

Mark Dov Shapiro Retirement – June 18, 2016

It's almost half past ten o'clock in the morning in the Golan Heights, although time doesn't seem to hold much meaning right here. We're in Katzrin, standing within the ruins of a synagogue built in the fourth century; forty of us from Sinai Temple in Springfield, Massachusetts. Some 1300 years ago, before it was destroyed in an earthquake, Jews who came before us read the Torah within these stone walls. And in just a few moments, our Rabbi Shapiro will guide our daughter Abigail in reading the Torah, becoming a bat mitzvah within these same stone walls. An hour later, we leave Katzrin for a day of rafting on the Jordan River and a night of celebration on the Sea of Galilee. But that morning with Mark in Katzrin has never left me...

Liz, Shelby, Abigail and I were part of that amazing Sinai Temple trip to Israel in July, 2007. I tell you this not because it was the journey of a lifetime (although it was!), but because it set me on another "journey" that I never would have imagined myself taking nine years ago. Before this trip, my relationship with Sinai Temple consisted of paying our family dues, dropping kids off at religious school, high holidays and occasional attendance at Friday night services, and our family's and friends' life cycle events. But during these twelve days in Israel with Mark, something changed. I was suddenly and overwhelmingly "hooked" on Judaism--- and this newly discovered and incredibly strong connection to Israel, to our history, and to my religion quickly grew into a desire to not just participate at Sinai Temple periodically, but to become "a part of Sinai Temple." And one person, and one person only, is responsible for that happening. That's one of the amazing things that this Mark Dov Shapiro can do.

We've climbed Masada with Mark, and on occasion we've drunk just a little bit too much wine or had too many martinis with Mark. And I've enjoyed hundreds of bagels and home-baked cookies and cups of coffee as accessories to our many conversations together. And although his worship services and his teaching and his sermons and his making sure that absolutely everything at Sinai Temple runs like clockwork (and in accordance with the laws of "Shapiroism") are all a wonder to behold, it's those many conversations with Mark, not Rabbi Shapiro, that I hold most dear.

What does Mark mean to the Leshines: For many years, Liz was disappointed that Mark did not marry us; we were married here at Sinai Temple in 1985 during the "twilight" between Rabbi Snyder and Rabbi Shapiro. So on the evening of our 25th anniversary in August of 2010, with Shelby, Abigail and Liz's mom Judy as witnesses before a celebratory dinner, Mark and I surprised Liz, and Mark married us again. An original marriage ceremony that had been somewhat incomplete, in some small but increasingly important way, was now fittingly, and happily, very much complete because Mark was now a part of it.

My family has celebrated the holidays and commemorated temple anniversaries of every kind with Mark. We've shared births and b'nai mitzvahs with Mark, and we've laughed and sang on each wonderful occasion. We've also said goodbye to fathers and we've said goodbye to children, with Mark always with us through all of the grief and through all of the healing. Not simply guiding us and leading us in prayer as I'm confident that all rabbis do; but holding our hands and holding our hearts, and by hugging us like only Mark can...

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I'm going to steal the words of a modern-day poet:

"I'm stepping down. I am not going to be Rabbi any longer."

"But your position is so unique."

"So I'll use it to move them along."

"Why do you have to say goodbye?"

"If I say goodbye, the temple learns to move on. It outlives me when I'm gone. Like the scripture says: 'Everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree. And no one shall make them afraid.' They'll be safe in the temple we've made. I want to sit under my own vine and fig tree. A moment alone in the shade. At home near to this temple that we've made. One last time."

"Rabbi Shapiro is going home."

Thank you, Mark, for everything that you've done for all of us at Sinai Temple, for everything that you've done for the greater Springfield community and beyond, and especially, for what you've done for me. You were first my Rabbi, but you are my friend forever...

*Bruce Leshine
President
Sinai Temple*