

I have concerns about the Temple.

For the moment, I don't mean membership or worship or programs or fundraising.

For the moment, standing before you on Kol Nidre, I am concerned about the actual Temple building.

And for the moment, my concern about the actual Temple building isn't that I think that it is well past time to make the doors and bimah wheelchair accessible, though it is.

I don't mean that the bimah carpet should be replaced, because almost weekly, it is turning a few drops closer from blue to wine-color, though it should.

I don't mean that if we put a concrete slab beneath the Sukkah, it would give all of us easier access, though it would.

My concern about the Temple building is that we are not using it for its purpose. Yes, every space is booked on Sunday mornings from religious school to Adult Hebrew, to PJ Library from tutoring B'nai Mitzvah students to meetings. Yes, during the week, we hear voices of JESP pre-schoolers and those of high school juniors studying for standardized tests.

Yes, our kitchen is used as a gathering place – of people and food –to celebrate, to comfort, to observe our holidays, to teach our 8th and 9th grade students Jewish cooking. Yes, our lobby is a mixture of recognition of happy and sad days gone by and a gallery of colorful, inviting posters beckoning us to register promptly for the next event.

My concern about the Temple building is, ironically enough, that things are staying neat and clean, tidy and in their place. My concern is that our values are not imbuing our gatherings and leaving with the members to disperse into the rest of the building and ultimately into the world. My concern is that our learning is staying within our classrooms and not making it past the front doors. My concern is that social action is stuck in the closet. My concern is that we are not

hearing the prayers that our mouths and hearts speak. Ultimately, I am concerned that the Torah is not leaving the Ark often enough.

Cantor Ellen Sussman writes (10 Minutes of Torah):

Over the centuries our worship service has developed using choreography, liturgy, and music to move our people and to illustrate the importance of our Torah. The Torah is the story of our people, as well as the source of our moral code. One cannot help being affected by the pomp and majesty of our Torah Service.

In Numbers 10:35 we read,

"As the Ark travelled Moses would say: Arise O Lord, and may Your enemies be scattered and may Your adversaries flee before You".

Unlike the stationary ark of today, the Ark of the Covenant housed the Torah carried by the Children of Israel, and it preceded them as they wandered through the desert. The Torah housed in the Ark was a source of comfort for our people; it protected the people, made them feel the Presence of God around them and kept them safe from their enemies. There was a feeling of courage as the Ark in front of them was their shield against attack.

The Jewish people still has enemies. They are real. Here's one example: They report that a man who made a video insulting the prophet Mohammed is Israeli. He isn't. How many enemies are involved in that story alone? But the enemy I spend the majority of my time fighting is: indifference. And for that in a way I am grateful. And for that in a way I am terrified.

Elie Wiesel wrote:

"The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference."

I will add a stanza: The opposite of religious is not atheist, it's indifference.

It is time for the Torah to come out of the Ark.

Four years ago on Yom Nidre, I shared this observation:

As I walked into the Temple [during my interview], it was –as it has been every single day since –elegantly decorated and spotless thanks to [at the time] Carol and Beverly [now Tracey and Eric] and each member who picks up a scrap of paper or straightens the table. The atmosphere says: welcome, pride, honor, generosity. Our loved ones grace our walls and floor and have become the foundation stone upon which Temple David is built.

Four years ago, my focus was on whether Temple David should have a Holocaust memorial. My words were:

We need to inscribe “Never forget” on more than a Yom HaShoah candle and accept the 614th commandment not to give Hitler a posthumous victory. We need to make sure that our House is not so clean that it is sterile.

I left it up to a committee who began with meetings and study but the passion was not there to create a memorial. However, when I hear words like these from Sister Gemma of the National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education, at Seton Hill University, I wonder if we can leave remembrance to others: She writes:

The study of the Holocaust has much to teach about the danger of dictatorship, about the necessity to be guided by religious, ethical principles and universal human values, and about the difficulty and the importance of maintaining human dignity in extreme situations, “ said Sister Gemma.

As Jews, beyond the study of the Holocaust is remembrance and mourning. This is our story, our history...and, we fear, our prophecy. We build memorials not only to remember, not only as sacred space, but to invite questions of ourselves and others and to Never Forget.

The Torah teaches:

Remember what Amalek did to you by the way, when you came forth out of Egypt; How he met you by the way, and struck at your rear, all who were

feeble behind you, when you were faint and weary... you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget it.

Amalek was nothing compared to Hitler. We must take the Torah out of the Ark. Who will join together to ensure that a Holocaust memorial will happen?

Not only is it time for the Torah to come out of the Ark, it is time for religious and social action to come out of the closet. We have collection bins for Crossroads Food Pantry and for the Squirrel Hill Food Pantry. The bins are neatly hidden away in the coat room. There is no mess, no overflow. But when collection bins are hidden away, aren't we also making the need invisible?

A story: members of the caring community came together and gave their time and cooking skills to make quarts of chicken soup to be given to people who are convalescing. And then it was gone. There was outrage that someone had the audacity to steal 10 quarts of soup. At first, I didn't believe it. I thought it was misplaced; perhaps removed during the Passover cleaning. But what if it was a needy congregant who couldn't put food on his family's table? Would we be as indignant? Wouldn't we, instead, go out of our way to set up a system whereby our fellow congregants in need can take from our bins and freezer? It is time for the soup to come out of the freezer and the Torah to come out of the Ark.

The Torah teaches:

When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow... 24:19

Who will join Kay Liss and the Caring Committee to make this happen?

It is time for the Social Hall to open its doors wider – not only for renters.

A great example of working with our interfaith partners is Fill the Need, which occurred last year in our Social Hall together with the Muslim Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh. This year, the entire Interfaith Ministerium

will be working on this meager meal –though I must say it was delicious! –which will benefit the Monroeville food pantries. At a minimum, you need to save the date of the Sunday of Martin Luther King Jr. weekend and come. Beyond that, will you contact Ann Cohen about shopping, cooking or serving.

That is one day. Could we contact the four food pantries in Monroeville to explore hosting a free dinner at the end of the month when rent has been paid and choices have to be made between medication and food? Look at how relevant Temple David could become. The Torah (Haggadah) teaches, “Let all who are hungry come and eat.” The Torah needs to come out of the Ark.

We live in a world of multi-tasking and technology and self-focus. As part of the Religious School Improvement Team’s work, we have defined this year’s primary goal in these terms: Students need to transfer their learning to their lives outside of school. In other words, what happens in the classroom *cannot* stay in the classroom. Learning about Judaism is an academic endeavor. Learning *about* Judaism – takes *away* ownership. It is distanced; it takes away commitment, covenant. Learning **about** Judaism results in report cards. Celebrating, questioning, finding comfort, seeking, challenging, creating, living our values, being surrounded by a community –these are the types of words –no the types of **verbs** -that can describe what it means to live as a Jew.

The Torah teaches:

You shall teach them to your children, speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the path, when you lie down and when you rise up.

If you want to help take the Torah out of the Ark, speak to Bruce Antonoff about joining the Religious School Commission or Religious School Improvement Team or speak with me about teaching, being a special visitor or presenter or joining the Curriculum Committee.

How can you take hold of the Torah?

A story: One Shabbat, a rabbi explained to his congregation that when the Temple stood in Jerusalem God was offered 12 loaves of bread each week. A simple man in the congregation did not understand much of what he said, but when he

arrived home, he told his wife about the loaves. "Next Friday morning, we will bake 12 loaves of challah. I will bring them to the synagogue and give them to God." And so they did. When he arrived at the synagogue, he looked around to be certain that no one saw him, then opened the Ark doors and placed the loaves inside. No sooner had he left, than the shammas entered the room to prepare the synagogue for Shabbat. He approached the Holy Ark, put down his broom and prayed "Lord, I do this job out of love for You and the Holy Torah. But my children are hungry. Perhaps You can feed my children, Lord." He then noticed the aroma of warm bread emanating from the Ark. He took a step forward and opened it. Gasping, he exclaimed, "A miracle! I knew You would feed my children. Oh, thank you, Lord, thank you so much!" The shammas gathered the challot and ran home to his wife who was overjoyed to see the food for their children. It would be enough for the entire week. The next morning, on Shabbat, the man waited eagerly for the Ark to be opened. When it was opened he saw that his prayer was answered. There was not a crumb in the Ark! The following Friday, the couple baked 12 beautiful challot and he took them to the synagogue. He checked that no one was about before placing them lovingly in the Holy Ark. A short time later, the shammas came to clean the synagogue and, approaching the Ark, found his challah waiting for him, still warm from the oven. This scene repeated itself each week, just before Shabbat, for thirty years. One Friday morning, as he was placing the challah in the Ark, the rabbi shouted, "What are you doing?" "What do you mean by putting bread in the Holy Ark?" "For 30 years, I have brought these challot to God every week," he stammered. The rabbi asked in amazement. "Whatever for?" "Because of what you taught about the loaves of bread in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem." "You fool! God doesn't eat food like people!" said the rabbi. "Ah, you are learned and wise," he said, "but you don't know everything. You see, every week God accepts our gift of challah. For 30 years, there hasn't been a crumb left in the Ark come Shabbat morning." Now the rabbi was curious, so he said, "Let us hide in the back of the synagogue and see just what happens to your challot." Several minutes later, the shammas entered the room and opened the door of the ark. "Lord, for 30 years you have fed my family and sustained us in good times and bad. We give you thanks." The rabbi jumped up and screamed, "You, too, are a fool! Do you think that God bakes bread and leaves the loaves in the Ark?" The shammas hung his head in shame and began sobbing. "I don't get paid for cleaning the synagogue, Rabbi. I thought this was God's way of repaying me for my work." At just that moment, Rabbi Isaac Luria walked into the

synagogue and asked what was happening. The shammes was miserable because he knew he would never find challah in the ark again. The man was miserable because he had simply wanted to please God and now he could no longer do this. When the entire story had been explained to him, Rabbi Luria smiled and turned first to the rabbi. "Rabbi, never since the Destruction of the Temple, has God had such pleasure as from watching what has gone on in your synagogue each week. Then Rabbi Luria turned to the man and the shammes. "I want you to continue as you have, and believe with perfect faith that if you bring your challot directly to the shammes, God will be pleased no less than before, for it is through acts of love and kindness that we serve God and repair the world. And you" the great Ari turned to the shammas, "know that these challot were baked by this man and his wife but they come from God, as well, because Jews are commanded to do the work of God in this world, feeding the hungry." From that day on, the man and his wife baked a dozen loaves of challah each Friday, as they had for three decades, and brought it to the home of the shammas, who gratefully accepted the loaves.

Temple David had our own "Challah in the Ark" stories: She came to me in August, a retired school teacher, and said, "Rabbi is there anyone who needs help with school supplies? I think it is so important for children to have fresh things when they start the new year." I immediately replied, "Unfortunately, yes." The next day, I said to a mother, "A fellow congregant, a retired school teacher, wants to help a family with school supplies for the new year so the kids can have a fresh start. Here is a check." Neither knows who the other is: Rung # 7 (out of 8) on Maimonides' Ladder of Tzedakah: Giving when neither the donor nor the recipient is aware of the other's identity. The Torah had come out of the Ark.

The 2nd story: She sat in my study and abruptly changed the conversation. "I would like to sponsor someone in the religious school." I told her about the Sheila Moritz Fund which provides scholarships for children to attend religious school. She said that the Temple had helped her at one point and she wanted to give back. She asked for the cost of tuition, took out her checkbook and wrote a check to the Sheila Moritz Fund for the entire amount of a tuition. Love your neighbor as yourself. The Torah had come out of the Ark.

The Ark gave strength and courage to our people as they entered into battle against our enemies. The Torah is our shield against indifference and inhumanity. When will you take the Torah out of the Ark?