



WHY TEMPLE SINAI MATTERS

Rosh HaShanah Morning
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When I was elected rabbi of Temple Sinai in 1994, I could not have dreamed that my tenure here would continue for 25 years. I came here with flaming red hair and stood five foot ten inches tall. Now my hair is blond, balding, and I stand -- at four foot nine. That's what Temple Sinai has done to me!

My friends, it has been the greatest privilege of my life to devote my life to this temple. Over these 25 years, we have laughed, celebrated, and cried together. If I have managed to heighten your joy or made your sorrow easier to bear, if I have filled your life with Jewish meaning or inspired you to deepen your connection to Judaism, then my dream to become a rabbi, ever since I was 16 years old, has been fulfilled. My soul is bound to the soul of this temple. Does that sound creepy?

My tenure as rabbi of Temple Sinai will conclude on June 30, 2019. As I turn 65 this November and look back on 30 years as a congregational Rabbi, it is the right time for me.

It is also the right time for Temple Sinai. It is time for a new rabbi to lead you to new heights. I am excited to learn about the new ideas and approaches, the new paths my successor will chart for Temple Sinai in the years ahead.

With every transition comes built-in anxiety. But change and innovation are what vital and vibrant synagogues do. And Temple Sinai is a very vibrant and vital synagogue indeed. So let us be both excited and calm.

You too have a crucial role to play in lifting Temple Sinai higher. As Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg wrote, "a community cannot survive on what it remembers; it will persist only because of what it affirms and believes."

Every synagogue should be constructed around vision, sacred mission, and core principles. These concepts do more than define who Temple Sinai is. They are the animating force that sustains, nurtures, and elevates us as a congregation.

And so, before I become rabbi emeritus at the end of next June, I take this moment to entrust you with Temple Sinai's vision, sacred mission, and core principles, as I have understood them these 25 years.

Before I can take my leave of you, I need you to know and to better appreciate why Temple Sinai matters so much to me, to so many others who belong to this temple - for 30, 40, 50 years or more - and to so many in Summit and in the region.

What is our vision? "I walk into Temple Sinai and I'm home."

So says temple member Judy Rosen in the new Temple Sinai video. Housed in this beautiful Victorian mansion, our vision is that generations of children and adults alike will always feel that Temple Sinai is a home away from home, a home that cultivates a warm sense of belonging. *I ask you to keep Temple Sinai synonymous with warmth, friendliness, genuine caring, and informality. Promise me you will keep this house a loving home.*

What is our sacred mission? Temple Sinai's mission statement, composed around 2005, begins "We are a Reform Jewish congregation dedicated to the spiritual fulfillment of its members."

For me, this is inadequate. Fulfillment is not a sacred mission. Sacred mission speaks to a cause that is greater and more important than ourselves. Sacred mission is always about responsibility.

It is our collective responsibility to make Judaism's fundamental moral values of love, compassion, justice, kindness, and forgiveness live in this world every day.

It is our collective responsibility to keep alive and to transmit the treasures of the Jewish heritage - its beliefs, principles, and culture -- to future generations.

In sum, Temple Sinai's sacred mission is the fulfillment of these two responsibilities.

What beliefs does Temple Sinai believe? Which principles is Temple Sinai committed to? They are right here in our sanctuary. Literally. And they have been in front of you since 2004. Etched into these ten windows are images of 10 Jewish beliefs and principles. They are here so that when you would enter this beautiful sanctuary you would see them and live up to them.

We shall soon prepare a beautiful booklet about these sanctuary window etchings. For now, let me name the principles and beliefs they picture. From left to right, they are: the value of communal prayer, the immortality of the soul, the pursuit of justice, revering the Torah, the existence of God, the love of God,

commitment to Israel, the covenant made at Mt. Sinai (the place we are named after), seeking peace, and being a blessing to the world and to each other.

I ask you to talk about these beliefs and principles. Make them part of your Jewish vocabulary. Engage in the unending dialogue between Jewish tradition and modernity. Promise me Temple Sinai will live up to its two-fold sacred mission, live up to its responsibilities to our faith, to our people, and to the world.

Another core principle or value of our congregation is reflected outside this sanctuary in the entire room dedicated to the Temple Emanu-El Holocaust Remembrance Center.

Temple Sinai has a disproportionately large number of Holocaust survivors, adult children of Holocaust survivors, children who were hidden during the Holocaust, and those who lost many family members.

The Holocaust Remembrance Center is one of the many beautiful outcomes from our union with Temple Emanu-El. Please see the lovely note written by past president Steve Greenblatt about the HRC in the High Holy Days booklet.

You will read that the Holocaust Remembrance Center will open this November with an exhibit dedicated to the 80th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass.

I take this moment to encourage the members of our congregation to lend your Holocaust artifact to the Holocaust Remembrance Center. I ask you to volunteer to help with the administrative tasks of getting the HRC up and running. I invite you to become trained as a docent who will lead guided tours of the HRC's permanent and rotating exhibits to schools and other institutions.

Temple Sinai is now the conservator for two Torah scrolls saved from the holocaust that were given to Temple Emanu-El on long term loan by the Memorial Scrolls Trust in London. These two scrolls are two of the 1,564 scrolls from Czechoslovakia that were saved from the Nazis.

Let me briefly tell you the story of the Czech Torah scrolls. In 1942, as the deportation of Czech Jews to the death camps escalated to its peak, the curators of the Jewish museum in Prague undertook an extraordinary mission. Realizing they could do nothing to save the Jewish people or themselves, they sought to rescue the Torah scrolls and other treasures from the now deserted synagogues across Czechoslovakia.

As an act of great spiritual resistance to Nazi persecution, more than 212,000 artifacts were brought to Prague, including 1,800 Torah scrolls. Until they were themselves deported to Terezin or Auschwitz-Birkenau, the museum curators carried out their sacred mission to preserve the heritage of the Czech Jewish communities for future generations.

In 1963, the Czech government offered Eric Estorick, a British art dealer, the opportunity to purchase some of the Torah scrolls stored in the museum. He contacted a client, Ralph Yablon, who in turn contacted Rabbi Harold Reinhart of Westminster Synagogue in London. Ralph Yablon funded the purchase of all 1,534 scrolls. They arrived in London on February 7, 1964.

Westminster synagogue founded the Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum to house some of the scrolls and established the Memorial Scrolls Trust so that the majority of the Czech Torah scrolls could be allocated to congregations around the world who pledge to give the Torah scroll a prominent role in the life of the congregation. Congregations like Temple Sinai.

It is a condition of the loan that we teach about the Torah scrolls and the communities they came from. This morning we read Torah from Czech memorial scroll 488. It was written in the late 19th century. This Torah scroll belonged to the small Jewish community of Holeshov comprised of 273 families.

The Torah scroll in the glass case opposite the sanctuary doors is Czech Memorial Scroll 1386. It was written in 1700. It belonged to the members of the Pinkas Synagogue in Prague, once one of Europe's great cities of Jewish life.

These scrolls symbolize the spirit of Jewish courage, dignity, resilience, and faith at the darkest and most desperate times in our people's history. *I ask you to continue Temple Sinai's commitment to Holocaust education. Promise me you will lovingly preserve these Czech memorial scrolls and learn about the Jewish communities that once cherished and loved them.*

This is Temple Sinai's vision, sacred mission, and core principles. They are an inspiration to me and I hope to you. Don't they make you proud to be a member of this congregation, and if you are a guest, to celebrate Rosh haShanah with us today?

I have been asked what I will most look forward to upon my retirement. I will look forward to being off in July and August for the first time in 30 years. I have been asked how I feel about my retirement in 9 months. To be honest, I don't have time to think about it. My list of goals to accomplish for Temple Sinai in the next nine months is at least a mile long. But I am sometimes here alone late at night. Then I feel the wistfulness. Then I feel the gratitude. Temple Sinai, thank you for taking a chance on me 25 years ago.

Shanah Tovah.