Journeys
Farewell Service
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Temple Emanu-El, Livingston, NJ

Once upon a time, I was the navigator. But moving to the driver's role, I've ceded the helm to my GPS. It tells me were to go and I willingly follow. Even when I think it is wrong, I usually do what it says. It says go right, then I'll go right – even if I think it isn't right.

But sometimes I ignore it. I go the way I know the traffic or simplicity or logic encourage. And sometimes, I just want to take a different road and go another way. You have to fight with your GPS for this right. It'll keep trying to send you back to its pre-determined path. But ultimately, it will recalibrate and you can go on a new road whatever the outcome.

In the scheme of life, we are all traveling a roads to the same end. So it's the path we take that ends up mattering. I am off on my journey – although it isn't one the GPS of life had picked out. I don't know even know some of the destinations ahead, but I know I had to turn left and take a different road.

Like any grand adventure, this is one that affects me professionally and personally. The next step is just one piece, not the ultimate goal. But truly life is series of figuring out where to go after each stop. I've heard many people are confused in understanding my specific destination ahead, so I thought I'd take a moment to share some details.

I have always loved being a congregation rabbi. While there are a few other jobs I'd jump at the chance to do – Mets color commentator, TV movie critic – I have always planned that I will stay a congregational rabbi – in some form – in the years to come.

Starting July 1, I will be working at a congregation in Orange County, California, just south of Los Angeles near the beach. Congregation B'nai Tzedek in Fountain Valley is a Reform synagogue that was founded by Rabbi Stephen Einstein 36 years ago. Rabbi Einstein is retiring this month – the only rabbi the synagogue has ever known. I will be their interim rabbi – a one-year position to help the congregation successfully transition from their beloved long-time rabbi to their next rabbi. I have been trained to be an interim rabbi, which uses different skills and approaches than a long-term rabbi might use. I am not a candidate to become their settled rabbi and will move on to another, as-yet-undetermined, job in July 2013.

Being an interim is a great way to expand my rabbinic vision. But it also allows me to have my own period of transition. I can use this year to focus on future, practice new techniques as a rabbi, and prepare for whatever my next

rabbinic job might be. Not knowing where I will be working a year from now is hard. But as one unknown author said, "I haven't a clue as to how my story will end. But that's all right. When you set out on a journey and night covers the road, you don't conclude that the road has vanished. And how else could we discover the stars?"

Tonight, I am grateful and humbled by this opportunity to share together the 8-year journey we traveled together. It has been an amazing one. I know that many many people worked behind the scenes for months to prepare for tonight. I am just discovering who most of them are. My endless thanks to the masterminds and secret keepers: Cantor Sharon Brown-Levy, Sherry Nemiroff, Rob and Holli Ehrlich, Theresa Edelstein, Amy Young, Marc Brummer, Phil Borker, all our musical groups, speakers, Temple staff and leadership, and so many others. And thanks to all you for making this transitional moment such a blessing with your presence, your good wishes, and you love.

Our journey together physically took us places such as Israel or DC. It spiritually moved us to hope and change. It intellectually stimulated us to grow and understand. We have gone many places together and are hopefully the better for it.

I thank you all for that. Our trip had to be one that we shared to get anywhere. We had to trust each other and be open to whatever was around the bend. I tried my best to bring the power of ancient and modern Torah, the opportunity to improve this world, a chance to connect to a holiness in the universe, and to grow this community to support each other and find the miraculous.

You let me into your most special moments in time. I've had the privilege of standing next to our young teenagers as they embrace their faith and future. I mourned with you as we celebrated the lives of those who are always in our hearts. We've explored the breadth of possibilities from Jewish history to Jewish vampires, from the opportunities of Casual Fridays to the introduction of *Mishkan T'filah*.

I've blessed babies and dogs and even a hamster, married young couples, older couples, and a lot of 4th graders. To reach out to God, we've sung *Mi Shebeirach*, *Kol Nidre*, and the entire playlist of The Wizard of Oz, The Sound of Music, Grease, Disney, and Fiddler on the Roof. We've gotten up early to study the Torah at a snail's pace, and stayed up late to change our Torah covers. We've watched many movies (most of them good), climbed Masada - twice, and sung Bim Bam more times than I care to count.

On any journey, you meet some interesting characters and groups. I got to be a celebrity among the under 5 ECC set – although a fair bit of them called me

"Cantor" for a while. I was lovingly embraced by an incredibly dedicated group of so-called Temple regulars. And year after year, my soul was elevated by the most amazing group of teenagers who made the adventure a little crazy, but worth every moment. I congratulate our parents for the kids they nurtured and the incredible adults their kids have become or are on their way to being.

On our journey together we celebrated landmark moments. A year into our shared adventure, we celebrated our Temple's 50th anniversary with great joy. This past year, we renewed our Sanctuary to a place of great beauty that prepares us for the journeys toward tomorrow. I didn't do a thing alone. We did it. You all did it. You supported, encouraged, nagged, emailed, meetinged, ate, and shared every step of the way. Thanks to all of you for everything you did and every blessing you created.

As I head across the country on my journey, we are never truly parted. Technology can connect us, of course, but the learning we've shared, the relationships we built are eternal because they've already changed us forever.

While my adventure takes me to the other end of the country, Temple Emanu-El is off on her adventure right here. Having been focused on journeys for many months, let me share a few key things to remember as you set out.

First, lots of bathroom breaks, but, come on, try to go when you stop somewhere. Second, and much more important, snacks. Lots of snacks. As it says somewhere in the Talmud, "No eatin'. No meetin'."

Journeys are full of unexpected detours. Obstacles ahead – traffic, poor planning, bad map reading, a stupid GPS – all can divert your careful plans. You can't fight it and make it go away. You have to adapt to the new circumstances. So embrace the unanticipated change and sometimes things are better because of them.

Have fun. If your journey through Judaism and Temple is all business, it quickly becomes dull and uninspiring. So take a diversion to somewhere new. Try something you've previously ignored. Follow a detour intentionally. That giant ball of twine or the tic-tac-toe playing chicken will be more of a memory than whatever you have planned. It is the unexpected and spontaneous where we find people's true selves.

Work together. We bury ourselves in our own words. We focus on what we need and want without looking around at others. Try playing the license plate game, geography, or singing a song - they connect you as a group. It should never be a journey of many individuals, but a group growing ever closer. This is literally true of trips. The Temple trips to Israel, the annual trip to DC with the Confirmation Class, and the two 11th-12th grade trips to Baltimore and Philadelphia

all did more to create relationships than a year's worth of classes or programs or services. Relying on each other and sharing together can connect us right here in Livingston.

Give everyone a role. Someone is likely driving, but others can navigate, research, entertain, offer morale support, prepare food, and so on. Make sure everyone is given a chance to be part of the adventure so they personally connect. And if you don't have role, go find one. A synagogue has so many options to explore. Don't like one, go find another. Can't find anything, create something new. Our journey and our synagogue thrive when everyone is contributing and everyone is a cherished part.

Look ahead to where you are going, of course. But look behind you too for the lessons you have learned. And most importantly, don't forget to look out the sides – enjoy where you are right now on its own.

So right now, here we are. A vibrant, special, powerful community that prays, laughs, and learns together. We've come so far over these past 8 years building on the strengths that defined Temple Emanu-El of West Essex. And there's a wonderful road ahead. Embrace it for all it can be and work together to make it come *to* be.

We go our journeys – physical and internal – and we grow from the adventure. As we each set out, remember: No eatin', no meetin'. Embrace the unanticipated change and grow from it. Have fun and seek fun out. Work together to create community. Make sure everyone is involved. And look ahead, behind, and especially right where you are. Through those steps we turn our trips into journeys, our adventures in gifts.

I certainly will never forget you all. You've changed my life and I carry the blessing with me for eternity. But I have a special memory of Temple that I prepared for a year ago. I am the only person with this one-a-kind memento for you see, I have the last and only remaining piece of orange carpet.

It has been my incredible gift to be the rabbi of this synagogue. Wherever I go and whatever I do, your loving support will be. You have inspired me to greater heights and possibilities. Thank you all for tonight. Thank you all for eight blessed years. And may we be blessed as we go our journeys through life