

Ordination - September 27, 2008

It was September 8, 1984, 24 years ago. Our 30<sup>th</sup> household just joined. That was our goal – to have a membership of at least 30 households to start our congregation. We did it! So to celebrate our beginning, we did what any new congregation would do....We had a service. Our first official service as Central Reform Congregation, was *Havdalah* - Saturday night, September 8, 1984. I put the service together, a total cut and paste job, as we so often did in those days. We finished *Havdalah*, and we're ready to sing our closing song. We became a congregation that night. We were on our way. All we needed to do was sing that closing song.

Shabbat Shalom, and welcome to Central Reform Congregation, 24 years later. I guess you could say that a lot happened in the last 24 years. Just look around at us today. I am especially honored that all of you are here, today, to help me celebrate my rabbinic ordination. It certainly is a momentous event for me and for my family.

*Atem nitzavim hayom kulchem*, it says in the Torah portion we just read. *Atem nitzavim*, you are standing, *hayom*, this day, *kulchem*, all of you. You are standing, this day, all of you. There is a television commercial for a cell phone company. This guy is standing behind you, no matter where you are, on the street, on a train, wherever you are, with, a bunch of people behind him, and he continually asks the question that rabbis have been asking for centuries,..... “Can you hear me now? You’ve probably seen the commercial. At the end, it says, “It’s the network.” I happen to use a different cell phone company, but I started thinking about the network, about my network. And then, I realized, *kulchem*, all of you -- you are my network. So I want you to see who you are, *kulchem*, all of you. You, who have been and continue to be, my support, my network, and to have you stand, *nitzavim hayom*, have you stand, on this day.

If you’ve had anything to do with the music here at CRC over the past 24 years please stand up. Leslie Caplan and Marty Miller, sometimes, joined by Steve Friedman, Robert Fishbone, Rabbi Jim, Rabbi Randy, Alan Freed, Will Soll, Charles Collins and the

CRC choir, all the musicians and choir participants. It's been a blessing to work with you for all these years. I love how we've all worked together to make something really beautiful. Last Saturday night, at our Selichot service, Bonia Shur, who wrote much of the music we sing at High Holidays, was present. He hadn't heard our choir sing his music in over 20 years. The music touched his heart in a way I had never seen, and it touched my heart to know we have created such beautiful sounds that help our prayers reached the highest heavens. Thank you all so much. (please be seated except Leslie and Marty)

Leslie and Marty, I couldn't do this holy work without you. I would sometimes introduce a new melody, five minutes before a service. "OK a new *niggun*, " I'd say. I would sing it for them one time. And then, Leslie and Marty would sing it with me in the service. Amazing! If they did that to me I would freak out. As a matter of fact, I dreaded Leslie coming back from her week with the Zamir choral group this past summer because I thought she would do what I do. "Hey I have this great new melody, let's sing it tonight." She didn't. Thank you Leslie for that. You both have helped me to grow as a musician and as a spiritual leader and I am grateful to both of you. Thank you Leslie and Marty for standing with me when we sing, and for being a part of my network. (please be seated)

Will everyone who is currently on the CRC Board, or anyone who has ever served on the CRC Board for the past 24 years -- anyone who currently works for CRC or who ever worked for CRC, either in the office, on the building, and CRC support staff, maintenance staff, please stand. *Kulchem* – look at, all of you. Thank you for guiding our journey for these past 24 years and for fulfilling last minute requests for time, appointments, rooms, copies, food, microphones, and all kinds of information. Whether you work with the physical aspects of this community or the administration, education, Holy Ground, the financial side, the Challah circle – it's all Holy work that you're doing and it's essential to keep our community going and growing. Thank you. (Please be seated)

Rami Pinsberg will you stand? Rami helped me to learn and to love the Hebrew language. And Rami and Chani, who is not able to be here today, together, took great care of Debbie and me when we visited Israel in 2007. *Rami, Ani ohev et kol ha avodah she anachnu osim yachdav. V'gam Chani, Todah Rabbah.* Rami would often end our lesson by saying, "Ed, teaching you today has been the highlight of my day, so far." Of course, we meet at 9:30 in the morning! (Please be seated)

Roger Goldman, Stephanie Riven, Ed Koslin, Fran Weintraub, Al Barton, Rabbi Dale Schreiber, and Rabbinic Pastor David Daniel Klipper, please stand. Roger and Stephanie, none of this would have happened and none of us would be here today without you, your vision and your collective energies. Those early meetings we had, to form CRC, became a blueprint of how we would work together as a community. We were inclusive, everyone's voice was heard, and we talked about everything. I mean everything. It's still the case today. Roger tells a story, that he came to me and asked, "Ed, would you rather be president of CRC or jump off a building, to which I responded, "How high is the building?" I don't know if that ever really happened, but Roger still tells the story. Ed, Fran, and Al, you took turns offering me much needed emotional support and helped to keep me sane amidst years of chaos and I'm grateful to you. And to fellow ALEPH travelers, Dale and David Daniel, *Ani yodeah she' anachnu chaverim meh ata v'ad olam*, as it says in the psalms. *Todah Rabbah*, thank you all for standing with me and by me. I also want to thank and acknowledge the support of my many colleagues who walked the DLTI and ALEPH paths with me. And, my ALEPH teachers, Rabbis Marcia Prager, Shawn Zevit, Shohama Wiener, Elliot Ginsburg, Rabbinic Pastor Shulamit Fagan, Hazzan Jack Kessler, and of course, Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi all of whom inspired me, taught me, and helped me to reach this moment. (Please be seated)

Will rabbis Goodman, Fleisher and Talve please stand. You are my teachers, my mentors and my guides. I am here today in this service because of all that you have taught me and because of the time, energy, and love that you have shown me.

To Jim, my mentor for music, and my teacher in *chevruta*. You opened my ears to new music and my mind to new ideas and to new ways of seeing things. And you have been instrumental (no pun intended) in what music we do here at CRC and how we do our music at CRC. I switched from acoustic guitar to classical guitar years ago because you thought a classical sound was better for liturgical music. Our two versions of Adon Olam are both yours and your poetry and other writing have found their way into our services and life cycle events, and into our hearts. I look forward to continued study and collaboration with you.

To Randy, you've truly made a place for me here at CRC, a place in our meetings, and a place on the bima. You continue to teach me the value of inclusivity by modeling that in everything you do. I remember the first time I co-officiated a wedding with clergy of another faith. I was a little intimidated. You helped me to see the bigger picture of inclusivity and how important it was to make a safe and welcoming space for this couple. You have opened your arms to me, and I am honored to be your colleague.

I'm so very grateful to you, Susan, for making a space for me here, for letting me be a part of building this holy place, for modeling Godliness in just about everything you do, and for seeing the rabbi in me long before I could. And, your complete faith in me, six years ago, when I delivered my first High Holiday sermon in the big service, I asked if you wanted to read it before I delivered, and you said, "No. I'm sure it will be fine." I don't know how you knew, but I am so grateful **that** you knew. And over the years, that you had the faith in me to cover the weddings and other life cycle events that you couldn't do, is an honor for me. I look forward to continuing to serve this community with you. To all of you, I pray that I will be the kind of teacher and mentor with my students that each of you is with me. With all my heart I thank you for standing **behind me** and standing **with me** and **standing up for me** for these many years. (Please be seated)

Will Nick, Emily, Jacob, Hilary, and Eliana please stand. I love you all so much. Thank you for graciously accepting the times that I was unavailable to you, for telling me

when I was making things too “Jewish”, like my needing to do the long Kiddush on Friday nights when *borei pri hagofen* would have been enough, and for helping us to celebrate all of our joys together. I am grateful that we all like being together, which I know doesn’t happen in every family, and I feel your blessings as I move from rabbinic pastor to rabbi. (Please be seated)

Debbie, will you please stand. You are the love of my life, my best teacher and greatest support. You comfort me in my moments of insecurity, you are the first to hear my ideas for talks, sermons, and classes, and you give me honest feedback in a loving way, for which I am truly grateful. And, you pushed for us to stay close during the times when I was so consumed with study. I am eternally grateful for you standing **with me** and standing **by me**. I hope I can be as present for you, as you go through this next year of chaplain residency. (Please be seated)

If you didn’t hear your name called or you weren’t in one of the groups previously mentioned, please stand up. To you, the CRC community and friends, I am grateful to you for supporting my learning, for your willingness to try out many new melodies, for listening to my ideas during sermons, Torah study, and other classes, for bringing food for all the celebrations we’ve had here over the years, and most of all for all of us being able to walk the path together. In Jacob’s Bar Mitzvah service in 1997 we wrote, “Today we celebrate Jacob’s Bar Mitzvah. He has grown up here.” In Eliana’s Bat Mitzvah service, in 2004, we wrote, “Today we celebrate Eliana’s Bat Mitzvah. She has grown up here.” I realize that it is true of me, as well. I have grown up here with you, in this holy place. I’m honored to be a part of this wonderful, vibrant community, and I thank you, *kulchem*, all of you, here today, *v’et asher einhnu po, imanu hayom*, and even those not here with us today, for being part of my network, for standing with me, and for giving me a place to grow up spiritually. (Please be seated)

So, you know who’s in my network. Think for a moment about who’s in your network. Who is the *kulchem* -- the all of you, for you, the people who will stand with you and by you, and maybe even stand up for you. One person, two people, a group of

people. Can you feel God's presence in your network? And what is it so important about having a network, anyway? The network helps you to take a step, maybe even a leap of faith, toward your dreams. Think about it. If I can become a rabbi at age 59, imagine what you can do. Maybe there is a class you always wanted to take but you stop yourself from taking it. Maybe there's something you're curious about or you want to investigate, explore, or do. Maybe you'll start it in this New Year.

And as you think about starting something new, pay attention to all the ways you might interfere with your starting it. Things like telling yourself, "I'm too old. I'm too busy. I'm too tired. My brain just doesn't work that quickly anymore." That's particularly common in the over 50 group. "What would my family and friends think?" I probably wouldn't succeed at it, anyway, or it's a stupid idea, why bother?" If you're saying one or two or these things to yourself, it's an uphill climb. If you're saying three or four of these things to yourself, you may never start. I know. I've said every one of these and then some.

That's where the network comes in. If you're a little shaky or uncertain about taking that first step, your network just might offer some support. That's what the network is for -- to support, encourage, lovingly nudge or confront us -- to help us to stretch ourselves, while keeping us grounded. The network makes doing something new, a little easier by having people stand with us, stand by us, stand behind us, and maybe even stand up for us. *Kulchem*, all of you, it's the network.

OK. .... It was *Modeh Ani*. The closing song at our *Havdalah* service, September 8, 1984, was *Modeh Ani*. *Modeh Ani*, says, "I give thanks to you, God for returning my soul to me." Now, I have nothing against *Modeh Ani* – we chanted a form of it earlier this morning. *Modeh Ani*, is a prayer that we say when we get up in the morning. It's a prayer for the morning, not for *Havdalah*. Truthfully, *Modeh Ani* was one of the three songs we knew at the time, which is probably why we sang it in the service. You know what? Nobody cared. Why? Because when you start something new, there's both excitement and inexperience. We didn't let our inexperience get in the way of our

excitement, our passion, or our creative energy about starting something new. And, of course, when you do start something new, it's OK to sing *Modeh Ani* after *Havdalah*.

Consider this. Nick, our oldest son, is in the process of leaving his successful web site development and multimedia business to pursue his dream of working in film. Debbie is now a full-time resident in Chaplaincy at Barnes-Jewish Hospital, after teaching music and movement for 15 years, and our very own Rabbi Jim recently completed his Masters in Poetry. You don't have to make a total job or career change overnight. You don't even have to make a job change at all. Start small. Debbie didn't decide to become a chaplain overnight. The process was gradual over 4 or 5 years. You can start with a class, a course, a seminar, a workshop, a book, an article. Follow your energy and see where it leads you. Listen for the ways you might interfere with yourself or stop yourself. And then, .....the network. I want to encourage you to identify your network, *kuchem*, the people you can go to for support and encouragement. And who knows, you might feel some energy, some passion, some excitement, that one-day, might just transform your life.

There is a congregation, similar to CRC and they were looking for a rabbi. So they went through the search process, identified the rabbi they wanted, and hired him. Shortly after the rabbi started, the president of the congregation was taking a group of prospective members for a tour around the synagogue. Here is the sanctuary, here is the multipurpose room, and here are our classrooms. The prospective members were very impressed. Then the president took the prospective members down a corridor that led to the rabbi's study. And, they found the door was partly open. The president and the prospective members peeked in the office and saw the rabbi hunched over the open Torah, sprawled out across the table, reading and studying, and pouring over commentary after commentary. One prospective member turned to the president and said, "So, what's with the rabbi?" The president shrugged and said, "I don't know. I thought we hired a finished one."

I can assure you, I am not a finished one. Although I would no longer end *Havdalah* with *Modeh Ani*, I will continue to study and to learn, and to share that with *kulchem*, all of you, in the holy community.

At the end of the *Yotzer* prayer, it says, *Or chadash al tzion tahir*, let a new light shine upon Zion. CRC has, since the beginning, been a new light on the horizon of Reform congregations in St. Louis and maybe even across the country. *V'neezkeh kulanu m'heh rah l'oro*, and may we all be worthy to stand in its light.

I know that CRC will continue to be a new light that shines. I hope and pray that as I continue to serve God and to serve, *kulchem*, all of you, this CRC community, that I may be worthy to stand in this new light. Thank you for standing with each other for these past 24 years. Thank you for standing with me, as well, for your standing with me has allowed me to reach this awesome moment. And thank you for being the wonderful, supportive and inclusive community that you are. I am truly honored and humbled. Shabbat Shalom and Shanah Tovah.