

August 21, 2019

Dear Members of My Rodeph Torah Family,

One of the first Jewish songs I ever learned was *Lo Alecha*. The song, taken from Pirke Avot, says, "It is not your task to finish the work, but you must begin it." I have taken this to heart for my entire rabbinic career because the work I chose to do is more than any one person – or one generation – can finish. But from somewhere deep inside me, I knew I had to start.

Now, as I begin my 36th year (Double-*Chai!*) as Temple Rodeph Torah's rabbi, it is time to turn this work over to a new generation. As you read in Tmima Grinvald's letter, I will retire from Temple Rodeph Torah and from the active rabbinate at the end of June, 2020.

Looking back on three and a half decades I am in awe of how much we, together, have accomplished. We built a building; we built a community; we educated two generations of Jewish children, guiding them from birth through high school graduation and many through weddings and children of their own. We have supported and lifted up people in their time of need, as a sacred community and as individuals. We brought our own excitement to Jewish life and Jewish learning, and that excitement has been contagious. *We have done so much, and there is so much more to do.*

As I shared with the Board, I am part of the first generation of Reform rabbis to grow up with NFTY, with conclaves, with Jewish camping – with guitars and creative services, and rabbis who get off the *bima* to talk with the congregation during our sermons. I say with pride that I have been part of the group which created what is now called "Modern Reform Judaism." Now, the newer generations of rabbis come from a different world – the world that TRT will be inhabiting in the future. It will be through their guidance that Rodeph Torah, and every Reform Jewish congregation, will find its way into a future which will look very different from the past. I am excited to see how they will shape that future, and I hope each of you will be an excited, active participant in that process, too.

I have spent more than half my lifetime as your rabbi. As I considered my retirement, the number one thing that weighed against it was knowing I would miss out on sharing the joys and sorrows of your lives, as you have invited me to do for years and years. I have cherished every moment, and I know I would cherish the opportunity to keep doing this work for another 36 years. But the words of that song, *Lo Alecha*, keep coming back to me, reminding me that there is *always* more to do, *always* more to share. I cannot be there for everything, but I am blessed beyond words to have been there – to have been *here* – for so many sacred moments with you.

Please know that Shira and I are, thank God, healthy. In fact, it is the thought that we are still healthy enough to travel, to enjoy retirement and to sit together at services which makes this idea less sad and more hopeful for us.

Between now and next June I look forward to continuing to share moments – and days, weeks and months – with all of you. I hope you will be there for our High Holiday services, when I will try to focus on

some of the most important lessons I have learned in my life and in my rabbinic career. I will continue throughout the year, as I use the opportunities of my weekly sermons to continue this discussion. It would be my honor to have you share this last year of our journey together.

Bringing a new rabbi into a congregation is never easy, especially after one rabbi has been in that pulpit for so many years. The leadership of TRT is now engaged in a thoughtful and deliberate process, utilizing the resources of the Reform Movement, and I hope you will share your energy, your opinions and your passion as part of that process. Over the years our Reform Movement has learned that after a rabbi serves a congregation for many years, it is best to engage an interim rabbi for one year. Although it might seem awkward to have a different rabbi for just one year, the interim rabbi's time will allow your new, settled rabbi to succeed – to come to TRT and build on the work that all of you will do during that interim year. Our Movement has trained many rabbis for this task; those who do this work bring their skills in leading services, life-cycle events, pastoral care, and teaching children and adults, and combine them with a unique skill set of guiding the congregation through this transitional year. I do not know who your interim rabbi will be, but it is my fervent prayer that you will give them the same welcome and the same love as you have given me through all these years.

This is not “goodbye,” as I have a lot of plans for this New Year. Instead, this is a personal invitation from me to you, to make the New Year that is about to begin into one of the best ever. Please join with me this year, and with those who come after me in future years, to continue the work that makes Temple Rodeph Torah the unique place it is.

We will not ever finish the work of building the congregation, the community and the world we want for ourselves and our children. But we can start, knowing with perfect faith that others will pick up the task when we are done.

Thank you, my friends – my *family* – for your support and your love over my entire career. I have always been proud to say that I am the rabbi of Temple Rodeph Torah, and that will never change.

I look forward to creating a beautiful, holy New Year with you.

With love, and with deepest gratitude,

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