

Where Is Your Spiritual Center?

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And there I was, standing on the elevator with the Director of the Rabbinical School and heading to the fourth-floor conference room. I was greeted by ten individuals, consisting of professors, students, and community members. After a series of introductions, a fifth-year student began my admissions interview with the following question: “Where do you find your spiritual center?”

I thought to myself, “I *want* my spiritual center to be the synagogue, but *does* our spiritual center have to be confined to those particular walls?”

Again, he asked, “Where do you find your spiritual center?”

Hesitantly, I replied, “I find my spiritual center in many different places. What makes it spiritual is not the center itself, but the choice that I have made to make that center holy.”

I define a spiritual center as that place in which one can achieve physical, mental, and emotional peace, even for a short period of time. It is that place that grounds us and helps us feel connected with both the land that we walk on and the people whom we encounter. It is a place of pause. It is a place in which we can be surrounded by ones we love and care for, and, in turn, those who love and care for us; or it can be a place of solitude and for personal reflection.

The Tabernacle was this center for our ancestors, and the synagogue has been a spiritual center for our people for centuries. Yet, we know that Judaism no longer can be confined to the walls of our synagogue on Cherry Blossom. We know that Shir Hadash represents a place that brings us together, but that place need not be in our sanctuary. For our spiritual center of Shir Hadash extends far beyond our building; it is found in the halls of our schools, the JCC, Vasona Park, and even Los Gatos Café. While God's presence may hover over Cherry Blossom, and be ignited by our students who have led our service this morning, God's presence may also be found on the Los Gatos Creek walking trails, at the Library, and even in the Passover section that has suddenly, and perhaps way to early, popped up in Safeway.

We choose for these places to be spiritual centers, to be holy places in which God's presence dwells, and we do so consciously and unconsciously. When we come to Shir Hadash for services, religious school, and youth group events, our building becomes a Tabernacle of worship, learning, and community—because we made it so.

As it begins to get warmer and our days lengthen, our spiritual center will be extended outside for the Purim Carnival, Yizkor in our memorial garden, and more. Our teens' spiritual center can be found when we co-host NFTY Spring Conclave in March, on college visits, and even in their favorite spots to study for exams.

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On this Shabbat, I now confidently reply, “I find my spiritual center in many different places. What makes it spiritual is not the center itself, but the choice that I have made to make that center holy.” My spiritual center is grounded not by place, but by experience—when I listen to our preschoolers sing on Friday morning, give a hug to someone grieving the loss of a loved one, or celebrate a life-cycle event. I find it quite frequently when I take walks with my dog, listen to my son’s heartbeat, or in the short nap I sometimes take on Friday afternoon before services and on Saturday afternoons. I find it when I have breakfast dates with my wife, take my dogs for a walk, and play board games with friends. I find it because I have chosen to make these experiences holy, and because of all these centers and others, I am complete.

May each of us discover our centers of spirituality and holiness, and may we encounter the Divine presence in all the places we may go and in all that we may do.

Shabbat Shalom.