

A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

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A Moment of Reflection on an Incredible Journey AJ at 150: The Celebration Begins



In 1858, a small group of American Jews of German ancestry gathered to start the fifth synagogue in the Philadelphia area. Now, 150 years, six buildings, eight rabbis and thirty-one presidents later, we are ready to celebrate an “Incredible Journey,” our incredible journey. In six months of stellar events, we will “explore our past, celebrate our present and envision our future.”

What an astounding century and a half! A tiny Jewish community in America has exploded with growth.

American Jews have roots all over the globe, but most of us by now are American born.

During AJ’s 150-year history America became a superpower. Wars have seared the landscape of our nation — the Civil War, World Wars I and II, and now the War Against Terrorism. The Great Depression tested the soul of a nation. We witnessed the assassination of a president. “9/11” entered our lexicon.

The world has undergone a technological revolution. Radio, television, and now the internet have made the world into a “global village.” Despite the ever-present ebb and flow of the times we are a more prosperous nation than ever before, with a health care system that has significantly extended human longevity.

As Jews we have witnessed both the horror of the Holocaust and the rebirth of the State of Israel. What novelist could have imagined two events of greater contrast occurring within a few short years of each other. American Jews have prospered and become accomplished in ways far in excess of our numbers. We have seen a resurgence in Jewish studies with creative scholarship and innovative programming that meet the challenges of the modern era. The American Jewish community rivals in quality any previous Jewish settlement in history.

Congregation Adath Jeshurun has mirrored the developments in American civic life and world Jewish history for 150 years. Our membership has included soldiers and financiers, teachers and tradesmen, civic leaders and Jewish scholars. Some have been ardent Zionists and others, activists on behalf of Soviet Jewry. Our children have become rabbis and cantors. Our graduates have influenced the study of *Torah* in communities all over the nation.

AJ is an original Conservative Jewish congregation that predates Conservative Judaism. It was one of only twenty-two founding synagogues of the United Synagogue of America, now known as the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. But it was in existence twenty-eight years before the Jewish Theological Seminary of America was founded in 1886, and fifty-five years before the United Synagogue was formed in 1913.

We have moved from location to location. We have welcomed newcomers from all nationalities. We have evolved into an egalitarian congregation. We have changed

with the times. But one thing has remained constant — our dedication to our role as a synagogue to preserve and transmit Judaism from generation to generation, and to embrace the mission of the Jewish people to perfect the world under God’s sovereignty for all humanity.

The programs of the 150th Anniversary Celebration, beginning with the Opening Event on May 4, have been structured to look back with pride and ahead with open-mindedness and confidence. Some, like the historic display in the newly constructed Rudman Gallery, will look back on the road we have travelled on our journey and explore our past. Others, like the Educational Symposium on September 7, will help us envision our future and the future of the American Jewish community. And still more, like the events planned for November 8, will celebrate our present accomplishments. What a glorious year of rejoicing this will be!

I am personally grateful to **Lana and Bernie Dishler**, the co-chairs of our 150th Annual Celebration Committee for their incredible dedication. They have been working tirelessly for almost a year now. They have assembled a great committee, and wonderful sub-committees who work with dedication and pride. These events will be among the finest of our long history, and worthy of it. The thematic logo of the Celebration is an image of the Tree of Life. From the roots that seek the nutrients of the soil, through the strong trunk, to the graceful branches with ever-new fruit and foliage, this tree is a symbol of life, the life of our congregation. Our roots reach deep into the soil of our ancient Jewish faith and our remarkable, young by comparison, American experience. Our trunk is strong, representing the present that links past and future. And the branches and foliage represent change and renewal. As the leaves fall in their season, and the branches are reborn with new blossoms, our congregation is ever refreshed by innovation and creativity.

This is a time for celebration. It is a time for rejoicing. It is a time to say Hallelujah. With the Psalmist we say as a congregation, “Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all my inward powers, God’s holy name” for all of the blessings with which our congregation has been favored throughout this 150 years. May God’s blessings continue to nourish the Tree of Life that is Congregation Adath Jeshurun, to enrich the lives of generations to come, and to help make our world a safer, nobler, and loving place for all humankind.

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