

This is the life of Sarah, she was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years. And so the rabbis ask, why is her lifespan broken up into different sections like this? Why are the years written in three different divisions? And the answer is that, as we know, our lives are not one singular event, not one continuous journey from beginning to end. Rather, as the Torah points out to us, our lives are broken up into different sections, separated by changes in status, changes in location, changes in relationships. And so it is with us as a community tonight: that we celebrate moving into the next stage of our journey, as individuals, as your rabbi, and as a community.

In my study, while sitting at my desk, I am flanked by two frames on the wall that have significant meaning to me and represent different stages of my life, and my journey to this moment.

On my right side, hangs my ordination certificate, my *semicha*, signed by all my teachers at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. This document serves as a reminder of the intense learning I have undergone and as a reminder of the constant need to continue learning to serve this community the best I can. It also reminds me of the many lessons I have received from those who I am blessed to call rabbi, among whom are Rabbi Norman Cohen, my childhood rabbi,

Rabbi Andrea Steinberger at the University of Wisconsin Hillel, Rabbi Susan Talve and Rabbi Randy Fleisher at Central Reform Congregation in St. Louis, who both taught me so much of what it is to be a rabbi and how to make sure that our Judaism inspires us to make the world a better place, my many teachers at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, including, but not limited to our guest tonight, Rabbi Ken Kanter. And a special thank you, Ken, not only for being here tonight to install me as the senior rabbi, but for your encouragement, advice, mentorship, and most importantly, your love and friendship. And at Beth-El in Fort Worth, my two senior rabbis, Ralph Mecklenburger and Brian Zimmerman, who have provided friendship, mentorship, and guidance to me as a brand new rabbi. Thank you also to my friends and colleagues, Rabbi Miller and Rabbi Miller from Temple Emanu-El. Max and Rachel, thank you so much for participating in this service. It is so meaningful to have fellow students from Cincinnati serving the greater Atlanta community with me and to have you here tonight. And, *n'siah tovah*, have a great trip to Israel this week.

On my left, is a painting, done by my Zadye, Bernard Ottenstein, of blessed memory, of a young boy studying a text in the yeshivah. This painting, which Zayde made more than thirty five years before I was born, hangs in my study as a reminder to me, not only of him, but of where I come from, of the family that has loved me, raised me, and taught me a love of Judaism. Judaism came alive for me at my Granny's Shabbat dinner table, in my mom's Sunday school kindergarten class, and sitting in the sanctuary with my dad, playing with the tzitzit on his tallit, a habit I still have today. The three of you, along with the rest of our family, truly showed me how rich living a Jewish life could be. Thank you Granny, Mom, and Dad, and thank you to my sister, Lauren, who is unable to be here tonight, and to my in-laws, Karen and Gil, who became my St. Louis family when Marni and I moved there after we graduated from the University of Wisconsin, and who allowed me to bring some of my families' traditions to their family in order to help me feel at home. All of you have done countless things, and supported me in so many ways on my journey to this day.

To the strongest support, the one who gives best advice, and one of the three greatest sources of joy in my life: thank you Marni, for all of your support, your patience, your sermon editing, and for everything you have done to help me achieve this dream. And to Noah and Kaden, who I hope are in bed asleep by now, but probably aren't, thank you for sharing your daddy with this community, our CDT family. I love you all.

I am flanked by two frames that remind me who I am, where I have come from, and how I became the rabbi I am today. But, sitting at my desk, in my study,

I look out into the openness, as the opportunity to be the rabbi of this community, Congregation Dor Tamid. Thank you all for your support and your encouragement. And while I do thank each of you here tonight and each member of our congregation, I do want to single out a few of you. To Jodi Rosa, who chaired the Rabbinic Transition committee and to Leslie Fox, Lisa Oxman, and Rob Lederman and everyone who baked and cooked for tonight's *oneg Shabbat*: thank you for all of your hard work on planning for this night and the celebration tomorrow. Rob, you have also been a fantastic president to work with over these first few months, and I truly enjoy getting to help build our community with you. To the Lisa Oxman, Mitch Skyer and the rest of the Senior Rabbi Search committee, I may be biased, but nice job! And thank you for your votes of confidence. To all of the committee chairs, committee members, board members, religious school teachers, and volunteers that I have the pleasure of working with: Thank you. Without your tireless efforts, your dedication, and your time, the holy work that we engage in would not happen. You all make my job as a rabbi possible. To our Cantorial Soloist, Mike Zuspan, and to our Director of Education, Molly Peled: thank you both for the hard work you each put in to make our services, our school, and our programs the best they can be. By working together, we truly have the opportunity to teach Torah and bring it to life. Additionally, I want to, and I urge each of you as well to, thank our staff: Kerry Sbat, Fran Simon, Ruthanne Warnick, Idit Orlinsky, Teddy Smith, and Shawn Friley. While I, as the rabbi, have the privilege of being on the *bimah* each week, you are the ones behind the scenes that truly allow everything we do to happen. Without your help and support, our programs wouldn't be as successful as they are, our congregants would not be served at the high level that they deserve, and it would, frankly, be a lot harder to be the rabbi.

Two pictures, representing two stages of my life, and one stage in front of me, in front of us, the future that we will build together, with love and compassion, learning together, praying together, rejoicing and mourning together, and making the world a better place together, with Torah in our midst and on our hearts, and from strength to strength.

Today rabbah. Thank you to everyone, from the bottom of my heart. It is truly an honor to serve this community as your rabbi. Shabbat shalom.