



Tribute to Rabbi Alan Silverstein by JTS Chancellor Emeritus Dr. Ismar Schorsch

In honoring Alan Silverstein, we honor a rabbi who exemplifies the very best that the pulpit can be.

Alan is a product of the Jewish Theological Seminary. He came to JTS from Cornell, a bright and ambitious rabbinical and doctoral student. I had the pleasure of teaching Alan any number of times. It was at JTS that Alan earned a Master's Degree, his ordination for the rabbinate and then his doctoral work in Jewish history.

Alan taught at the Seminary for a good number of years. He brought to the attention of the Seminary the urgency of addressing intermarriage. At the Seminary, he developed gradually and maturely, the books that would emerge a decade or so later – the two wonderful volumes on intermarriage and looking for a Jewish mate. The books are clearly, crisply and cogently written. They are accessible. They made a forceful case for being and staying Jewish in a free and open society.

Alan came to Congregation Agudath Israel in 1979. At that time, it had 325 households and grew to nearly 900. The growth of a suburban congregation takes us back to the post-war years when a generation of Conservative rabbis built formidable Conservative institutions across the country. Alan has achieved that type of growth by virtue of his extraordinary vision and the ability to collaborate with colleagues.

Alan does not have to do the work all alone. He respects the people with whom he works, he inspires and motivates them, and they continue to work for him. Cantor Joel Caplan has been with Alan for many years, as has Susan Werk, his educational director. Both of them come from the Seminary. They together have constituted a highly talented team that has turned Agudath Israel into a premier Conservative synagogue.

That synagogue reflects a growing corps of observant and knowledgeable Jews. Advanced Jews as well as entry-level Jews find their home in this hospitable religious institution. They are there because they are attracted to the kind of Judaism that is preached from the pulpit, by the kind of Judaism that is offered by Alan and his colleagues.

It provides a dynamic religious life. It is an institution at work seven days a week, from early morning until late evening. It is an institution of diversity and sincerity. It is an institution of cerebral, experiential and emotional Judaism.

Alan has also produced leadership and clientele for the other institutions of the Movement. His congregants are inspired by the broad vision of the Conservative Movement which he espouses. They are motivated to serve in many sectors. They join and rise to leadership positions in all of the most important institutions of the Movement. They become rabbis, cantors, Jewish educators, Jewish scholars, Jewish communal workers. It is no accident that so many of CAI's students have studied at our Movement's Day Schechter Schools, that so many are campers at Ramah day and overnight camps, at USY and so forth. Through these formal and informal educational experiences the synagogue has produced an ever-growing number knowledgeable observant Jews, as they move up the ladder of Jewish observance.

At the same time, Alan did not abandon his deep scholarly interests. He came to the Seminary with the intention to earn a doctorate and he stayed to finish it. He earned it while in the pulpit. The book he produced, *ALTERNATIVES TO ASSIMILATION: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT IN THE USA, 1840-1930* was published in 1995 by Brandeis University Press. It tells a great deal about the inner life of Alan Silverstein. Alan achieved a deeper understanding of the institutional life of Conservative Judaism by studying

the organizations of the Reform Movement, which had evolved first. He was particularly interested in the paradigms that these Reform institutions absorbed. These paradigms came from different sources, from England, and from Germany. Eventually they were generated in the United States. ALTERNATIVES TO ASSIMILATION is a staple in the field of American Jewish history, it is a volume which tells us much about how religious movements grew in the USA.

Alan's large vision propelled him to move to international leadership. He rose to the Presidency of the RA at the young age of 45 in 1994. He was by my side [as JTS Chancellor] as an eloquent and vigorous ally in the battle for religious pluralism in Israel. This was particularly true within the Federation of MetroWest in which Alan has merited great respect through his vigorous participation. His knowledge of organizational life yielded not only a doctoral dissertation but also as a skill and a reservoir that helped him in his leadership role.

I attended Alan's installation at Agudath Israel as the President of the World Council of Conservative Synagogues in 2000. It was another opportunity to impose his vision upon the Conservative Movement worldwide. The synagogue was absolutely full. It was heart-warming evening because one could feel the affection of the congregants for their beloved rabbi. Who had served them so effectively for over 20 years. That evening was more than an installation. It was a love fest. It was an expression of profound appreciation by devoted and appreciative congregants for an extraordinary religious leader.

At the 2000 RA convention, I presented to Alan the Wolpert Menorah to express and love for his achievements. This is a symbol of the light of Torah in Alan Silverstein's life. It is a symbol of the source of Alan's faith. Labor and inspiration. It is the light of God. That is what Judaism has meant for Alan Silverstein. The magnificent Wolpert Menorah is a symbol of the truth that has resonated in his inner life. It brings with it the love and affection that the RA and JTS have for our colleague and friend, Rabbi Alan Silverstein