

Chanting a Legacy, by Rabbi David Lerner

Last Shabbat I had the great pleasure of hitting for the cycle. No, it wasn't a late summer / early autumn softball game with my fantasy four perfect at-bats. But I did get the chance to participate in some of my favorite activities: running with the rabbis before shul, yoga at the beginning of services, leading Tot Shabbat and *leyning* (reading) my Bar Mitzvah portion.

While it has been 30 years since my big day, I still remember much of the reading. And the *haftarah* (the prophetic section), I still know by heart. I spent the year before my bar mitzvah studying these texts until they became etched into my core memory and identity. They are, in a sense, part of my DNA.

If I close my eyes, I can see myself standing at the *amud* (lectern) chanting sacred verses from the prophet Isaiah through the last line: “*U’vrit shlomi lo tamut amar meraḥamekh Adonai*—For the mountains may move and the hills may be shaken, but my loyalty shall never move from you, nor my covenant of friendship be shaken—says Adonai, who takes you back in love.” (Isaiah 54:10)

There was great excitement as I finished the *haftarah* and raced through the closing blessings. Everyone responded with resounding “amens” and I could feel the love of the congregation—friends and family—embracing me in a manner not too dissimilar from what Isaiah wrote.

Each year when I chant these words, I am taken on a journey back through the decades. I remember working with my tutor diligently, who gently corrected my mistakes until, slowly, I remedied them. I remember memorizing the pronunciation of certain difficult words, repeating them and longer phrases over and over again until it was as if I and the text became one. I could close my eyes and still see the words on the page. I could hear their sounds; I could feel them.

As I celebrated this 30th anniversary, my daughter, Talya, is one year removed from her Bat Mitzvah. While her experience is much fresher, I want to make sure we can hold onto it. And so, I have looked at pictures from the weekend. I watched her Bat Mitzvah slideshow again and looked through some of the other mementos, but the memories fade.

To keep memories and to honor the past, we have been presented with a most amazing opportunity: we are writing our own *Sefer Haftarot*. “Our own what?” We are commissioning a *haftarah* scroll that will contain all the prophetic passages that we recite throughout the year.

Our community will benefit from a new ritual object that will take us back before the printing press when all books were written by hand. *Haftarot* used to be on scrolls and now, we will once again have ours in its “original” packaging. This scroll will be in our *Aron Hakodesh* (Holy Ark); while we will not process or lift it, as we do the Torah scroll, it will present us with an additional spiritual dimension to enjoy and additional honors so that more people can participate in our service.

In addition, we have the opportunity to sponsor a *haftarah*. We are dedicating this new project to Lowell Bensky, who taught so many people at Temple Emunah how to read *haftarah*; thus, you can help sponsor his Bar Mitzvah *haftarah*. Each *haftarah* can be sponsored in honor

of someone or in memory of someone. For many of us, it will be a way to remember people who were instrumental in our lives and/or moments we wish to hold onto. Even if you did not have your own Bar or Bat Mitzvah (and it's never too late to have one!), you can sign up for the *haftarah* that is associated with your birthday or one you consider particularly meaningful. I am happy to help consult with that.

Funds collected beyond the cost of the scroll will go to the Building Fund to help repair our aging plant (for pressing needs like HVAC repairs and upgrades, a new roof, landscaping, painting, and other maintenance to our building).

Through this project we raised a significant amount of money last year. We want to thank all the donors who have already made their commitment to this project; we hope to continue to expand the list of *haftarah* sponsors through this fall. The scroll should be commissioned in January so that we can dedicate it and begin using it in 5776 (September, 2015). We envision a day of learning and celebration where community members will have the unique experience of writing a letter in the scroll.

As I think of ways to remember my Bar Mitzvah and Talya's Bat Mitzvah, I am most excited that I can dedicate these two sacred texts that are inscribed in our souls. Sponsoring Talya's Bat Mitzvah portion and mine will connect us in a permanent way to these texts and allow us to help sustain the community which means so much to us.

I hope that each of us will find a way to participate in this campaign on some level. Whether our gifts are large or smaller, there are opportunities for everyone. Please explore the brochure (which is on our website and has been emailed to you) and find the best way for you to become involved.

But more importantly—together, as a community, we will honor our teacher, Lowell; create a new sacred object; maintain the financial health of the shul; and strengthen our spiritual practices. As the holiday season continues, may it bring us all joy as we maintain and enhance this sacred community.

For more information, see the complete brochure which has been emailed to you. Please click on the brochure on the website and feel free to call me with any questions or concerns.

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