

Leaving the Sanctuary Ceremony

June 11, 2017 • 17 Sivan 5777



Prayer Upon Entering a Synagogue

מָה טֹבוֹ אֹהֶלְיֶךָ, יַעֲקֹב; מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Ma tovu ohalekha Ya'akov, mishk'notekha Yisra'el.

How great are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! (Numbers 24:5)

פִּתְחוּ לִי שַׁעֲרֵי צְדָק אֲבִם אוֹדָה יָהּ: זֶה הַשַּׁעַר לִיקוֹק צְדִיקִים יָבֹאוּ בוֹ:

Pitchu li sha'arei tzedek, avo vam odeh yah. Zeh Hasha'ar l'Adonai, tzadikim yavo-u vo.

Open for me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them, to thank God.

This is the gateway to the Lord; through it the righteous shall enter. (Psalms 118:19-20)

A History of This Building and The Stained Glass Windows

Gary Kodner

This sacred space holds so many memories for so many people for so many reasons. It is impossible to mention all the people and all those events and occasions. But I do want to recognize the Klei Kodesh who served our congregation in this space:

Rabbi Ephraim Epstein, Rabbi Arnold Asher, Rabbi Sholom Paul, Rabbi Zalmon Stein, Rabbi Kenneth Green, Rabbi Dov Bard, Rabbi Hillel Gold, Cantor Paul Dubrow, Rabbi Mark Fasman, Hazzan Joanna Dulkan, Rabbi Barry Friedman, Rabbi Noah Arnow, Rabbi Scott Shafrin, Rabbi Emeriti Benson Skoff and Mordecai Miller.

Congregations periodically move in response to an ever changing community, new consequences and opportunities:

Shaare Zedek began by renting a temporary space The West End Hall, at 3908 Finney Ave. to hold High Holiday services in 1905. In 1906 they occupied a house at 4557 Cook Avenue. In 1914 they moved to 4436 Morgan Street. In 1917 they built a magnificent structure at Page and West End. In 1926 they added a large educational center to their facility at Page & West End. In 1945 they moved to temporary quarters at 5470 Delmar. In 1952 they relocated here, at 829 North Hanley.

In 2018, we will move again.

With the St. Louis Jewish population moving westward in 1948, Shaare Zedek purchased a tract of land at

the corner of Hanley and Amherst and obtained a U. City permit to build a new synagogue on this property. The first design, by architect Meyer Loomstein, was not used. In 1951-52, a new design by architect Bernard Bloom was chosen. The goal was to develop a modern suburban facility to serve 550 families.

Work began on the chapel and school building (now occupied by the ECC) by general contractor Dickie Construction Co. in 1951 and was completed in the Fall of 1952. William & Bess Leve led the congregation and building committee in raising the funds to develop this first phase of development. The chapel was dedicated in the name of Marvin Diamond who was killed defending our country on Yom Kippur, 1943.

A photo in the December 1952 Post-Dispatch shows a completed structure, without stained glass windows or this sanctuary building, yet to be built. Our first High Holiday services at this location were held in a large circus tent capable of holding 1000 people.

In 1954 Shaare Zedek contracted Emil Frei Art Glass Co. and a young artist, Rodney Winfield, to design our windows. Under the direction and inspiration of Rabbi Ephraim Epstein, two sets of windows were designed. In 1954 the chapel windows were installed, and in 1957 the sanctuary windows were completed. The first service and dedication ceremony took place on Sunday, May 19, 1957. The building was dedicated to the Leves

and Rabbi Epstein. We are still looking for the time capsule that was part of its construction.

The "OFFICIAL" original description that was provided by Emil Frei, Rodney Winfield and Rabbi Epstein:

"The stained glass art windows are the most dazzling and colorful aspect of this space. Perhaps each of us has formed their own, impressions, importance and meanings of these windows.

The unusual stained glass windows, radiant with color, are uniquely penetrated by the black marble Aron Kodesh. The ark is in the form of the tablets of the law, together, they express the interior and exterior of the ark – the covenant between GOD and man. The ideas of knowledge, wisdom, tolerance, compassion, and ethics are depicted through the flight of the bird-like abstraction along with the words of the Torah. The spirit of the Torah cannot be destroyed, for it would always be directed to heaven."

For those who don't know this already, the orange glass surrounding the bird's eye is always the the last color of light to go out after sundown, marking the end of Yom Kippur.

The angled blue and green glass panels with Torah excerpts in front of the main glass create additional color and reflections. The views of the glass are ever-changing from different vantage points and light conditions.

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The chapel windows have a unique zig-zag 3-D interplay of light, form and design. With the success of these windows, Winfield would go on to design other major installations, including the National Cathedral in Washington DC.

Renovations and improvements were made to the building in 1992-1993. Those included improvements to this sanctuary, a new foyer, outdoor amphitheater, remodeled school wing, a Sara Myers Community room, and the Chapel which was re dedicated for the Guller family.

In 2008-2009 we dedicated a new Raiffe Torah, added the lower bima with accessible ramps and rails, the 2 Torah stands, improved ceiling lights, additional signage interior and exterior and renovations to the Mirowitz Auditorium.

Reflections on Leaving the Sanctuary

Rabbi Arnow

Welcome everyone. I'm so glad you are all here to mark this important occasion. This sanctuary, to which we bid farewell today, was the product of immense courage, imagination, hard work, and vision. Shaare Zedek, which built this sanctuary, contributed so much to the St. Louis Jewish community, to the greater St. Louis community. And we want to preserve that legacy and bring it forward into the future.

There is deep pain and loss in leaving this sanctuary, in saying goodbye to the spiritual home we lived in and loved for decades, for our whole lives.

We remember fondly the rabbis and cantors who served in this building, Rabbi Ephraim Epstein, Rabbi Arnold Asher, Rabbi Zalman Stein, Rabbi Dov Bard, Rabbi Hillel Gold, Rabbi Shalom Paul, Rabbi Mark Fasman, Cantor Paul Dubro, and Hazzan Joanna Dulkan.

We remember happy moments, moments of celebration and joy in this space, as well as moments of sadness, of grief, of mourning.

I want to share with you this afternoon the same Torah I shared as we prepared to leave BSKI. In Psalm 27 (verse 4), we read,

אחת שאלתי מאת יְקוֹק אֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ
שְׁבִתִּי בְּבֵית יְקוֹק כָּל יְמֵי תַחִי

One thing I seek from God, for which I yearn: To dwell in the house of God all the days of my life.

We all yearn to stay in our homes all the days of our lives, and especially in a house like this, a בֵּית ה', a house of God.

But when we leave, we remember another verse from psalms we recite three times a day: אֲשֶׁר יֹשְׁבֵי בֵיתְךָ, עוֹד יִהְיוּ סֵלָה
Happy are those who dwell in your house, again they will praise you (Psalms 84:5). May we all find ourselves together many times again, happy to be together, in house of God, a synagogue, and again we will praise, and sing.

הִנֵּה מַה טוֹב וַיְמָה נְעִים שֶׁבֶת אַחִים גַּם יַחַד:

Hineh mah tov u'ma-na-im shevet achim gam yachad.

How pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell together. (Psalms 97:11)

Some Thoughts on This Space

Rabbi Mark Fasman

Some thoughts on this space on the occasion of its de-sanctification.

When I think about the Shaare Zedek sanctuary (for that is how I knew it for most of my 14 years in St. Louis), I think less about the space itself than I think about the congregation that filled it. I think about specific people – I my mind's eye I see the faces of so many, in the seats that they occupied every Shabbat.

I think about all the baby-namings and birth announcements that took place on that bimah.

I think about all of the 13-year-olds who celebrated coming-of-age Jewishly on that bimah.

I think about the weddings that took place on that bimah.

I think about the people whose lives (now over) we honored and remembered in that place.

I think about High Holy Day services, Festival services, holiday services.

So many tears; so much laughter.

So much Torah. So many blessings.

I think about my personal/professional mission statement, from Leviticus 25:8

ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם

"Make for Me a sacred space, and I will dwell among them." This room was, for me, a sacred space, because it was here that I most felt God's Presence in our congregation. It wasn't the room itself where God dwelt; God dwelt among the community that sanctified that space. Thus, God's Presence was not only in the sanctuary, but wherever the community gathered – and that happened *because* we made this sanctuary a sacred space.

Just as our ancestors carried the sacred space with them on their journeys through the wilderness, reassembling it in each new location, so too may this congregation be accompanied by God's presence on your upcoming journey to the wilderness of Clayton.

A Song of Endings & Beginnings: A Modern Psalm

Debbie Perlman, z"l

Let us sing of our completions, smooth, round, Silvered voices to praise Your Name.

Every season holds starts and stops, Years of trees and spirits and souls, Days ripe with harmony and turning, Circled, cycled, to order our lives.

Inside each completion, We hear Your creation; Inside our creations, We resound with Your voice.

Let us mold a new shape for our completions, Fluid and longing, subtle limbs That lead us onward to praise Your name.

Every season casts away its jagged edges, Rubs away the torn moments To rejoice in the realignment Of old ways made straight.

Inside each refitting, We renew again Your creation, Pulling it taut against us, A firm bound shield of Your affection.

Let us sing of our completions. Your hand hovers, blesses, bids us move to new beginnings. Your hand moves us forward, toward unimagined completions.

As we move from sadness over leaving a sacred space, to faith in the potential of the future. Today, this day, this moment, contains within it the seeds of hope. Changes don't just bring loss and uncertainty, but also shining possibilities.

אֹר זָרַע לְצַדִּיק וּלְיִשְׁרֵי לֵב שִׂמְחָה:

Or zarua latzadeek, u'l-yishrei lev simcha.

Light is sown for the righteous, and for the upright of heart, joy. (Psalms 97:11)