

Rabbi David M. Frank, Temple Solel, Cardiff, CA
Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur 5778

“Har Ha-Bayit B’Yadeynu”

I’m often asked what I love most about being a rabbi. And I would have to say that what I love are the stories. Every one of you in this sanctuary has a unique story, and I feel so privileged when I get to share a small part of it with you. Over the years, I have seen how courageously you can face life’s toughest challenges, and how you can radiate gratitude at special and life-affirming moments.

I will always remember the story of one of our senior members, now of blessed memory, who told me how, as a young mother, she was rousted with her husband and baby out of her apartment by the Nazis. There she stood, holding her baby in her arms with an SS officer pointing a gun at her head. It was a Sophie’s Choice, her baby or her life. Her infant was shot before her eyes and her long nightmare began.

When finally, the war was over, she had miraculously survived the Holocaust. And one by one, the far-flung refugees started returning home to see what was left for them. One day, she spotted a man in the distance walking toward her, and she knew that man had to be her husband. She recognized him because he was a tailor by profession. He was also colorblind. Before she could make out his face, she could see he was wearing a neatly sewn, but clashing colored patch on his trousers.

They both eventually made their way to France and gave birth to a son, and then to America, where they were able to live a long beautiful life. That son became our temple president, and their grandchildren now have children of their own. I don’t know how someone survives this, but they did – and they showed me what it means to be a courageous, defiant Jew.

Many years ago, a young mother came to see me. She was a happy, practicing Irish Catholic who had married a man with Jewish ancestry. Her children, however, were not happy in Catholic school and were rebelling. Finally, her understanding priest suggested that she go speak with a rabbi.

I will never forget that meeting in my study, as this fiercely loving mother poured out her complex dilemma. She had come to her wit’s end when she asked her oldest of three daughters what she wanted for Christmas, and she answered insistently, “I want a Torah!”

It has been a long and interesting road. The end of the story is that this mother and her three daughters eventually converted in the Mikveh together, and in turn

all four of them became bat mitzvah, with each of the three girls growing up to become amazing teen leaders here at Solel and Camp Simcha.

They taught me about something called, the Pintele Yid, the little flame of Jewish life that may fade and flicker, but never goes entirely out. Sometimes, in the most surprising ways and unexpected times, it is fanned into a bright and passionate fire.

From each of your stories, I have learned so much. You are survivors, fighters, activists, lovers of life and our Jewish people. You have created a joyous and welcoming community here. I am always touched and grateful to work with our interfaith families, who make a conscious choice to bring their children to Torah. I am proud to be rabbi of an inclusive congregation that doesn't just accept, but celebrates diversity. And I am inspired to see firsthand how important it is for you to pass on the heritage of your parents and grandparents, for whom being Jewish was and is a badge of honor.

Of course, our individual stories are also part of something much bigger than ourselves. For 3,500 years, in fact, the Jewish people, has been writing a majestic narrative, and we each have a role in that story. From Abraham to the Modern State of Israel; from the great moral minds of our sages, to the Jewish Nobel Prizes winners in our own time. Our ancestors fought against Greece and Rome to keep Judaism alive, while our fathers and grandfathers fought against Hitler to save our people. We have always stood on the side of justice. From sweatshops to labor unions, from civil rights marches to the great causes so many of you labor in today.

All of this is our story. And we are writing it still.

Rosh Hashana/Yom Kippur calls it the Book of Life, the book in which our ancestors, we, and the generations to come are inscribed. And the question on this day is, what story will our chapter tell?

Will it be said that we made the same worthy contributions, had the same extraordinary courage when called upon, made the same sacrifices as those who came before us? When our children read it, will they call us heroes, will they call us generous, will they say we built something of lasting value and handed it down to them?

Of course, as your rabbi, this is something I think deeply about on a day such as today. And as I do my own *cheshbon ha-nefesh* and measure my labor and contributions, I can't help but reflect upon the story of the greatest of all rabbis, Moshe Rabeynu, Moses our rabbi, our teacher.

The Torah calls him the most humble person on the earth, and nowhere is that more evident than at the very end of his career. Despite everything he did to free the Israelites from slavery and bring them through the desert to the Land of Israel, he knew that he would not have the privilege of completing his mission and entering the Promised Land himself. That had to fall to a new and younger leader, to Joshua. Moses was wise enough to know that no one leader can go on forever, even though there are more dreams to chase and more mountains to climb.

So, before he sent them on their way, Moses gathered the Israelites and retold their history and their story. He reviewed the Law that would shape their destiny. In short, before stepping down, he did everything he could to secure the foundation for their future.

Yes, it's the stories I love, because they inspire us, and show us the way to navigate our own journeys. And so it is, that as your rabbi for more than a quarter of a century, I cannot help but be mindful that my journey with you is also coming to an end. The time is near for me to pass the leadership of Temple Solel onto the next Joshua, or perhaps Deborah, as I get ready to retire and, as Moses did with such humility, help you prepare for your future.

What a remarkable journey it's been. We have built this beautiful spiritual home, and created a true gathering place for our greater North County community. Here, we shelter and feed the homeless. We nurture toddlers and preschoolers with love, and Torah, and lots of hugs. We give our children and teens a safe space, mentorship, and a secure identity. And we create circles of friendship that keep us close and supported throughout our lifetimes.

We have covered a lot of ground together. We have planted, we have built, we have nurtured and grown and, now, we absolutely have to take this moment to prepare for what lies ahead – the next chapter of your story.

There are some great challenges on the horizon. A new generation is rising in our ranks and they have their own ideas about what a synagogue should be and how it should serve. Our leadership is going to be spending this coming year listening to you, and imagining with you what Solel can and must become. Every story starts with a great idea. That's why this critical juncture in the history of Temple Solel, belongs to you, to share your great ideas and passions and vision. Now is the time to cement a firm foundation, so that when I step away and become your Rabbi Emeritus, my successor can feel that he or she has inherited a dynamic, vision-driven, and secure synagogue.

And here is where I have to be as direct and honest as possible. In order for that to happen, we are going to have to lay not only a spiritual foundation, but also a

secure financial foundation. Throughout the 40-year history of Temple Solel, like the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the desert, we have lived hand to mouth – with some occasional manna falling from heaven to keep us alive. But, every single year, we are on the financial edge. It is demoralizing to our staff and board, even as somehow we pull through and make it work with smoke and mirrors. And now, we've reached the point where there is nothing left to cut in our expenses, and we certainly can't raise dues any higher. So again, I will speak directly and honestly and say, we can't continue any longer with business as usual. It is not sustainable. If we want this place to be here for our children, we have to do something.

Our rabbis of the Talmud taught wisely: "Ein kemach, ein Torah." Without sustenance, there can be no Torah. In that spirit, before I retire, I am committed to helping set our foundation firm, to securing your future, just as Moses did with the Israelites. I owe you that much, and you owe it to yourselves, as well. We simply can't in good conscience, hand down a precarious institution to our children and grandchildren.

This is why we have begun the single most important project Temple Solel has every undertaken. Because our ability to continue here as a synagogue, to thrive in the new land of your future, depends on it. It's fittingly called, "Atideynu – Securing Our Future" – an ambitious campaign to do two things.

First, like all responsible and stable non-profits, Atideynu will help us build an endowment, whose earnings each and every year ensure you always have the finest clergy, staff, schools, and programs.

And second, Atideynu will tackle our huge mortgage expense of over \$360,000 a year, that keeps us from reaching our potential, and possibly even surviving.

Ideally, we would like to be able to lower dues and the bar of entry into Jewish life for everyone by making it more affordable. We have many wonderful programs here, but we have so many more creative and life-changing program ideas for children, for teens, for adults, and for our beloved seniors that we are eager to implement. We also want to be able to retain our outstanding clergy and staff, and attract the best and the brightest in the future, including your next senior rabbi. And, even though it's kind of mundane, we absolutely must maintain this magnificent campus that is now twelve years old and aging.

Just as Moses stood at the top of Pisgah looking out over the Land of Israel's future, we are poised, you and I, for a parting. I want you to go forth and thrive in the new land of *Temple Solel's future*. And now is the time to ready yourselves for this journey.

As you think about the generations that came before you, will it also be true to say that Jewish life is here and strong because of you? Temple Solel was started in a living room by a few families who dreamed, and built, and personally sacrificed to bring Jewish life to our community. We, every one of us here, are standing on the shoulders of those before us. Those who gave of themselves to build Temple Solel, and those throughout our 3,500-year history who sacrificed to ensure the survival and vitality of the Jewish People. We can do no less. It falls to us to match their vision and their commitment with our own.

I have to tell you that it is hard to give a sermon like this at our holiest time of year, so holy that it's marked by the blast of the Shofar. But, for our temple this is an existential moment. And I would add that the shofar has always been a call to action at just such times.

Many of you remember the 1967 War, when Israeli paratroopers, after long battle, finally overtook the Old City of Jerusalem. They reached the Western Wall of the Temple for the first time in 2,000 years. Then, in an iconic moment, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, surrounded by war weary soldiers, blasted the shofar – while exactly above him, and a little to the right, was the very spot where the shofar used to be blown in the ancient Temple. At that moment 50 years ago, history came full circle and we reclaimed our story. After 2,000 years of exile, we were back where it all started, to the very spot where Abraham was called to sacrifice Isaac, where Solomon built his Temple, where one thousand years of Jewish life was lived. Instantly, the news was broadcast across Israel – “*Har ha-Bayit b'yadeynu*, The Temple is in our hands!”

Today, it's that shofar that calls to us: *Har ha bayit b'yadeynu* – the temple is in our hands! This temple, this very special and loved Temple Solel is in our hands. Its fate and its future rest with us.

I have already made my pledge to our Atideynu Campaign, as have every one of our board leadership and staff. Our amazing campaign leadership team of more than 50 dedicated temple members, have been organizing and working behind the scenes over the summer, with the hope that when Atideynu opens up in the coming months, you will also step forward.

It is almost time for me to send you forth and, most of all, I want you to know that I believe in you, and I believe in the future of Temple Solel. It has been an honor to walk beside you, to share your story, to see the thoughtfulness with which you approach life, love, friendship, and our shared responsibilities for our people and this world.

Over the rest of this year and next, we will all be preparing for your journey ahead, securing and dreaming of the future of Temple Solel. And I certainly look forward

to celebrating all your future successes as your Rabbi Emeritus, and maybe even having the privilege of occasionally blessing you along the way.

In the meantime, I ask only this: that when you hear the shofar sound on this and every Rosh Hashana/Yom Kippur, you think about your story, you think about *our* story, and what they mean and what they call upon you to do.

Because, *Har Ha-Bayit b'yadeynu*, this temple is in now in your hands.