

## **A Legacy for the Generations**

A sermon delivered by  
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Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple  
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Throughout the service tonight I have been thinking about all of us, the entire membership of this congregation. On my mind have been those who sat with me around a table in Room 108, one night in the spring of 1974 when I had my interview to become the first assistant Rabbi here at Anshe Emeth. Nearly all of them are no longer with us. They had an incredible sense of pride in this Temple, their synagogue, our congregation. They spoke to me about its importance in the community, the role it played in the Jewish community and the general community. They told me about the youth of the Temple and how important they are to the Temple's future. And, at the end of the interview, one of them, Bud Singer *z'l*, walked with me up the steps to the sanctuary; and, as he did, he told me, "I want you to see the most beautiful part of our Temple. It holds us all together."

I am thinking tonight about all of the generations that preceded us in our congregation. Most of them we never knew but their legacy to us we feel each and every time we walk into this building, every time we gather together, every moment in the life our congregation. They inherited much from their predecessors: a deep and abiding covenant with the past going back in time to that moment on Mt. Sinai when the Israelites first received the Torah; a caring tradition of faith and celebration in the essential goodness of humanity and in the power of words, words of Torah, that can transform a community from worshippers of golden calves to doers of mitzvot, from people practicing idolatry to people following the divine, from a community that focuses on its self to a community that sees itself as the focus of helping others. And they inherited a sense of excellence in all that they did and a commitment to a future imbued with deep respect for the past.

As I have watched our congregation over these last months I have been overwhelmed by the sense of commitment and passion that you and I have shared in the legacy that was given to us and the one we are now establishing for the future generations to come. To you and all of the families in our community I am deeply grateful for what we have already established together.

Tonight, there are so many who deserve our thanks. Len Littman and Lee Livingston have been guiding us through the Legacy Campaign. They and the members of the Steering Committee have been generous and loyal servants of our congregation. To

them all we offer our sincerest gratitude. To Dr. Norman Reitman, no one has steadfastly encouraged and led and given to the Legacy campaign than you. You have been our cheerleader and guide and you have continued to push us again and again to reach as high as we possibly could.

To all those who have worked on the campaign we are grateful. And to all those who have given to the campaign we express our deepest appreciation to each and every one of you.

Our thanks go out to Jane Cantor and Harvey Stone who have been presidents of the Temple during the Legacy Project; and, thanks to Steve Satz, our new President, under whose guidance the Temple will be rededicated at this time next year. Harvey Stone has been in this building nearly every single day. Oh, how he loves this place and all that it means to our community. Jane has steadfastly guided the new construction, restoration and renewal of our Temple building. Her enthusiasm and dedication to the project has been boundless and I know that her father's and mother's love of this Temple has guided her in all of her efforts on our behalf.

To the members of the Temple staff including the custodians, secretaries, book keeper, the Rabbis and Cantor and professional staff members – you have put up with so much and have continued to come in each and every day with smiles on your faces and commitment in all that you do. And special thanks to Gail Kroop whose love for this Temple is boundless and whose efforts on our behalf are beyond measure. This Congregation is deeply grateful to you, all of you, and my personal appreciation can only be expressed with words that are inadequate.

To all the members of the Legacy Celebration committee I express our thanks for what you have planned for us throughout the coming year and for what you have already done to make this night and this weekend and all of the Legacy events so very special. While we all had hoped that the construction would be totally completed by now, you have somehow managed to transform a construction site, filled with dust and debris into a sacred space to welcome Shabbat and to celebrate all that is good in our congregation. And to our officers and Board of Trustees I express my thanks for all of your support and trust in the Legacy Project and for your belief in what it will mean for our congregation's future.

In the early history of the Jewish people and its encounter with God, three times the people sought to find a place for the divine presence to dwell. They understood that in order for people to truly be a community of faith they had to establish for themselves a presence for the divine. In any contemporary period it is all too easy to become enslaved to materialism and idolatry. There is a seductive quality to living in a me centered world, a world where no one and nothing matters other than me, myself, and I. The Torah instructs us over and over again to fear such a world, to create a sacred community where every soul is sacred, where safety and security are assured based on human dignity and integrity.

To create such a community the people were instructed first to build a Tabernacle in the wilderness, a *Mishkan*. It would be a place where the people would go to become as close as possible to God, where they could feel God's divine presence, and from which they would learn how to live with one another and build a world of truth, compassion, honesty, and dignity. What a Tabernacle that must have been! It is described in vivid detail, how it was made, what material went into the construction, what would be the purpose of each of its parts, and who would be responsible for every facet of its unique fabrication. It became the basic architectural blue print for the Temple later built by Solomon, and the Second Temple, too, built by Herod, and every other Temple and Synagogue ever built throughout history.

The Rabbis tell us that three things were given to the people of Israel: *Eretz Yisrael*, The *Mishkan*, and the dynasty of David. These three things would act as pivotal points to the meaning of our existence. The Land of Israel would remind us of our place in the world, a homeland from which our Jewish souls would be nurtured throughout the generations. The dynasty of David would serve to give meaning to our lives in recognizing that we are a messianic people committed to bringing peace to the world. And the *Mishkan*, that magnificent tabernacle? Well, here are the words of the divine. I will let them speak for themselves. "As for this house which you are building, if you will walk in My statutes, and execute My ordinances, and keep all My Mitzvot, then will I establish My word with you which I spoke ... and I will dwell among you and will not forsake My people Israel." The *Mishkan* has the potential for the divine to dwell in our midst. But doing so is conditional. It is based on the kind of community we fashion, the way we live our lives, how we treat the widow, the orphan, the poor, the needy, and the enslaved. This beautiful edifice that has been given to us can only have true value and meaning if we live out the values and obligations of our faith.

I have thought about that quite a bit. It gives us an awesome responsibility and privilege. What shall be the meaning of this new and renovated space? How will we use it and what will we make of it? Will it be a place from which justice and mercy shall be pursued? Will this building be a place that is Torah centered, where we come here to be challenged by the wisdom of the ages so that we can respond to a world that has gone mad in a way that brings sanity to this beloved earth given to us as a precious gift to behold? How will we fill the halls and the rooms that have been crafted for us? Will we make them places where human dignity is cherished, where young and old can come together and share in the learning from our sacred texts? Will this be a place where men and women will be treated with equality and where rich and poor can gather together and even break bread with one another? And will this sacred space become a place known throughout our community as the place that holds us together, that is the anchor that keeps us steady in times of troubled waters, a place from which the "word of the Lord shall go forth?"

The building is far from complete. It will take some weeks before the construction is concluded. Then it will take even more months for us to learn how to live in the new spaces and how to transform our lives with the restored spaces. In the coming week, new carpet will be placed on floors that are now bare concrete; desks and files will

be placed in appropriate places. For now, it all seems a jumble, a hodge-podge, a construction site yet to be finished. But when you walk through the halls, tonight, I hope you will begin to envision the completion of our Tabernacle, and begin to dream of what is possible in the future and how we can make that future become our tomorrow.

Despite the fact that there are tables and files and boxes in the middle of the media center, close your eyes when you are in it and imagine young and old sitting at computer stations, reading books, having a cup of coffee, or just engaging in good conversation. Consider that each of the rooms has in it ten, fifteen, or even twenty people studying Torah or engaging in discussion about a good book, or arguing a passage of Talmud. Think of the kids sitting on the steps and listening as one of the adults is reading a story, or acting out a dramatic moment in Jewish history. It's all there, right in that special space. And how exciting it will be!

When you go into the Bruskin Beit Midrash down stairs I want you to imagine a lecture being held, a Shabbat morning minyan or a meeting of the Board of Trustees. Think of sitting in that room, surrounded by the great books of Jewish tradition. And then, when you walk into the new auditorium, close your eyes and consider the music emanating from that space, or the drama production, film, or a good lecture. Who knows, maybe even this summer it will become the place where we will hold our informal services that so many attend in July and August.

In a few moments, when you walk into the sanctuary, I think you will be overwhelmed by its beauty. While there is scaffolding that remains and the floor has yet to be sanded and stained, you can already get a sense of what will be. The pews have not yet been returned, nor the carpet been put down; but, one can well imagine and even feel the sense of intimacy and sacredness. And right in the middle of the bimah there is a huge open space, where once the Ark of our Temple was placed. In fact, the last remaining section of the original Ark was removed just today. All that is there now is a blank spot waiting for a new Ark, a new place for our sacred scrolls of Torah to be placed in our midst once again.

In my studies I learned that when the Second Temple was built in Jerusalem there was no place for the Ark in the building. It seemed that no matter what the architects did they could not come up with an appropriate design. The engineers could not fabricate a replica of the first Ark, and the exact space where once the Ark was placed was hidden from the Levites who were in charge of serving in the Temple. I found that to be quite astounding. For you see, in our entire Legacy Project, the Ark has been the most difficult part of the project for us to work on. We have rejected numerous designs, and we have had countless numbers of meetings to determine the size of the Ark, its placement, its meaning, and its design. How many Torahs should be placed inside, should we walk up steps to get in the Ark, what shall be the wording above it. To date, we have finally come up with a design and answers to our questions that we believe will meet our needs and enable the Ark to be placed lovingly and appropriately in our *Mishkan*, our Tabernacle.

Maybe the process was more important than the product. We had to know what was unacceptable to us before we could know what we truly wanted. We had to come to grips with the meaning of Torah in our midst in order to determine how many Torahs should be placed in the sacred space. And before we could determine the writing at the top of the Ark, we had to know the meaning of the sacred space that has been transformed and been touched by its truly special spirit. We had to know who we are before we could determine before whom we stand. In other words, we had to re-affirm ourselves as the Jewish people dedicated and devoted to the God of Israel before we could stand in God's holy place. Maybe that is why, for the first time in our sanctuary, inscribed high above, in the arched area over the bimah, is the inscription, "*Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheynu, Adonai Echad!*" For all to see, we are the Jewish people, and we are one with God.

In the coming weeks, the new ark will be crafted. Above it, an inscription like that inscribed before will be written: *Da Lifney Mi Atah Omed*, "Know before whom you stand." It will serve as a reminder to us that while we have built this beautiful building, we are only the temporary residents of its beautiful space. We are the inheritors of a legacy given to us by so many before; and we shall always seek to make this Temple a place where God's presence dwells and from which God's imperative for a world of kindness can go forth. May its spirit touch us and imbue in us a sense of promise, a commitment to the future, and an everlasting legacy among the generations.