

2008

## INTRODUCTION



**TEMPLE ADAT ELOHIM**  
your place to learn...grow...connect...

Temple Adat Elohim today is a vibrant institution which offers a full schedule of Jewish activities; religious, social, and educational. It is an exciting center of Reform Judaism in the Conejo Valley. As temple members, we all come and go enjoying everything our temple has to offer, but do we ever stop to ask how this all got here? The sanctuary stands beautifully on Hillcrest Drive, yet clearly it did not spring out of the ground.

This year, Temple Adat Elohim celebrates its 40th Anniversary. Former Congregation President Ken Bock had the idea that it was time to talk to those that were there, compile a history of Temple Adat Elohim, and write it all down. I volunteered to head up the project and, with the help of Bob Grossmann and the many folks who took the time to put their thoughts and memories to paper, we now have a written history.

I am dedicating this historical project to those who came before us, who did what they did so that today we can do what we do. Histories are generally kept by listing the dates of major events. It would be so easy just to list key dates of the growth of Temple Adat Elohim and leave it at that. However, as we discovered, there is so much more to this story, because this is not just the story of the physical construction of a building. Rather, it is the story of an incredible group of determined people who would let nothing stop them in their quest to create and sustain a Reform Jewish congregation in the Conejo Valley.

There have been many perilous moments in this history. Yet, at each critical juncture individuals emerged and stepped up to do what needed to be done. This then is their story.... those temple members whose enormous dedication and personal sacrifice brought Temple Adat Elohim from a dream to a reality.

In honor of our 40th Anniversary, here is the history of Temple Adat Elohim from its earliest days to the present, as told through the thoughts and words of those who were there.

I welcome all of you who read this document to stand beside me in awe as I recount the incredible human effort that went into the building of Temple Adat Elohim.

Robin E. Hirsch

## IN THE BEGINNING.....1967

Temple life flows like a river. It meanders on its course and our lives flow with it. We are there for great life milestones, births, b'nei mitzvah, weddings, and funerals. We gather to celebrate, we gather to mourn, we gather to pray, and we gather sometimes just for companionship. We are members for a year, five years, ten years, or a lifetime and through it all temple life flows, following the course of our lives. This is true today just as it was true in 1967.

It was in the year 1967 that our river began to flow...

"In the beginning," these are the words of Audrey Benesch, the temple's longest standing member and Ed Pauley, the first president of our congregation. I was so fortunate to meet and interview Ed shortly before he passed away.

"We were too young and stupid to know that it was impossible," said Ed Pauley as he leaned across the table at Coffee Bean and smiled. In his eighties now, but for that instant I saw the young, determined man who, with his wife, Esdra, and 15 other families, made the first step to found a reform temple in the Conejo Valley. They had all recently moved out to the Conejo Valley and like Jewish People have done throughout history, sought a bond with fellow Jews to gather for prayer, fellowship and a Jewish education for their children. The only problem was that in 1967, the nearest reform temple was Temple Beth Torah in the city of Ventura.

"It was quite a drive back in 1967," Ed remembered. "The 101 freeway was very different than it is today. There were no red lights or gradual entrance ramps. You waited for an opening and charged onto the freeway. Then you had about an hour-long drive to Ventura. A lot of it was two lanes, so if there was traffic."

Sitting back on the couch in her living room Audrey Benesch also remembered. For years Audrey and her husband, Bernie, of blessed memory, were very active members of Temple Adat Elohim. Even today, Audrey remains a strong temple presence. She is a remarkable woman who has truly been the heart and soul of Temple Adat Elohim for forty years. Her enthusiasm has never wavered. Always involved, working quietly in the background, she is a walking history of the temple, recalling the minutest details of those early days.

Audrey and Bernie had moved out to Thousand Oaks in the early sixties....

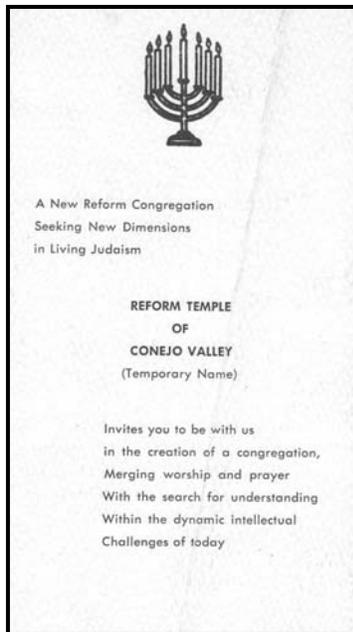
“When we moved out here with our kids we immediately started looking for a temple to join. We were reform Jews and Temple Beth Torah was our best alternative, so a carpool was our only salvation to get the kids to Hebrew School.”

So they started a carpool with Ed and Esdra Pauley, Frank and Serena Greenspan, and Ed and Doris Kaplan, other Jewish families in the same situation who lived nearby.

“The carpool was great,” Audrey continued, “but it still took a lot of time and if there was traffic it could be impossible; something had to be done. We met with the Board of Directors at Temple Beth Torah to ask about opening a satellite facility in Thousand Oaks, but they were not interested.”

Ed recalled, “There was nothing else to do. We arranged a meeting at Audrey and Bernie’s home in Thousand Oaks with our carpool and a couple of other families.”

On May 7, 1967, a meeting was held to discuss the formation of a new reform congregation for the Conejo Valley. Present at this meeting were Ed and Esdra Pauley, Bernie and Audrey Benesch, Ed and Doris Caplan, Frank Greenspan, Anne and Bob Roberts, and Pauline and Paul Barbakow. They decided they would contact the UAHC and move forward.



On June 15, 1967, Executive Director of the UAHC Irwin Herman along with Dave Caplan, Jerry Berg, Dave Siegle and other UAHC members met with the original six families along with Teki and Herb Reis and Sandra Greenfeld. At this moment in time the decision was actually made with the support of Dave Caplan, the Director of Synagogue Activities of the UAHC, that it would be beneficial to the local Jewish community for a reform temple be organized in the Conejo Valley. At the end of the evening, the UAHC agreed to support their effort and loaned them \$60 to pay for postage to help contact the local Jewish community.

They used the money to contact everyone who had a Jewish name

in the area. There was nothing scientific about it in those days. They also contacted the local paper, The Thousand Oaks News Chronicle, which publicized their efforts. One month later, on August 22, a meeting was held at the Thousand Oaks Community Center. “We were thrilled. About 70 - 80 people showed up,” Ed recalled. “We told them our ideas and out of that group 16 families signed up”.

Mr. & Mrs. Paul Babakow, Mr. & Mrs. Bernerd Benesch, Dr. & Mrs. Gary Berry, Mr. & Mrs. Elya Bresler, Mr. & Mrs. Edward Caplan, Dr. & Mrs. Fred Goldstein, Dr. & Mrs. Albert Greenfeld, Mr. & Mrs. Frank Greenspan, Dr. & Mrs. Robert Nopar, Mr. & Mrs. Bernard Norman, Mr. & Mrs. Ed Pauley, Mr. & Mrs. Herb Reis, Mr. & Mrs. Robert Roberts, Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Rosenweig, and Mr. & Mrs. Leslie Seelig.

Ed and Esdra's house on Warwick Avenue in Thousand Oaks became the first temple. Using the Union Prayer Book, the families would gather in the Pauley's backyard for Friday-night services. As Ed told us his story, the years flew back and we could picture the backyard Shabbat service on the Pauley's patio.

“It's really amazing none of my neighbors ever complained. Of course Esdra was everywhere back then. She always had to bake her chocolate chip pecan pies for the Oneg on Friday night. Every family was involved. Nobody ever said do this or that. We all knew what had to be done and we did it.”

Meanwhile the search was on for a permanent location. Between August 22 and September 7, 1967, ten locations were investigated as potential places to hold services. On September 9, 1967, a decision was made.

## HIDDEN TRAILS - SEPTEMBER 1967

If you ever drive up Agoura Road between Reyes Adobe and Kanan Road, you pass some wooded property. It's been the home of summer camps and retreat centers over the years, most recently the home of Camp Kinneret. In 1967 it was called Hidden Trails. It just so happened the owner back then, a Dr. Larry Barr, was



Jewish. Nobody is quite sure who knew him or approached him, but one way or another, he agreed to the concept of a temple on his property, but only from September through June, when summer camps started again. His conditions were accepted and by September 10, 1967, the little temple at Ed and Esdra's house was up and running at Hidden Trails.

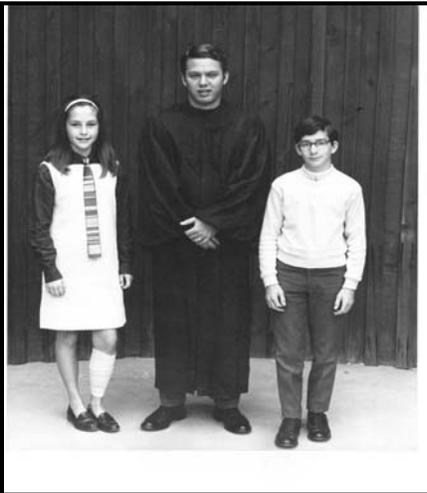
The UAHC found our first rabbi, a second year rabbinic student from Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles named Rabbi Gary Dolin to serve as a part time rabbi. And so it began... the temple in the woods. On September 22, 1967, with a congregation of 37 families, the Reform Temple of the Conejo Valley held its first Friday night service. A newspaper clipping from the Thousand Oaks News Chronicle recorded that there were 150 people in attendance.



“Student Rabbi Gary Dolin led the congregation through regular Sabbath religious services. James Kaufman provided the religious music accompanying himself on the guitar...The congregation is now in the process of forming a choir...The Temple Sisterhood provided the Oneg Shabbat following the services.”

The article goes on to describe a planned picnic for the coming Sunday.

“All Conejo Jewish residents are cordially invited to spend the day meeting the temple members and the rabbi and his wife. This is a good opportunity to hear the progress and future planning for the Reform Temple.”



I guess the picnic was a success because two weeks later, on October 5, 1967, the first High Holiday service was held for Temple Adat Elohim with Rabbi Dolin presiding. The Temple had already grown. There were 46 families.

It was truly amazing how once it all got started, it really did just start to flow. Besides the Benesches and the Pauleys, there were the Marks, the Greenspans, the Reis, the Kates, the Rosenthals and many, many more families who put in thousands of hours to make sure the temple would survive. Temple life soon became... temple life. Of course there

were bar and bat mitzvahs. The first young man to have a Bar Mitzvah at Temple Adat Elohim was Ron Greenspan. The first young lady to have a Bat Mitzvah was Marilyn Pauley. Ed Pauley was elected the first congregation president. Audrey Benesch helped to organize a Sisterhood and was installed as its first president, while Frank Greenspan became the first Brotherhood president. A religious school was started with 57 children of all ages in attendance. Elya Bresler was appointed the first director. The teachers were all volunteers at first, but, "It was great," recalled Audrey. "There was so much enthusiasm, so much excitement and no more long drives up to Ventura."

The buildings of Hidden Trails were designed for summer camp and woodsy corporate retreats. The religious school was held in the camp houses with the kids sitting on bunk beds.



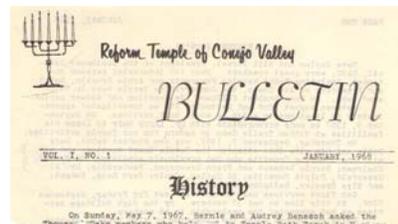
"The buildings were very rustic," Ed remembered, "but we made it work. The bathrooms were outside and had no roofs. This became a problem during the winter rainy season, so we kept a small supply of umbrellas by the door in case you had to go to the bathroom and it was raining. It was very funny that when we moved from Hidden Trails to

Covenant House, my kids were very impressed that the bathroom had a roof."

"Everybody did everything," Audrey described. "The first temple office was at the Pauley's house. You'd walk in and there'd be a meeting going on in one room, a mimeograph machine in another. I think there was even a small sisterhood shop in one of the bedrooms. It was crazy, but we were all so excited that nobody minded. We eventually got office space in Thousand Oaks, but I'll always remember the Pauley's"

### 1968

In January of 1968, the Temple Bulletin, as it was called back then, published a brief history of the Reform Temple of the Conejo Valley. At the conclusion of this history is a wonderful summation of the eight months of effort...



"As you can see, a great deal has been accomplished in a relatively short period of time. With such a fine beginning by

such dedicated members, we can look to a bright and stable future.”

The Reform Temple of the Conejo Valley was now an established fact. A core group of dedicated temple members were on board. There was still a very long way to go, but everyone I spoke with said that as 1968 began there was a very strong sense this crazy idea was rapidly becoming a reality. There was, however, one more important event that needed to happen. The temple needed a name.

The Reform Temple of the Conejo Valley, while an accurate description, was not a very exciting name. This issue was finally addressed on February 16, 1968, at a congregational meeting following Friday night services. On this date, the Reform Temple of the Conejo Valley became Temple Adat Elohim. Translated, this means Congregation of God.

“As best as I can remember, we were at a meeting trying to come up with a name,” Ed Pauley remembered. “A temple member, Gary Barry I think it was anyway, he came up with the name. We all agreed and that was it.”

It was also about this time that Mort Rosenthal and his wife, Marilyn, became temple members. They immediately became integrated into the congregation and would, over the next two decades, play very significant roles in temple history. Mort would become the third temple president following Ed Pauley and Bernie Benesch, as well as play a hugely important role in future growth. Marilyn, who has sadly passed away, also served as the first woman president in the early 1980s. Mort is filled with many wonderful memories of those early days.

“Keep in mind that the Temple Adat Elohim in Hidden Hills was not a permanent structure. The buildings were used for other events as well. We'd have to get there early to set everything up. We rolled out our Ark, set up a folding table for our podium, put out the prayer books, and got the coffee and tea ready for the congregants. After each service, we had to put everything away in the closet for the following week.”

In a March, 1968, temple newsletter Rabbi Dolin put forth his thoughts on temple life that ring as true today as they did back then.

In the words of Rabbi Gary Dolin: “Many joys have we shared together in the development of our new synagogue and Jewish community. And we have many more to look forward to in the future. The synagogue must give an unmistakable definition of its place in the modern Jewish

world. It must make clear its position in relation to the immediate problems which confront us. It must gird itself to defend the Jew on the basis of his religious philosophy of life and his contribution to the moral progress of mankind. It must define and fulfill its obligations to the Jewish Community.”

## 1969 - 1972

...And the river flowed.

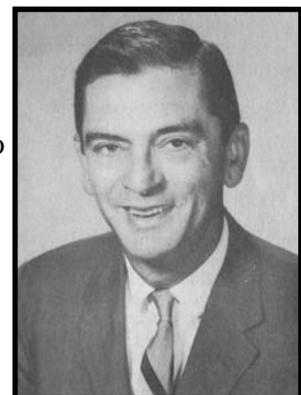
By August of 1969, student Rabbi Gary Dolin left for his year in Israel and the first fully ordained rabbi, Fred Krinsky, was hired. Rabbi Krinsky was on sabbatical leave from the University of Southern California’s political science department. A very dynamic man, his sermons reflected his background and were anything but dull.

Mort recalled... “The service with Rabbi Krinsky was an interesting one each week. Since he was the chairman of a civics department, his sermons were always current and we were kept up to date on what was happening in Israel as well as our government. There was a tradition that said that Rabbi Krinsky knew his sermons were good if my son Elliot fell asleep during his talk.”

We are fortunate to have a letter written by Rabbi Krinsky, who has passed on, to the temple in honor of the new sanctuary dedication in 1997. In it he described those early services.

In the words of Rabbi Fred Krinsky...

“Our serenely rustic setting of Hidden Trails Camp lent itself to the spirit of camaraderie and commitment which so characterized those early years. I always remember parents bringing blankets to services so that young children could lie down when they tired. Youngsters were never left behind but instead celebrated the Shabbat with the adults; therefore, by the end of the first year, almost all the children knew the service, at least musically, by heart.”



Clark Kates and his family joined the Temple in 1971.

“We came in for services for the first time,” Clark recalled. “We were used to people going to temple with suits, ties, and dresses, but here it was so much different. We felt immediately welcomed. We joined right away. Those days at Hidden Trails were something,” Clark continued. “We sat on wooden benches. Rabbi Krinsky did the service with a folding table for a bema. His wife, Lynn, sang and his son played a guitar. Nobody minded though, there was just this warm and friendly feeling to it all that kept you coming back.”

And so the river flowed, and Temple Adat Elohim continued to grow. On October 4, 1968, through the generosity of Al and Sandy Greenfeld, the temple got its first Torah. Our Torah was tattooed No. 60 and was from the district of



Rakovnik in Bohemia, 50 km west of Prague. The earliest record of Jewish settlement dates back to 1441. Our Torah once belonged to this amazing synagogue which was built most probably in 1763 - 1764. Services were held there until World War II. After WWII, the synagogue was used by the Hussite Church until 1950. Now the sanctuary shares its beauty with a concert hall for classical music. The Torah had been rescued from the Nazis by the Czech government and brought to England for restoration. Now it had a new home in the Conejo Valley.

“Once we got the Torah,” Clark continued, “we had another problem. There was no place to store it at Hidden Trails. A temple member, Max Straus, built an Ark, but that made another problem. We’d have to take the Torah, the Ark, the whole thing home each week. I don’t remember who had that job, but somebody did it. They’d bring it all back Friday night and we’d set the whole thing up again.”

Meanwhile the Conejo Valley area was booming. The First Neighborhood development in

Westlake Village, plus the continued growth of Thousand Oaks and Newbury Park, brought many Jewish families to the area.

Gene Marks and his family were also early temple members...Gene remembered, "I was on the membership committee. We'd check with real estate offices and look for Jewish names. Then we'd contact them and get them to come out for a service. Most were so excited to find out there was a reform congregation out here. We got a lot of support and we just kept getting bigger and bigger."

It soon became evident that a new home would be needed to allow for this growth. A new search committee was formed and after some research they approached Covenant House, a local facility that already housed a Lutheran and a Methodist congregation. Since we were still a bit too small to be solely independent, the congregation worked out a deal and moved into Covenant House on the corner of Westlake Blvd and Agoura Road. The date was June 1, 1972.

Mort Rosenthal recalls, "We moved to Covenant House before summer camp started. The move was fairly easy due to the fact that we didn't have that much stuff to take over. We moved the ark in a truck and loaded up our cars with whatever books there were. The next Friday we had our regular Friday night service. It really was that simple."

Gene Marks adds, "Of course, we wanted to walk the Torah to its new home. There were about 50 - 75 of us taking turns holding the Torah marching straight down Agoura Road. I remember it was a beautiful sunny Southern California day. Had to be a first for the Conejo Valley anyway."

## COVENANT HOUSE

And so the river flowed into the summer of 1972. Temple Adat Elohim was now five years old and sharing space with a Methodist Church under the direction of Reverend Truman, and a Lutheran Church under the direction of Reverend Lawson. As they said back then, an ecumenical feeling was the reality. The other congregations were extremely thoughtful and sensitive to the needs of a Jewish congregation.



Bernie Benesch, of blessed memory, was the president of the congregation back then. From a previous temple history written years ago, I found this quote.

In the words of Bernie Benesch, founding member and the second president of the temple, “The names of the three groups were on the pedestal sign on the corner of the property. It was a time of friendship, acceptance, and fellowship for Temple Adat Elohim, even though our



congregation grew to use more of the facility than the Lutherans and Methodists combined.”



Again, Rabbi Krinsky recalled, “I strongly remember our participation in the ecumenical arrangement at Covenant House. I recall Covenant House not only because of its innate worthiness, but also because of the first 13-year-old to become a Bar Mitzvah three: our youngest son Glenn.”

In August of 1972, Rabbi Krinsky decided it was time to return to academia and a search began for a full time rabbi. After a brief search, Rabbi Ed Zerin was chosen. Also at this time, Cantor Saul Silverman, a semi-retired cantor from Temple Israel in Hollywood, became affiliated on a part-time basis with Temple Adat Elohim.



Religious services at Covenant House were challenging. How do you create a sacred Jewish space in a church? Before services, a cross was sensitively covered up, as were Christmas decorations in the season. Our Ark was on wheels. Every Friday night it was rolled out and then rolled back to a closet where it was stored.

Money was always tight and the temple continued to rely on the dedicated family of volunteers who did everything and I mean everything.

One of those families was the Bocks. Marcia and Joel Bock and their four sons joined the Temple in 1972 and quickly became involved in temple life. Their son Ken has had a long relationship with temple Adat Elohim and served as congregation president from 2005 - 2007. Ken has many wonderful memories of those early days and in fact had his Bar Mitzvah there.

Ken agreed to share some of those for this history.

Covenant House as remembered by Ken Bock...

“My family moved from the San Fernando Valley to Westlake Village when I was 11 years old . It was 1972 and they soon signed me up for religious school at TAE. My memory of attending school three days a week at TAE was that I was a serious scholar of Judaism and soaked up all that my teachers had to impart to me. When I checked these facts with my parents, they had a different remembrance. They say I did not want to attend and only did so under extreme duress; mine and theirs, and I was terrible at Hebrew!

“My dad, Joel, volunteered to be treasurer at the time and Mort Rosenthal was the president. My dad said money was always a problem and sharing the space with the two other churches at the Covenant House on the corner of Westlake Blvd. and Agoura Rd. was very difficult. “We had no money to pay the teachers and all of our income and expenses were tracked with one check book,” my dad said. My mom would help with the onegs each Friday night, putting cookies on platters and serving wine. “Volunteers did everything,” she said, “there were no custodians or hired help, we did it all. Every time we left, the rooms had to be better than when we found it.

“While attending school at the Covenant House, I remember seeing crosses everywhere. On flags, books, artifacts, etc. I guess this is when I started to understand my identity and wishing we had our own place. I was uncomfortable and this theme continued for many years. I remember attending High Holy Days at different locations; the Los Robles Golf Course; the Mormon Temple in Newbury Park, twice; the Ascension Lutheran Church on Hillcrest. They always covered the big cross for us, but I knew it was there.

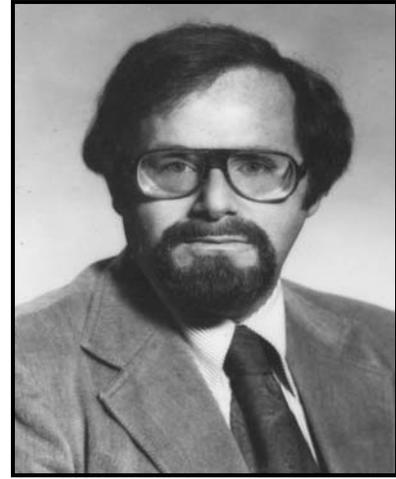
“I was Bar Mitzvah at the temple by Rabbi Zerin on May 4, 1974.

“Just when I thought I was done, my parents said, “Oh, no you're not, you are attending confirmation class.” Being the strong willed kid that I was, I quickly submitted. I am glad that I did, because we had a great time. There were about 12 of us and we were older now. Our meetings were fun, we went to the beach. It felt less like an obligation and more like a club. After confirmation, we all went our separate ways and I didn't come back to TAE except for the High Holy Days; that is until I met my future wife, Lisa.”

Two months after Ken's Bar Mitzvah, Rabbi Zerlin left and was replaced by Rabbi Richard Address. We were not able to actually meet Rabbi Address, but we did contact him via email. He is still an active rabbi and was kind enough to write his memories of those early years.

In the words of Rabbi Richard Address...

"In the spring of 1974, a very young rabbi sat in the living room of the Rosenthals (Mort and Marilyn) to conclude an interview to become Adat Elohim's full-time rabbi. I had decided that I needed to be on my own after 2 years as the assistant of a congregation in the Valley. The regional director (Erv Herman) and the placement director for the movement both thought that this small, developing congregation of 90 members would be a perfect fit. So, there it was, signed sealed and hired. The house bought (on Columbia Rd in Thousand Oaks), new born son (Alan) and a new beginning.



"Covenant House. I imagine few who are at TAE now recall the jockeying we needed to do to create a sacred Jewish space. Mid-week Hebrew at the Covenant House classrooms. Religious School on Sundays at a local Westlake school. High Holidays at an inn in Thousand Oaks (the name of which I now forget). I do remember that it looked out on a golf course and I kept waiting to spot a congregant tee-ing off during the Holidays. I did once, but no names!

"Confirmation class trips and youth group trips. The gradual maturing process of a community as it learned to discover its own identity and begin to take its place within the L.A. community of congregations. (I still remember going to some meetings early in my tenure and having people respond after I introduced myself with "you mean there are really Reform Jews out there?") The laying of the foundations for the governance of the temple and the worship style, (still in evidence the last time I prayed there). Helen Walker, the temple administrative assistant, general caretaker and guardian of the rabbi, a truly wonderful human being. Reverend Truman and both the Methodist and Lutheran congregations who really did go out of their way, in most cases, to be respectful (remember the b'nai mitzvah that were scheduled during December and the careful masking of the Christmas tree and cross so we could have our sacred space. Services "in the round" and the birth of "super-bowl Shabbat" (thanks to the Hamlish family, who showed up for Friday night services the first time Denver played in their Orange Crush t-shirts). And, as the Rosenthals may remember, Marriage Encounter!

"All in all, the people I still remember. We were, so many of us, just starting out. In our late twenties, or early thirties, with young kids and big dreams. Lots of empty living rooms and

furnished "family rooms." Lots of people all chipping in to do Oneg Shabbat, picnics, special dinners and events... the Finks and the Lowensteins (too many crazy times to recount).. the Bendons, Kimbergs, Faynes and so many more. My presidents, Mort, Dick Lapkin and Gene Marks, and all their families who

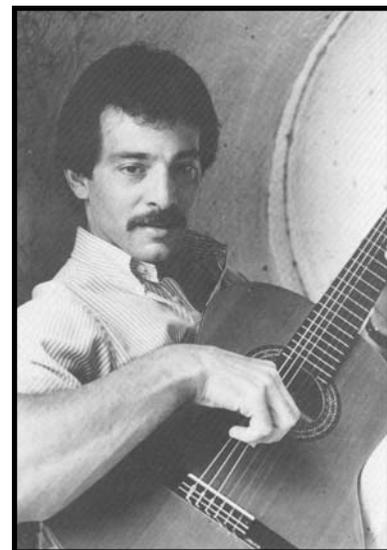


welcomed my family into the community and put up with some off-the-wall behavior. But, we had fun and we built a community, a community that I was proud to serve and one that continues to grow; from those 90 families in 1974 to hundreds and hundreds now."

Another milestone was reached during the Covenant House years: the hiring of our first full time cantor, Cantor Michael Anatole. Cantor Michael would go on to serve for 24 years. Cantor Michael is currently the cantor at Temple Beth Torah in Ventura. We were able to contact him and he kindly sent us some of his great memories.

In the words of Cantor Michael Anatole...

"On Friday night, August 23rd, 1974, at about 7:30 p.m., I walked into the Covenant House in Westlake Village. The Covenant House was, at that time, the home of Temple Adat Elohim. This was my first Friday night as cantor, there, or anywhere. Debbie and I had married only 13 days prior and we were brand new Californians. I was more than a little scared. A friendly-looking man with a warm smile came up to me and extended his hand. "Cantor," he said, "My name is Mort Rosenthal. I am the president of the temple, and I am happy to meet you. I have just one question: Can you sing?"



It had been a fair question. A couple of months prior, I had flown out to California from my home in Phoenix, Arizona. Rabbi Richard Address, TAE's Rabbi in 1974, had taken me to lunch at Solley's in Woodland Hills. We had a lovely visit. He told me about Temple Adat Elohim, a relatively new congregation in Westlake Village. He seemed to be a fun guy, although he did not look anything like any rabbi I had ever seen before. He was well over six feet tall, with bright red hair and a goatee, and he smoked a pipe. I thought, "If this is a rabbi, I am certainly in California.

“He was, in fact, a very fun guy. I will always remember a sermon of his, entitled “The Incredible Diving Horse of Atlantic City.” But, I digress. During lunch, he offered me the job as cantor, part-time (student pulpit), of Temple Adat Elohim. I accepted. Later, I learned that the following Friday night, he told Mort Rosenthal, the temple president, “I hired a cantor.” “Great!” Mort exclaimed. “How does he sound?” “How should I know,” Rabbi Address responded. Hence Mort’s question to me on August 23rd.

“At that time, TAE had approximately 90 member families. We shared Covenant House with two churches, Lutheran and Methodist. I have extremely fond memories of Reverend Truman, the Methodist minister, and Pastor Lawson of the Lutheran church. These were excellent, *haimish* men, possessed of great kindness and humor. Would that the rest of the interfaith religious world treated each other with the sort of respect and compassion as we all shared!”

It was also right around this time, in 1975, that Temple Adat Elohim entered what was referred to as the year of the presidents.

Eugene Marks describes what happened... “Mel Koven was installed into office, but had to resign because he moved to the East Coast. Burt Lichter succeeded him, but also resigned for personal reasons, so in the space of a few short weeks, I took office to complete the term.”

## 1976

Histories tend to reflect great events, the history of a temple is no exception. However, a temple’s history can be a very personal thing as well. Each of us has our own set of memories of the important life moments that occurred at the temple. Days turn into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years. During my research for this project, I stumbled across an old history that dates back to the Covenant House years. The author is unknown, but the memories are precious and so I quote this slice of life in 1976.

“1976 brought the Guys and Dolls dinner dance, complete with a belly dancer for entertainment. Mr. and Mrs. Jack Goldberg donated our large Memorial Table, and members began ordering plaques in memory of their loved ones. Our new prayer books arrived and our congregation began a new phase of prayer. We presented a plaque to Covenant House that read ‘*Hine matovu manaim*’ or ‘How good it is and how pleasant when brethren dwell together in

unity.’ Another plaque went up on the memorial board in memory of the Six Million who died in the Holocaust. Always remembered, never to be forgotten.”

### 1978

And so the river flowed into the year 1978. Temple Adat Elohim had grown to well over a hundred families and it was clear that the time was right for the temple to have its own home. Actually, this thought was not new. The year before, a committee had been formed to begin the search for our own home. While all this is going on, in the summer of 1978, Rabbi Address left for another position and was replaced in December of that year by a young rabbi from Pittsburg, PA, Rabbi Elliot J. Holin.

Again Rabbi Address remembers...

“I remember the last time. It was July of 1978. My family and I were leaving to move back to Philadelphia to assume the position of regional director for the Pennsylvania Council of the then UAHC. Rabbi Holin was on his way (he later followed me to Philadelphia and I became his regional director). We stopped at the temple picnic to "hang out" one last time and kind of say a last good bye. It was a bittersweet time. As we got into the car to head home and finish packing, I remember looking back into the rear-view mirror. This Adat Elohim chapter was closing, a new world was opening and I was very happy to have had the honor of being called to be TAE's rabbi. We both learned so much together as we both grew. Truth be told, in all these years, I still think of it as my congregation. Thanks and mazel tov!”

And so you have the beginning of the temple's next phase. With over a hundred families and counting, Temple Adat Elohim was rapidly outgrowing Covenant House. It is clear to all that it was time for our own permanent home. So the search began...

### HILLCREST

In 1979, Clark Kates found himself the chairman of the search committee looking for a new home. “At first, everyone wanted a Westlake Village address,” Clark explained. “We looked at a bunch of properties, even looked up around Potrero Road, but it was all way out of our price range.”

Richard Lapkin was president of the congregation during this period of time.

In the words of Richard Lapkin, “Our search for a home took place over many months. We looked at locations throughout the area from Agoura to Camarillo. Many on the board and many temple members felt we couldn’t afford to purchase our own property. Fortunately many of us felt we couldn’t afford not to.”

“Then we heard about a piece of property on Hillcrest Drive...”

Clark Kates continued, “It was called the Conejo Valley Church located at 2420 Hillcrest Drive. The A-frame building had been on the market for 2 years. It was a beat up old building with a slanted roof. Inside was a small chapel. It even had a baptismal pool. I think it was Manny Feingold who said, ‘Hey guys, look, we even have a mikvah!.’ It really wasn’t much, but it fit our price range and we saw the potential.

“The negotiations began. The final price was \$245,000. The church was asking \$285,000, and we offered \$220,000; they countered with \$263,000 and we responded with \$235,000; they responded with \$245,000 which we accepted. Stan Cohen, our negotiator/attorney, and I were very pleased.”

Richard Lapkin added, “When the church became available and we had negotiated a price, the members of the building committee called a special congregational meeting and put on a very professional “dog and pony” show, architected by Dick King, an advertising executive.”

When Zelda Finestone counted the votes approval was overwhelmingly given. On May 14, 1979, with a down payment of a \$5,000 check to Title Guarantee and Trust Company, the congregation of Temple Adat Elohim purchased the Conejo Valley Church building and land.

Richard Lapkin, “Ellen Kinberg and I went down to the City of Thousand Oaks and signed papers to transfer title to TAE. We both felt honored and touched to be part of temple and Conejo Valley history. When we finally took possession, those who were there will never forget removing the cross that hung on the wall over what was to become the location of our ark.”

A little over four months later, on a misty Saturday morning, September 29, 1979, to be exact, a couple of hundred congregants gathered in front of Covenant House to walk the Torah to its new home on Hillcrest Drive. By then we had two Torahs and everyone took turns carrying them. Up Westlake Boulevard they marched, over the freeway on which 12 years before, the carpoolers struggled to drive an hour each way to Ventura to get their kids a Jewish education. Across Thousand Oaks Boulevard and on to Hillcrest. At last Temple Adat Elohim had a real home. Yeah, the place was a little run down, but it was our home.



In the words of Rabbi Elliot J. Holin, “I remember the day when our families walked from Covenant House to our new location on Hillcrest Drive carrying the Torah scroll, passing it among our children, youth and adults, as we progressed from Westlake Village to Thousand Oaks.”



Clark Kates and Joe Kinberg were chosen to carry the Torahs inside the new synagogue. Clark Kates remembers the day vividly. His eyes misted as he remembered.

“Oh, that was quite a moment. I stepped inside and I got light-headed as this tremendous feeling of euphoria swept through my body. Never felt anything like it. I remember it all so vividly, even to this day.”

And so the Torahs were carried in. The synagogue was jammed with people. Rabbi Holin presided over a service of dedication and just like that, Temple Adat Elohim finally had its own home.

### **The A-FRAME SYNAGAUGE**

There was so much work to do and no money to do it with. So once again the great force of Temple Adat Elohim volunteers stepped up.

“We had to do all the work ourselves,” Clark remembered. “Me and Dick King designed and

hung the front sign. TEMPLE ADAT ELOHIM it read.” It was Pete Reinish who coordinated the fix up. Norm Levinson supervised the electrical work. Then there was Max Straus, and really so many others. I don’t want to leave anyone out. Literally everybody did something.”



Ken Bock remembers, “The sanctuary was interesting.



Filled with indestructible orange chairs, styrofoam gold engraved artwork covering the whole bema wall at one time and a small gift shop made up of a couple of cabinets at the back of the room. Since the building was a church before we moved in, it is a little known secret that there was a baptism pool behind the Ark; drained of course. There was also a faint shadow of a cross above the bema from where it was removed when we bought the place; not fully removed until the building was remodeled. Bottle brush bushes surrounded the temple and the land next door was vacant.”

It wasn’t long before Temple Adat Elohim was up to full speed at the Hillcrest location and the next few years of temple life flew by. Again, to quote an anonymous temple historian from a history compiled back then: “The years just passed so quickly. We could still remember the cold nights at Hidden Trails and the Sunday school classrooms that had beds instead of chairs to sit on. During the first annual Tribute Ball, the past president was the master of ceremonies and the new president had to take all the pictures. Then there were fact-finding trips to Israel, the horror of the Six Day War in 1973. The ecumenical feeling of Covenant House. Most of all, though, it is the kids. Watching them have their bar/bat mitzvahs, then getting married and having their own kids. We look back, and then we look forward!”

As the decade of the 1970s came to a conclusion, Temple Adat Elohim had much to look forward to.

## 1980s

And so the river flowed into the next decade, and what a decade it was. Of all the decades of temple history, the 1980s stand out as a period of time when the history of Temple Adat Elohim took certain critical turns that were to indelibly impact the next two decades. Roads were crossed, decisions were made, changes were wrought and dividends were paid. Let us now turn

our attention to this remarkable era.

## MAY 1980 - THE EMPTY LOT NEXT DOOR

Since we had purchased the property on Hillcrest back in September of 1979, the lot next door had been an empty field that was not part of the original purchase. Nobody gave much thought to the land next door; there was more than enough to worry about fixing up the facility that we did own. All this changed rather suddenly on a spring day in May.



In the words of Mort Rosenthal....

“The property next store had been for sale for years. Nobody paid any attention to it. Then one day I received a call from the temple that someone was inquiring about purchasing the vacant lot next door for a preschool. I contacted a friend who was a realtor, and we called on the owner of the lot and were told that there had indeed been inquiries. I made the decision then and there and told him that the temple was interested and could he hang on for a few days. We agreed on a purchase price of \$108,000, and now it was up to me to get a down payment and loan from the bank. Our board of directors said that they would repay the people who gave the deposit within 3 to 5 years. I began approaching congregants to ask for \$5,000 each. The group would own the land and when the temple paid them back, they would donate the land to the temple, and the assessed value of the land would be a tax deduction to each. We raised \$35,000 in a week, and that was the down payment. The temple would pay the fee each month. Within two years, the temple was ready to repay each of us. Some took the money and others donated their share to the temple. The realtor donated his commission to the temple. The assessed value of the land at the time of sale to the temple was \$125,000.”

The group called themselves the Temple Land Associates and on June 18, 1980, they took possession of the property next door to the temple. Almost two years later, on March 26, 1982, the temple had repaid the original debt and the group donated the land to Temple Adat Elohim.

It took 15 years for Temple Adat Elohim to build our new sanctuary on that property, but try to imagine what the future of our temple would have been if this group of people had not stepped up with the down payment. How could we have possibly been able to expand our facility?

Where would we have gone? How could we have found the land necessary? Can you only imagine the cost 10 years later to buy the acreage necessary?

This entire transaction is very indicative of what is a recurring theme in the history of Temple Adat Elohim. There is a need and there are those willing to step up to meet that need. It is as simple as that.

Who were those families... besides Mort and Marilyn Rosenthal let's thank, Ray & Beverly Breslau, Alan and Janet Fink, Albert and Sandra Greenfield, Dodd and Sandra Leanse, Jean Lee, Larry and Judy Levine, Eugene and Maryann Marks, Ron and Jackie Pizitz, Harry and Bev Pomeranz, Jack and Elizabeth Thompson, Harvey and Fran Waldman.

## 1981 - THE DESICRATION

Marilyn Rosenthal, of blessed memory, was elected as the first woman president of the congregation.

Within a few months of her election, the temple was vandalized by a neo-Nazi group. Her husband, Mort recalls, "Someone during the night had snuck onto temple property and had spray-painted swastikas and phrases like 'Jews die' on the building. It was horrible. The congregation was in an uproar. Of course, everyone wanted to paint it over immediately. I can remember all this so vividly. Marilyn stood up and said, 'no, before we paint it over let the entire community bear witness.' It was a powerful statement.

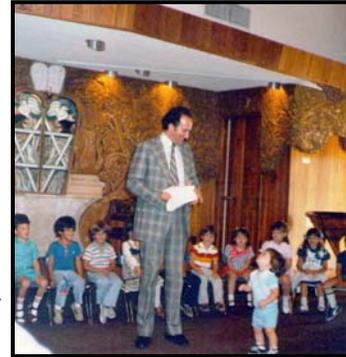


For three days, anyone who drove down Hillcrest saw the result of this act of hatred. Plans were made to rededicate the building. By then, the entire community of the Conejo Valley knew what had happened. Hundreds of people showed up. Jews and non-Jews worked side by side to repaint and rededicate our temple. Those responsible were never caught, but Marilyn's statement resonated throughout the community.

Rabbi Holin remembered, "I recall the phenomenal response of the community when the

synagogue was desecrated: How members of the neighboring churches joined us to celebrate a service of re-consecration and to help us repaint the exterior walls of the synagogue.”

Ten years later, in April 1991, an arsonist attempted to set the temple on fire during the night. Pete Reinisch described the damage, “The fire was started on the south entrance to the a frame right across from the bathroom. It burned the entry doors, the door frame and a little bit of the ceiling. Fortunately it did not have a chance to spread.”



Again a tremendous outpouring of outrage from the entire community was the result. Temple Adat Elohim came through it all stronger than ever.

### 1982 - THE BUILDING OF THE SCHOOL

The decision was made to begin fund raising with the object of building a day school for the children of Temple Adat Elohim. Hal Bloom and Elaine Gerwitz were put in charge of capital fund raising. Fran Waldman was given a budget of \$2,000 to begin planning for the facility. Again Mort remembers...

“There were many who wanted to raise money and build a new sanctuary; Marilyn led the faction that said, no, first we have to take care of the Jewish education of our children.”



This thought carried the day. It only made sense, after all. The original 16 families had founded the temple in order to provide a Jewish center of prayer and education close to our community. We had a sanctuary that was adequate, we needed classrooms for the kids. This decision culminated with the ground breaking of our day school on October 14, 1984.

## 1984 - THE RABBI GREENBAUM ERA - THE BEGINNING

The summer of 1984 brought with it another major milestone, only at the time, nobody knew it. Rabbi Elliot Holin resigned to return to Pennsylvania and the search committee hired a young rabbi named Alan Greenbaum. After four rabbis in a 17-year period, Rabbi Greenbaum was to serve for an astounding 21 years. During his tenure, Temple Adat Elohim went from a small reform congregation, gathering in a converted Chapel, to one of the fastest growing congregations in the United States that could point with great pride at its beautiful, brand new sanctuary.



There is really no way to truly measure the impact of Alan Greenbaum on the history of Temple Adat Elohim. It was immense. As we said, he served as rabbi for 21 years and spearheaded unprecedented growth. Yet, he remained a simple, modest man; someone you would never hesitate to approach and ask a question, or make a comment to. In the midst of whatever he was doing, he

would look you in the eye and listen to you as though you and he were the only people in the world. Invariably he would be whisked away by someone else, but you were left with a feeling of being touched by someone who cared. You always knew that if you needed something more, he would give it to you. His services reflected the man. Quick with a joke, one could always tell that he strongly felt his calling and had a deep love of Judaism. When he left, we all knew that the search committee would find a new rabbi to lead our congregation, but that Rabbi Greenbaum would never be replaced.

And so we turn first to Rabbi Greenbaum to help put those 21 years in some sort of historical perspective.

Rabbi Alan Greenbaum writes...

My years with Temple Adat Elohim were transitional years:

-from a small board-run schul (where board members would open and close the



sanctuary on Friday nights and the congregation provided the food for the Oneg Shabbat on a rotating basis) to a large staff-run synagogue (where there was a professional and support staff to do everything from plan the events, run the events, set up, clean up and more),

-from a modest utility-room type facility with bright orange chairs which could be converted from sanctuary to reception room within 1/2 hour with the gift shop and four offices in the back of the room and it's hidden baptismal basin (left by the church which owned the building before us) to a stunning and inspiring sacred space, complimented by a fully-functional social hall and catering kitchen ,

-from the "warm reform" temple of the Conejo Valley (as we billed ourselves in the newspaper box ads) to ... what? And that was the challenge.

“How does a temple family transition from a rather small and modest group to a major congregation (at one point, we were told by the leaders of the Reform movement, the second fastest growing congregation in the United States) without losing its "warmth" - the one characteristic which had been its distinctive feature for years.

“The growth came from luck and skill. The luck was that we were the destination point of a huge demographic shift from the city of Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley to the greater Conejo Valley. The community-at-large, which included the Jewish community grew by leaps and bounds, and we were there to welcome all these newly arrived Jews. The skill came from the lay leadership; individuals who had vision of what we could become.



“One decision that was made early was the desire to not become a "Bar Mitzvah Mill", only recruiting families with young children. We wanted to become



an extended family, and so we heavily recruited from the more settled populations. We even developed what we called the "*Shabbosmobile*" which, quite simply, were individuals who drove to Leisure Village in Camarillo, parked outside the gates at 7:00 PM, and waited to drive anybody who would show up to services, and of course return them at the end of the evening.

We offered lectures in the Village on a variety of topics in order to invite these people into our ranks. So what resulted was not a youth congregation (which tends to be erratic in membership patterns) but a multi-generational congregation. We had achieved the "extended family" goal that we wanted to be. I was more excited about the number of 3-generational families in our membership than I was about the size of the religious school or of the overall membership.

“Congregations, like individuals, have life cycles. I was privileged and honored to serve Temple Adat Elohim for 21 years of transitional growth.”

In the words of Robin Hirsch...

“In 1987, my wife, Elisa, and I, along with two elementary school aged children, Esther and Elliot, bought our home in Westlake Village. It was June and we had the summer to find a temple and a Hebrew school. I had been raised conservative and my wife reform and after a small bit of research the choice was obvious: Etz Chaim or Adat Elohim. We visited them both, saw a service and the choice was unanimous; we loved Adat Elohim.

“This was not a physical choice. Etz Chaim had the beautiful sanctuary and Adat Elohim had an oddly shaped, A-framed building with plastic orange chairs, but there was something about the feeling when you walked in the door. Rabbi Greenbaum exuded warmth and kindness like no other rabbi we had ever met. Cantor Anatole had that classic cantor voice that could put chills down your spine with its soaring melodies. We just felt comfortable there. So we joined Temple Adat Elohim.

“The rest, as they say is history. Temple Adat Elohim was the place where we went to pray. We celebrated our kids’ bat/bar mitzvahs there. We are among the group that attended High Holiday services in various churches in the Conejo Valley. Yes, we listened to many a Kol Nidre trying to ignore the cross in the church where our congregation met because our synagogue was much too small to accommodate our numbers. Somehow, it never really mattered. There was Rabbi Greenbaum and there was Cantor Anatole, and wherever they were, there was Temple Adat Elohim.

“I joined the Torah Study group after dropping by one morning while waiting for my daughter to be finished with her bat mitzvah class. I never left and have been a part of that esteemed group for 17 years. I even got to share the class with my dad, Sam, during the few years he lived out here after my mom passed.

“Rabbi Greenbaum was there to help us celebrate our simchas and he was there to comfort us in our times of bereavement. He was there to offer sage advice and help us through several family crises’ with his common sense approach to life. And so for us, even as temple life takes new turns, new bends in the river, every time I sit in the beautiful sanctuary I can see the orange chairs, the simple wooden ark and feel the warmth of my memories wash over me. There is Rabbi Greenbaum and there is Cantor Anatole and there is Temple Adat Elohim.

## THE 1990s

And so the river flowed into a new decade, the 1990s.

Temple Adat Elohim entered the 1990s with great energy and optimism. The entire Conejo Valley was filled with many new housing developments. The Las Virgenes and Ventura County school districts were attracting many families escaping the shortcomings of the massive LA Unified. Besides, with Rabbi Greenbaum, Cantor Anatole and an award winning educational program, the congregation of Temple Adat Elohim now boasted close to 500 families in its membership.

Michelle and Richard Jackman and their two children were typical newcomers in the early 1990s. They would also go on to become very involved in temple life with Michelle serving as President in 1999 - 2001.

In the words of Michelle Jackman...

“In January 1991, our daughter started preschool at Temple Adat Elohim. Bringing her to school in the mornings and waiting for her outside the classrooms is where we met our new Jewish friends and neighbors. It is where we met the families that invited us into a Havurah; and in that Havarah is where we met some of the active board members of the temple. During our second year as members, I was invited to join the board of directors as a committee chair.”

Michelle became part of the new generation of temple leadership. More on that later. Before she had married and started raising a family with Richard, Michelle had worked as a television director. She met Rabbi Greenbaum and, well, I'll let her tell the story.

## THE GOLDEN AGE OF THEATER AT TAE

“Rabbi Greenbaum was interested in my television background and asked me to read a play, *“The Gates Are Closing.”* It was a play based on the High Holy Days liturgy. He asked me if I would like to mount it for the High Holidays that year. I didn't know too many members and

wasn't sure how to cast it. He gave me a list of congregants who he thought had the acting bug. The first name on the list was Michael Lotker. Michael served on the board of directors, but we weren't friends, yet. I made my calls and was able to cast the show. The show was staged in the sanctuary on Silchot in 1992. Michael Lotker had the lead. It was a huge success. We filled the room to capacity: 200 people attending Silchot that year.

"The next Purim, we did the *"Great Robbery At Greenbaum Gulch."* This was a *'schpeil'* telling the story of the Shooshan Indians. Coming from a musical/variety background, I wanted to add music to the show. Getting to know Michael Lotker was the answer. Michael is a natural lyricist. I put together a list of well-known country/western songs and Michael rewrote the lyrics to tell the story of Purim. Tons of fun! After that there was the Hanukkah show, *"Miracles Aren't Just Magic,"* taken from Debbie Friedman's music, with Michael Lotker as the 2000-Year-Old Man. *"The Heart of the Matter,"* was an original multi-media event that I wrote and conceived for the following



Silchot. The next in a number of shows was the *"Beatle's Hanukkah,"* coinciding with the release of The Beatles Anthology in 1995. That show had a four-piece rock band, including the rabbi and cantor, doing the Beatle songs with Michael Lotker's fabulous Hanukkah lyrics.



A friend of mine, who is a costumer for the movies, made the Sgt. Pepper costumes for our band. Marilyn Fine, an art teacher in the congregation, replicated the album cover as a backdrop. We had dancing dreidels and a latka conga line. The shows were an opportunity to involve so many congregants as singers, dancers and participants in some great productions during this time. Rabbi Greenbaum coined the nineties as

the 'Golden Age of Theater' at Temple Adat Elohim."

By the way, Michael Lotker became Rabbi Michael Lotker and is currently rabbi at Temple Ner Ami in Camarillo.

Now let's get back to our river. Much as a river rushes towards the ocean, the 1990s saw our river rushing towards a specific destination. Temple Adat Elohim was growing very quickly and the little A-frame sanctuary was simply too small to accommodate the needs of the congregation. We have already mentioned that High Holiday services had to be held in area churches. We had no social hall, no youth lounge, and very limited office space. Clearly

something needed to be done and once again from amidst the congregation a group of determined people rose to the challenge.

### “BUILD IT...THEY WILL COME”

While the need for a new sanctuary had been discussed for years, many credit the beginning of the effort that actually brought it into being to the presidential term of Lynne Robbins. In 1988, Lynne appointed temple member Marc Malovany to chair an architectural committee, which also included Pamela Rishfeld, Bobbie Berg, Max Strauss, and Joel Meyer. Slowly but surely a plan began to emerge.

In the words of Marc Malovany...

“It was in 1988. I think it was the second High Holidays of Lynn Robbins’ presidency. We were still at the Mormon Church. During her speech, she spoke of getting involved and talked about the need to build a building on the existing land. Having been a member at my former temple in the valley for 10+ years and never having done a thing other than go to services, I thought it was time to get involved. It took several phone calls and I finally got directed to the Future Directions committee. The FD committee had no real direction but when it became clear that the board really did want to pursue the new building, we started gathering information. As it happens every two years, it was time for a new

board. I was on the search committee to find a someone to replace me. When I couldn’t find anyone to take my place, I resigned from the search committee, so that I could continue. My sole project was to bring the building to reality. We did some surveys, interviewed architects and eventually came to the board with an estimate for the cost of developing plans and a recommendation of who we wanted to do that. The fund-raising committee found the money and soon we hired the architect, Ron Goldman, to draw up plans. During the plan-creation stage, I had a committee of about 4 or 5 people who visited other synagogues, talked with everyone and made decisions about the basic design; we met with the architect from time to time and made adjustments. Being the head of the committee, I also was on a few sub-committees, so we also interviewed caterers to see if we could find one that we liked and was willing to invest in our new kitchen.



Eventually, plans were completed, models built, and then we waited for money.”

Bob Murray picks up the story. Bob was a big part of the effort to find money within the congregation to pay for the construction of the sanctuary and social hall.

In the words of Bob Murray...

“In 1989, President Marty Ricks assembled a committee, chaired by Richard Newman, which was charged with the task of determining how much money was needed and how to raise the necessary funds to address the congregation’s wishes. Mike Sobelman, Robert Murray, Sandy Bistrow and Robert Finestone joined the other members on the committee. It became painfully obvious that the committee was well represented by accounting and legal types, but lacked the dynamic marketing/sales personality to execute the fundraising necessary to fund the sanctuary/social hall. The committee sought and interviewed various professional fundraising groups, ultimately selecting the Mark Randall firm to do a feasibility study. The results of the study estimated that \$1,800,000-\$2,000,000 potentially could be raised.”

Richard Newman was president of the temple from 1991-1993. He describes what happened next. “Although the recession of the late 80s and early 90s mandated tight fiscal constraints so that cash flows would permit continued operation of the temple, there were many rewarding achievements during this period of our evolution. Our architects, Goldman, Firth, and the construction committee worked hard with the Thousand Oaks Planning Commission and finally got our construction plan approved in early September, 1991.”

A few weeks later, on Sunday, September 22, 1991, the official groundbreaking was held. It was a hot, sunny day. Rabbi Greenbaum stood in the dry, dusty field a shovel in his hand. I can still remember the joy on Rabbi Greenbaum’s face as he pushed aside a shovel full of dirt then pumped his fist into the air with excitement. That shovel has been preserved and on it is an inscription that reads, Turning our field of dreams into a house of prayer for all people.”



Rabbi Greenbaum remembers, “We knew that we needed a facility that was both aesthetically pleasing and functionally supportive of the programs we wanted in the

congregation.

“There were so many from the membership who stepped forward offering large amounts of money or their skills which were considerable, or their time which was valuable, and often a combination of those things. If I were to name individuals, I know I would leave out people who deserve to be named, so I will keep the reference to congregants general.”

### THE BUILDING OF THE SANCTUARY

It is not easy to build a temple and social hall. Money has to be raised, plans have to be made and a consensus has to be found. There is no “how to” book that can help you. Six more years would pass following the groundbreaking before the sanctuary was complete. So that empty lot that Mort Rosenthal had spearheaded the effort to buy sat patiently, growing weeds, awaiting the day. Finally, during the presidential term of Zelda Finestone, of blessed memory, a pivotal board meeting was held.

Congregant Hannah Grossman was at that meeting.



Hannah Grossman remembered, “We joined TAE in the fall of 1985 when we moved here from West L.A. We were delighted to be reunited with Rabbi Greenbaum, whom we were with in Memphis. The congregation was rich in delightful individuals with wonderful hearts. The congregation was poor in finances. We remember one meeting where we considered putting the mortgage payment on our collective credit cards. We realized the potential of TAE and the need for a proper sanctuary to attract even more families to watch our Reform Jewish community grow. I had the privilege to be on the board when it was voted: to build it, they will come! We didn’t have the money to finish a sanctuary and social hall, but we had the spirit.

“Our modern day Moses was Bob Murray. He came with a plan to have a fundraising drive and build the current sanctuary. Our two families committed the initial monies and then set out to convince others to overextend, as well. Some with considerable resources were unwilling, and others with less were more than willing.”

Bob Murray recalls, “Ultimately, in late 1991, the decision was made to terminate the contract with Randall, a professional money raiser, and go it alone with temple members only. I chaired the committee along with Bernie and Audrey Benesch, Robert and Zelda Finestone, Marty Ricks, Lynne Robbins, Gary and Joan Davidson, and Drs Hannah and Robert Grossman as the most active members. An attempt was made to contact all members of the congregation to solicit financial assistance. Rabbi Greenbaum and temple leadership led the way in a capital fundraising campaign that ultimately raised an amazing number of pledges which reached about \$1,400,000.”

Finally, in 1994, a construction committee headed by David Blankstein was formed and work began. It was a slow and arduous task. Money was very tight. There were many, many, many congregants who put in literally thousands of volunteer hours to push this project to completion.

Ken Bock was on that construction committee and ultimately served a key roll in the construction of the sanctuary.



Ken Bock’s construction recollections, “I was recruited by David

Blankstein to be the temple’s on-site project manager for the construction of the sanctuary and social hall. I joined other professionals who made this building a reality; Stuart Rose, Mike Sobelman, Larry Levine, Ed Lewin, and Pete Reinisch. When I got involved, the concrete was not yet poured for the foundation of the new building and there was a lot of upset because of the grading, compacting and unexpected cost of installing a sewer line through our property and the one behind us.

“Architects Goldman & Associates drew up the blue prints and prior committees did a lot of work. In our infinite wisdom, and mostly because it was important to save money, we decided to finish the structure without the architect. This could not have been done without the help of David Blankstein, who watched the finances, Len Polan, architect and the interior design committee; all temple volunteers.

“One of the first things we did was interview contractors for the job. We eventually hired Carignan Construction. Larry Carignan was a contractor who could “value engineer,” and felt it was God’s plan that he be involved in this work. He turned out to be a good partner.”



“Len and I, with David’s reluctant acquiescence, made many decisions about the structure because blue prints and reality didn’t always live in the same world.

“I was on the phone with David a lot. A few issues come to mind. The blue prints called for the sound room to be

where the clergy room is now. That made no sense, so we had it moved to its current location. The pews were laid out to be symmetrical in the room; there was no place for the choir to sing. So we extended the concrete to make a platform for the band and choir. Originally, there was no money for a stage in the social hall, so we built it anyway. The plans called for about eight outlets in the building, we fixed that. Money was so tight. Originally we were not going to buy pews because they cost about \$28,000. We were supposed use the orange chairs from the other building; but, the Interior Committee prevailed.

“While we were concerned about building a house, the Interior Committee was formed to make it a home. I was the chairperson, which meant scheduling meetings for the group to get together. They included Michele Jackman, Jane Bubar, Sharlynn Schulner, Hannah Grossman, Max Straus, Pamela Rishfeld, Audrey Benesch, Charlotte Lewin and Randi Seigel. Many decisions had to be made, like what color carpet, the color of the trusses, the stone for the lobby, fixtures for the restroom, and the type and color of the pews. The list went on and on. After the building was complete, we discovered that the sanctuary and social hall were too loud because of the hard ceilings. Upon hiring an acoustic engineer, we applied a cellulose material to the ceiling to deaden the sound.



“Hannah Grossman headed a separate committee that dealt specifically with the kitchen. Should the kitchen be kosher, kosher light, full service or partial? Should we have multiple caterers or one? Who would that be? How were we going to pay for it? At one point Hannah stood up at a meeting and said, “if we can’t find a way to pay for the kitchen, I’ll put it on my credit card.” Good thing her husband Bob was not there. Adrian Stern eventually negotiated with our first caterer, Parties at Your Door, to finance the kitchen for us. Everyone did their part in big and small ways; like Adrian asking his neighbors to come over to his house to sit on one of three chairs to see which one they liked best for the social hall.

“After the decisions were made about the ordinary stuff, we hired professionals to design the ark, stained glass windows and courtyard.”



Michelle Jackman, “I served on the Interior Committee and later headed that committee as we made final plans for the sacred Ark and for the stained glass windows and other aesthetics decisions for the facility. The Interior Committee was looking at drawings for an Ark and I heard of a congregant, Deborah Goodman, who had a drawing that they thought I should see. I really liked her concept for the Ark, which would symbolize the Tree of Life and windows that would depict the parting of the Red

Sea. I brought Rabbi Greenbaum to Deborah’s home to take a look. He, too, liked the concept. We went to Bill Coleman, a local woodworking artist, who had created our lecterns and Torah table to build the Ark. We found a wonderful glass designer, Shawn Atari, who interpreted our Red Sea vision. In addition, Bill Coleman, made our beautiful Memorial Boards. In the courtyard, we laid the Jerusalem stone which created a path and came together at the fountain to symbolize *Tikkun Olam*, the ‘healing of the world’.



## RABBI DUBOWE



Amidst all of this activity and in anticipation of the growth that a new sanctuary was sure to generate, the temple hired its first full time associate rabbi, Rabbi Rebecca Dubowe, following her tenure at Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple in New Brunswick, N.J., where she served as associate rabbi for four years.

In the words of Rabbi Dubowe, “My first memory of Temple Adat Elohim happened in the spring of 1997 when I came for an interview with Rabbi Greenbaum. I walked into the courtyard and I looked to the right and saw the administration building and then I looked to the left where the brand new sanctuary had not yet opened. I met Rabbi Greenbaum in his office that

overlooked the preschool playground. Standing by Rabbi Greenbaum's office, I saw many bright orange chairs set up for services and on the bema there were these beautiful stained glass windows and wooden ark. If one took a step further on the bema, one would see the old baptismal tub that was built by the previous congregation. On both sides of the bema, there were two small little offices. Cantor Michael Anatole used one of them and eventually I used the other tiny one. It was quite surreal knowing that this building was truly holy as I walked by that baptismal everyday!"

I guess the interview went well. Rabbi Rebecca Dubowe was hired and came to work in August of 1997.

### THE COMPLETION OF THE SANCTUARY

Meanwhile, the building was going up next door. Momentum had shifted as excitement grew.

Hannah Grossman... "When Rabbi Greenbaum asked at the High Holidays for us not to have services one more year at the Lutheran Church down the block, the congregation responded with an amazing amount of money to complete the building. Indeed, the following year, we had High Holy Days in our new facility."



Rabbi Dubowe... "By August of 1997, excitement was buzzing everywhere as we got ready for the grand dedication of our new sanctuary that was going to take place prior to the High Holy Days."

Thirty years and six days after a small group of 36 families had gathered for a Friday night service amidst the oak trees of Hidden Trails, a new sanctuary rose majestically out of the ground, its white walls gleaming in the sun.

Michelle Jackman... “We planned the dedication of the new sanctuary for Sunday, September 28, 1997. It was a huge occasion. One of the loveliest moments, among many that afternoon, was when families who had donated \$10,000 or more, (remember, this is a project created by a community with no huge donation or endowment), carried the Torahs from our old sanctuary into the new sanctuary.”

Rabbi Dubowe... Community leaders, other rabbis and clergy were invited to join us as we posted a mezuzah on all of the doors to the synagogue. The shofar was blown and we all went in with complete awe of our new sanctuary.



Ken Bock and David Blankstein were also honored. As Ken remembers, “For me, one of the more memorable moments was when David and I were called up to the bema to receive a plaque as a token of the congregation’s appreciation for all the time we had put into the project. As soon as we were standing side-by-side, the room broke out into a loud chuckle. We understood the joke. David is 6’8” and I am 5’3”. That was the long and short of it!”

Also amidst the crowd were Ed Pauley and Bernie and Audrey Benesch, those original car-poolers, those original founders.

Ed Pauley, “In the beginning we were happy to get one or two families as members each month. I don’t think that any of the founding members could have imagined that one day we’d be standing here at the dedication of this beautiful sanctuary.”

Audrey Benesch, “I was in awe. I looked around in utter amazement. For us, thirty years ago, we never dreamt that this would be the result. I looked over at Bernie: Look what we started!!!!”

Indeed, look what they started.

In the words of then Congregation President Sandy Bistrow from the dedication book...



“Welcome to our beautiful new home... Temple Adat-Elohim is truly the ‘warm reform congregation’ of the Conejo. We welcome membership to all who wish to practice Reform Judaism. We have always been proud of the leadership role our Temple has assumed in both the Jewish and secular community. Now, with this beautiful new sanctuary and social hall, we can offer even more. We want our members to consider this facility an extension of their home, to be used for their spiritual needs as well as for celebrations. As we grow, Temple Adat Elohim will continue to share its resources with the entire community as our mission statement challenges us to “be a light unto the nation.”

Five days later, on October 1, 1997, for the first time in the 30-year history of Temple Adat Elohim, High Holy Day services were held in our own home. “My family and I were among the multitudes that attended those services,” related Hirsch. I am sure that the joy we felt was felt by every congregant walking through those doors. There was no cross, no Christian hymnals tucked into the pew racks. At last we had found the ‘sacred Jewish space’ that Rabbi Address had searched for back in Covenant House.”

Cantor Anatole, in his 23<sup>rd</sup> year as cantor when the new sanctuary was built, said, “We built a beautiful sanctuary and staffed our catering hall. It was true . . . we built it, and they came. ‘They’ were the over 300 members that swelled our rolls after we had finished the new *Beit Hamikdash*.”



Rabbi Dubowe, “Since that time, I have seen and watched many people come and go into this beautiful sanctuary. Babies have been blessed with their Hebrew names. Children have chanted Torah and become bar and bat mitzvah. Brides and grooms have walked down the aisles and eulogies have been eloquently spoken of those whom have died. The sounds of music have touched many, the passion of teaching Torah from the clergy and the squeals of delight heard by the children during Tot Shabbat makes this sanctuary truly a special place.”



As the High Holiday services wound to a close in 1997, everyone close to the temple, though elated, was faced with the realization that there was still much work ahead.

## 1998

And so as the river rolled on to the year 1998, there were more changes in temple life.

Most significant was that Cantor Michael Anatole, after serving as our cantor for 24 years, announced that he was leaving. For most of us he had been the only musical voice of Temple Adat Elohim that we had ever known. His rich sound had always added so much to all of our religious services. He had taught our kids their bar/bat mitzvah lessons. He had just always been there. A gala concert was held on Sunday June 28, 1998, as our congregation said goodbye.

Cantor Anatole, "I served TAE for 24 years, until 1998, so it would be quite impossible for me to really reminisce in a few short paragraphs. Suffice to say that, during my time with you as cantor, the temple grew from 80 to nearly 800 and became *the* Reform temple in east Ventura County. I would not presume to take the credit for the growth, but it was exciting to be there when it happened!"

Shortly thereafter we welcomed Cantor Peter Halperin, who had recently returned to this country from the Netherlands. He was kind enough to send us his thoughts and memories. In the words of Cantor Peter...

"I was looking to return to the states to serve my first American congregation as an invested cantor. I came to Thousand Oaks and was greeted by sun, by friendliness, by people who enjoyed their lives and each other. I had the first glimpses then of what I knew would be a happy life, and I joined them several months later. The next years would grow to be filled with laughter, harmony, affection and a gratitude to God. As I think back over those years, I will never forget the innocence of a growing congregation with a good heart. Rabbi Alan's gentle grace and Rabbi Rebecca's deep sense of the Eternal set the tone for a staff that was always special, even as it evolved. I will always remember Michele Jackman's passion and vision, Bob Murray's humble respect, sincerity and devotion. One year, Rabbi Alan had an idea to offer the congregation a creative Rosh Hashana service and the clergy team set to work. It was so satisfying to see the fruits of our labor of love in action as we watched and listened to the enthusiasm and waves of people participating fully. One musical memory is the Moscow Male Jewish Choir and the committee that brought them to Thousand Oaks. My two-week-old Nathan and I came to temple for our baby shower just as their buses arrived. What a scene: 22 Russian Jews meeting their host families and confusingly entertained by this cantor arriving

with a baby. And what a weekend it was, from the fabulous Friday evening with them on the bema to Sunday's concert at the Canyon Club, all organized by our committee. It was quintessential Adat Elohim, creative, unique and with a "can-do" approach. When I think of temple, I smile and feel warm. It represents for me all that we can expect from life: a time of happiness, a gifted respite - all that can be meaningful, graceful and lovely. "Happy Birthday TAE on reaching 40. And as many of us well know... life begins at 40!"



Our current cantor, David Shukiar, was at Temple Adat Elohim at the time serving as choir director. He has fond memories of Cantor Halperin.

In the words of Cantor David Shukiar... "After Cantor Anatole left, we welcomed Cantor Peter Halpern to our community. I remember being so amazed and in awe of his musical ability and knowledge of Jewish music. I tried to become a sponge, absorbing all I could from his expertise and was so appreciative when he took me under his wing and gave me so many opportunities to learn, grow and experience many facets of synagogue life. It is because of his love and friendship that I decided to work towards becoming a cantor, and I owe my love for Jewish music and the cantorate to him. He continues to be a close friend and confidant, and a cherished colleague. He took the level of musical sophistication of Temple Adat Elohim to a new level, where we could truly experience the meaning of spirituality through our music and text."



Rabbi Greenbaum and the temple also began to address other temple needs as the staff transitioned from volunteer and part time positions to full time staff members.

Rabbi Alan Greenbaum... "We needed something else. We needed to grow as a staff in order to serve the needs of this growing Jewish community. Part-time positions needed to become full-time positions, and we needed to find professionals who could take the lead in areas that had been fully run by the board in past years. Beyond the professional skills, the people skills

were an important criterion for hiring new staff. That was a challenge. But we found just the right people to be the bridge from what we were to what we knew we had to become:

Neal Federman in the religious school and his successor, Marcy Goldberg  
 Susan Cohen in the youth department  
 Rabbi Rebecca Dubowe to oversee youth and adult education  
 Cantor Peter Halpern to expand our musical horizons  
 Beryl Strauss in preschool and her successor, Batsheva Spector, which occurred just after I left.

These were the professionals who were essential in that transitional period.”

## THE NEXT PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION

This growth meant that there more physical needs to be met. The temple had always been extremely short on office space. Now, with a whole new staff of full-time people, this issue had to be addressed. The obvious solution was to utilize the old A-frame chapel, so a plan was put into place to transform the old A-frame building into office space.



to

Michelle Jackman was temple president in 1999 and helped spearhead the project. “With the volunteer help temple members Bruce Parton, a congregant and contractor, and Deborah Goodman, a local artist who helped plan the interior decorating, we proceeded in 1999 to revamp the building. We added a second story, offices for our clergy, religious school director and preschool director, and a library. There was a youth lounge and reception area. The plans certainly made the most of every inch of space. During this construction phase, all the temple administration was done from the new Sanctuary; specifically the current clergy room and the Shalom Room. Everyone worked together.”

By the time Michelle left office and Bob Murray took over in 2001, the building was complete.

And so the river continued to flow.

### 2001 - 2004

As the year 2001 rolled around, Temple Adat Elohim hit its full stride. For years, the temple had been held back by its lack of space, its lack of a fully functional sanctuary and social hall. With that need met, the temple could begin to concentrate on internal matters.

Rabbi Greenbaum, “The most difficult role to fill was one that had not existed in earlier years: administrator. I think that because it was a new position, we did not know fully what to look for in the candidates. The result was tumultuous. We hired and fired so many people! Each had wonderful strengths, but all failed to fully gain the confidence and secure the support of the board. When I look at the temple today, it seems that this cycle has ended and that the current executive director, Aliza Goland, has all the attributes to administratively carry the congregation into the future.”

By the year end of the year 2001, temple membership reached 750 families. Our High Holiday services were so large that an early service and a late service were organized in order to accommodate the entire congregation. Both services were packed. By then however, the explosion of the real estate market started to slow that growth. The high price of the housing market in the Conejo Valley made it difficult for new families to move into the area. This resulted in a bit of a plateau in the membership of Temple Adat Elohim, which of course translated into, once again, tough economic times. As always though we got through it.

One major highlight of this time period occurred in the year 2002. Rabbi Greenbaum used his High Holy Days Appeal to ask for funds to purchase one ambulance for the Israeli Mogen David. At that time, Israel was besieged by terrorist bombings so ambulances were in critical demand. The response of the congregation was incredible. So much money was raised that we were able to purchase two ambulances. These vehicles went into service emblazoned with the words “donated by the congregation of Temple Adat Elohim, Thousand Oaks, CA.” It was a very proud moment for everyone involved. Later that winter, a contingent of temple members traveled to Israel with Rabbi Greenbaum and was able to visit the



ambulances in Tel Aviv.

And so the river flowed. We had our beautiful sanctuary. A large and active congregation that was involved not only with religious matters, but also played an active role in providing social services for those less fortunate in the Conejo Valley regardless of their religion. “Manna” food drives, Habitat for Humanity, walking for Darfur, a homeless shelter were just a few of the activities that temple members participated in. All was good, all was peaceful amidst an atmosphere of stability; so much so that this seems to be the best place to drop in a couple of interesting side bars.



There are many activities that have become an integral part of temple life. I would love to take a moment in this history to digress from the main body of historical temple events to take a look at a couple of Temple Adat-Elohim institutions.



## TAE TORAH STUDY..... as described by Bob Grossmann

“During the Spring of 1985, Rabbi Greenbaum and I were discussing the fact that our temple did not have a regular group that reviewed the Torah text. I had come from a congregation in New Jersey where the Torah was studied every Saturday morning and wondered whether we could continue this learning experience here at TAE. At that time, there was no ongoing study group. Rabbi Greenbaum thought that it was a good idea, that he also enjoyed reviewing the text and that we would make this program available to the entire congregation. We would see what interest there was, and the program started with Genesis: ‘In the



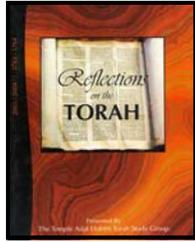
beginning.’ There were just a few congregants besides myself who attended the early sessions, including Michael Lotker and Gerri Wissot. The study session started as an every-other-week gathering for an hour, but quickly was expanded to weekly because of the interest of the group.

“Very early on, it became apparent that the participants were eager to learn as well as to share their feelings and opinions of the text being reviewed, so there were times when only a few sentences were tackled. As a result, the group slowly went through each paragraph, sentence, and, yes, at times, every word. The participants’ feelings and understanding of text began to grow and expand under Rabbi Geenbaum’s tutelage. The text used was and remains The Torah, A Modern Commentary, with commentary by W. Gunther Plaut et al. Additionally, Bob shared footnotes from the Pentateuch & Haftorahs, edited by Dr. J.H. Hertz and, at present, other Torah texts are also utilized to gain additional insights.

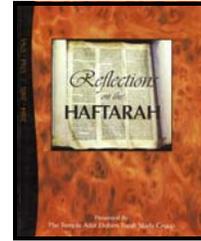
“The Torah study group finally completed the initial review of the Torah text on June 21, 1991, a period of 6 years from the start. Then an important question arose: what do we do next? Does the group want to start all over again, does it want to go on to other texts, or should we just stop? Initially, the group decided to continue in the Tanakh, the rest of the writings in the Jewish Bible. After a while, the group decided that it was more interested in going back to the Five Books of Moses, so we went back to ‘the garden’ and started anew. Rabbi Rebecca Dubowe became part of our temple and was also a teacher of our study group, sharing the duties with Rabbi Greenbaum. The second reading and review was completed on August 30, 2003, this time taking 12 years. This time through, however, the group was more knowledgeable, and the questions, insights and sharing of thoughts became more in depth and contemplative. Rabbi Ted Riter joined our temple, taking over the reins from Rabbi Greenbaum, and quickly added additional information for the group to discover in the text. The latest reading of the Torah was completed on October 27, 2003, in just 4 years. Once again came the question as to whether the group wanted to continue or to return once again to the start of text. The decision was to renew our study with creation; so the group has started its journey once more. It is amazing and inspirational that with each review of the text, new insights become apparent and a greater appreciation of our tradition surfaces. As has been noted before by sages and scholars that the study of Torah is like peeling an onion, ever so slowly peeling, layer by layer. It is these insights and major discoveries that keep the regulars of the group, from 25 to 30 people, continuing to attend, to study and to participate.



“During the years 2002 and 2004, the group participants, under the inspiration and leadership of Rabbi Greenbaum, undertook the challenge of putting together their own written commentaries



of the Torah. Individual congregants took the responsibility of sharing their insights for each of the weekly Parashahs and to compose their own commentary of each section, with Lisa Bock as our editor-in chief. The first edition of Reflections on the Torah was published in October, 2004, and was dedicated to Dr. Bill Greenbaum, of blessed memory a Torah Group participant and Rabbi Greenbaum's father. A second written



commentary by the study group was the Reflections on the Haftarah, which was completed in June, 2005, once again under the leadership of Lisa Bock, and was dedicated to Rabbi Alan Greenbaum.

Torah Study at Temple Adat Elohim remains a viable, informative, inspirational, soul-searching experience. Comments by participants on individual sections being read are always welcome and are an expected part of the session. The group continues to widen its knowledge of the

Torah, Jewish history and customs. Most recently, Lisa Bock and Ken Elman have started a Talmud study group that is getting to understand the writings and commentaries in these expansive works. All are welcome to come and join both of these wonderful groups of people each Saturday morning before services. We will leave a seat for you.”



Gigi Dictor has been a Torah Study member for over 17 years, “My husband, Rick, my three month old Elijah and I joined TAE right before High Holy Days in 1999. During those first Rosh Hashanah services I needed to take Elijah to the Shalom room and it turned out to be a serendipitous decision. Many others were in there too, and I struck up a conversation with fellow new mom, Melissa Park. During our conversation I learned that she attended Torah study, something I had always wanted to do. I told her I wished I could join her, but I couldn't leave the baby yet. She told me she brought her baby with her, and the other students were fine with it. So the next Shabbat, baby and gear in tow, I went to my first Torah study. I was greeted with warmth, and indeed, bringing the baby was no problem. That was over eight years ago, and I've been going religiously ever since (pardon the pun). On the few Saturdays that I don't go, I feel like something is missing. It has been such a joy and blessing to me. I've met so many interesting and wonderful people, made good friends, gotten to know the rabbis better, and I've learned so much, and look forward to learning and studying for years to

come. It also lead me to teach in the religious school and join the Religious Practices Committee. I feel very blessed to be a member of TAE.”

## THE CHOIR

Our temple’s choir has had many starts and stops over the years, but music has always been an important element in the fabric of our religious worship. The current choir seems to have stuck. Actually, it is now in its 23<sup>rd</sup> year. Again, Bob Grossmann has also been involved with the choir for all of those years and he was kind enough to tell the story.

“When my wife, Judy, and I joined the temple in spring, 1985, the only music was the beautiful melodies chanted by Cantor Michael Anatole during the worship services on Friday evenings, Saturdays when there was a Bar or Bat Mitzvah service, and during the High Holidays. Judy and I had been involved with the choir at our temple in the east. We wondered if a choir could also become a part of worship services here at Temple Adat Elohim. There had been several attempts previously, but it hadn’t worked out. During a visit to Rabbi Greenbaum’s house, while singing songs on the floor of their living room, the subject of a choir was mentioned and the rabbi thought that it would be wonderful if a choir would also participate during services. The question was, how to get interested people involved and who would direct and teach the choir. The matter was then put aside for the time being.”



Before the Rosh Hashanah services in 1986 being held at the Mormon Stake Center in Newbury Park, Bob asked Rabbi Greenbaum whether it would be possible to have a few people sing some familiar Jewish songs while the torahs were being marched around the sanctuary and the Rabbi agreed. This was the very start of the TAE. Adult Choir, Judy and Bob as well as Gerri Wissot.

Somehow, money was found, Cantor Anatole welcomed the idea and the music specialist who was working with the school children took over as our first music director. Rehearsals were weekly and the choir participated at monthly Friday Shabbat services as well as at one of the High Holiday services. The initial musical pieces were simple, familiar melodies sung

accompanied by a piano or guitar, and participation by the congregation was encouraged.

As time progressed, the music that the choir sang became more complex, with four part harmony and acappella pieces being introduced. The choir slowly increased in size to over 20 people. Rehearsals were held weekly for an hour and a half, and for High Holiday rehearsal, twice a week for 2 hours each. In 1997, David Shukiar became our choir director and in addition to teaching us and conducting, he also arranged some choral pieces for us to sing. Light blue robes were acquired and were worn for both Friday Shabbat services and for the High Holiday Services. The choir participated in our temple's Music Festival at the Thousand Oaks Civic Center fund raiser. During the Chanukah holidays in 1998, the choir went to the Motion Picture Home in Woodland Hills to sing appropriate songs of the season to the senior citizen residents. For many years, the members of the choir have participated in the Conejo Valley Ecumenical Services at Thanksgiving time, along with members of the choruses of several local churches.

When Cantor Peter Halpern started in 1998, he brought to the choir more of the traditional music as well as a piece that he wrote, a rendition of V'Shamru. With the growth of our congregation, two separate holiday services were necessary to service the needs of all of our families. The choir was asked to participate at both of these services with the clergy. We hope that the choir added to the spirituality of these holy days. Under Cantor Halpern, the Band of Milk and Honey was started with congregants as the musicians. The choir and the band both participated during the Friday Shabbat Services and the congregation truly appreciated their efforts. Two years ago, David Shukiar rejoined us to lead our congregation as our cantor. The Band has now joined the choir for the High Holiday Services for the past two years. Cantor Shukiar has also started a junior choir, Shirei Elohim, for our school children.

Our present choir director is Dr. Raymond Egan, with a background as a composer, arranger and conductor. Under Dr. Egan's tutelage, the choir is now adding to their varied repertory of choral music, and mastering musical pieces written and arranged by Cantor Shukiar as well as many of the significant Jewish choral music composers. In 2007, the choir had their first retreat where we brought all of our talents, energies and enthusiasm to develop a greater sense of self. One of the results was our Music Blessing:

Bless our music family  
Which encourages and supports glorious harmony,  
Loving and caring community,  
And a mutual blend of hearts and voices  
In our sacred task of spiritually elevating  
Our community through music.

## IN THE YEAR 2005

I remember when I first heard the rumor that Rabbi Greenbaum was going to step down. It was a feeling of incredulity. No way, we all thought. We all expected Rabbi Greenbaum to be there for our grandchildren's bar/bat mitzvahs. Then the rumor was confirmed and I remember the shock and feeling of uncertainty. How will this change the temple's dynamic?



This occurred during the presidency of Gloria Meyerson. She had to face the difficult task of handling this great transition. Fortunately, she rose to the task and handled these events with grace and calm.

Rabbi Dubowe..."Of course I was saddened to hear of Rabbi Greenbaum's decision to leave the congregation however I fully respect and admire his decision. He was a wonderful mentor for me and I greatly appreciate the seven years that we had together at TAE."

And so for the first time in 21 years, a search committee had to be formed. Led by Karen Persichetti and Larry Levine, résumés were received and interviews were conducted. It should be noted that Larry Levine, past president, was on the search committee that brought Rabbi Greenbaum to our temple. When all was said and done the decision was made to hire a young rabbi named Ted Riter, who had been serving the Jewish community of San Diego's north county at Temple Solel in Encinitas.

In the words of Rabbi Ted Riter, "When Rabbi Greenbaum announced his departure, the lay leadership recognized that after more than two decades of stable leadership, they held the responsibility of ensuring a smooth transition. With Rabbi Greenbaum's encouragement, congregants and the congregation itself began a process of evaluating their own needs so that they could find the appropriate successor, knowing that they would never truly find a replacement for their rabbi and friend. After months of focus groups and institutional introspection, the synagogue called for a senior rabbi who would lead the community into the future. Specifically, the congregation sought to bring in a rabbi who would have the energy, foresight and ability to



set a new common direction for the synagogue, inspire new programming, and help the synagogue adapt to the modern Reform Movement.

“In 2005, I answered the call from TAE and accepted the position as senior rabbi. I recognized immediately that I had enormous shoes to fill, both in terms of the space left by Rabbi Greenbaum and the many and varied interests of the congregants. My hope, upon beginning my tenure, was to move slowly and learn more about the community. In the first year, Corey and I had a calendar full of “meet-the-rabbi and *rebbitzzen*” events. We visited with one to three *havurot* each weekend, met with all of the auxiliaries, and generally tried to be everywhere. However, we found that the common adage to “make haste slowly” was not achievable. On the one hand, there was a great excitement within the synagogue to see significant changes and we did not want to lose this momentum. Adding to this was the urgent need to bring cohesiveness to the various interests of the synagogue, structure to the ritual practices and a higher level of sophistication to the governance and administration of the synagogue. On the other hand, there were those still mourning the departure of Rabbi Greenbaum and the synagogue they once knew before the great growth of the 90s.”

On June 25, 2005, the congregation gathered one last time to say good-bye to Rabbi Greenbaum. Our daughter Esther was getting married the Sunday of that same weekend and Rabbi Greenbaum was there to perform the ceremony. This was actually his last official act for Temple Adat Elohim. We said good-bye amidst the mazel tovs and appetizers, but you never really say good-bye to someone who has meant so much to you and your family. Rabbi Greenbaum will forever be in our family’s thoughts as well, I am sure, in the thoughts of all of us at Temple Adat Elohim whose lives he touched.

One year later, in July of 2006, there was yet another major change as Cantor Peter Halperin left and was replaced by Cantor David Shukiar, who, as I mentioned, had served previously as choir director.

Ken Bock was congregation president at this time and recalls the events that led to Cantor David’s hiring. A little back-story ... “When it became clear that Cantor Halperin was not going to be staying, it occurred to me that yet another search committee would need to be formed. Timing was important and I did not know how everything was going to fall into place. I called Cantor Shukiar who I had not spoken to in five years and asked him to lunch. At Mimi’s Café in Thousand Oaks, we picked up where we had left off. The more we talked, the better I felt about asking him if he was happy at his current temple. David said he was and in fact was in negotiation for a long-term contract there. I suggested that he put off making a decision as long as possible and we would be in touch. As it turned out, a search committee was needed and

Cantor Shukiar threw his kippa in the ring with many other candidates from around the world. Who wouldn't want to live in Thousand Oaks, CA! At the end of the day, the committee led by Neil Federman and Ken Elman with more than 20 volunteers decided that Cantor Shukiar was the best fit for our temple. They got it right."

Cantor Shukiar describes his return and has some interesting thoughts on the future... "In July 2006, I stepped into my role as cantor of Temple Adat Elohim. A dream come true for me, I walked into my new office flooded with the memories of my years here before. When I walked into the sanctuary, I was overwhelmed with memories of the warmth created during our services. I truly was at home again.



"My goals were simple. I wanted to take the rich musical tradition of Temple Adat Elohim and help to create a sound and style that is uniquely ours. I wanted the music of Temple Adat Elohim to reflect the warmth of the community, to allow each person to experience a deeper, personal connection to our liturgy through our music. I wanted people to become active participants, singing and praying with me rather than listening to me pray for them. I believe the true strength of a community comes from doing things together. We had some work to do, as the adult choir had decreased in size down to about 8 singers and the junior choir was no longer active.

"During the past two years, we have worked hard to strengthen our musical voice. We combined the Band of Milk and Honey and adult choir to facilitate one musical Shabbat service each month that truly has elevated our spiritual experience. We hired Dr. Raymond Egan as our newest choir director, and he has brought his selfless love of music and high level of expertise to our community. The choir has grown to more than 25 singers; more than tripling the number we started with 2 short years ago. The band has begun to play during our High Holy Days experiences, joining forces with our choir to bring a new and deeper meaning to the music of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We started *Shirei Elohim*, our junior choir, and now enjoy 30 children singing and helping our community to pray during our family Shabbat



services. We have even started a teen band, which will one day be a monthly fixture at our family Shabbat services. We have brought in *Kirtan*, ancient Indian chanting, to our worship experiences and have formed *Kirtan Elohim*, our musical ensemble that helps to facilitate chant and meditation. We have introduced more than 100 new pieces of music that are unique to Adat Elohim, each arranged and composed to suit our choir, band and community, each with the sound and style that has now begun to define our music.

“What will people be saying 40 years from now? I hope that we will continue to evolve as a community and that our music and worship will evolve to continue to serve the needs of our congregation. I hope that people will feel like they can safely pray for themselves, singing and dancing with the various choirs, bands and ensembles to help them find that deeper meaning in their worship. I hope that the Temple Adat Elohim sound continues to develop, sustaining our unique and special voice among the community. I hope that our choirs once again outgrow the “new choir areas” that we find for them. I hope that we continue to mix the traditional sounds of our history with the contemporary sounds that allow everyone to find music that speaks to him or her. It is an honor for me to be a part of this new and exciting voice. It is an honor for me to take my place among the rich musical tradition of Temple Adat Elohim. I look forward to creating the history of our future together.”



This pretty much brings us up to date as of June 1, 2008. At this point I will turn our history over to Rabbi Ted Riter. With 40 years of history and tradition to draw upon, Rabbi Riter has a wonderful perspective on both where we came from and where we are going. My fondest wish is that future generations always treasure these wonderful memories.

In the words of Rabbi Ted Riter, “Transformation, rather than change, has been the theme for these first three years. Our religious services are alive with song and celebration as we embrace new melodies and liturgy, styles of worship and a new prayer book, *Mishkan T’filah*. Rituals are more in line with the modern Reform Movement and there is consistency in our practice.

“Clergy involvement has greatly increased with a strong presence in our ECC, Religious School, auxiliaries, committees and even administration. Our ECC and *Mishpaha* parents’ group are thriving. Our social action program has evolved to be a model for other synagogues.



Our bookkeeping and administration are running smoothly and efficiently. And, our professional staff is functioning as a unified team.

“In 2006, we began providing *Synaplex Shabbatot* for the synagogue. *Synaplex* is a nationwide initiative from *STAR (Synagogues: Transformation and Renewal)*, which has helped us understand and present Shabbat in a whole new way. On *Synaplex* evenings, we may conduct a traditional Friday night service, but we also provide a multitude of other worship, study and social opportunities. These *Synaplex* evenings have been well received and draw in congregants and unaffiliated Jews by the hundreds.

“2007- 2008 have also been important years for planning for our future. The synagogue has engaged a group of congregants under the banner of *Kadima*, a long range planning task force, to help us focus on our journey ahead. Through surveys, focus groups and intense study of our community, the *Kadima* task force is crafting a new mission and vision for the synagogue and guiding us in steps to reach our new goals.

“In 2007, we were chosen as one of seven congregations in the greater L.A. area to participate in the *Re-Imagine* program. *Re-Imagine* starts with the recognition that our educational system is based upon a model that is now 100 years old and may no longer serve our needs. A group of two-dozen TAE congregants and staff are “re-imagining” our educational program from the ground up. This 18-month, guided exercise will transform how we educate our children, how we involve entire families in the educational process and how we see ourselves as a congregation of life-long learners.

“With all of our success in proceeding with our transformation, we cannot ignore the fact that in the years 2005-2007, our community painfully said goodbye to five past presidents of TAE: Lawrence Schulner, Marilyn Rosenthal, Bernard Benesch, Zelda Finestone, and Edwin Pauley. These were the first presidents in the history of TAE to pass away and their deaths are still felt in our synagogue.

“As we celebrate our 40<sup>th</sup> year, we stand at a pivotal time for our congregation. We are no longer the nascent congregation that sprung from humble beginnings. We are no longer a small community in the suburban hinterland. Instead, today we are a major player in the Los Angeles Jewish community. Our acclaimed Early Childhood Center is the home to more award-winning teachers than any other in the greater LA area. Our Religious School is one of seven elite schools participating in a groundbreaking educational revolution. We are recognized for our social action activities and awarded for our outreach programs. We are lauded for our groundbreaking work with *Kadima*.

It is with great pride that I serve TAE as the senior rabbi at this important time in our community's history. Together, we honor our past and those who paved the way for us. Together, we commit ourselves to meeting the challenges and needs of today and tomorrow. Together, we embrace our future.”

This begins the effort to tell the story of the first 40 years of Temple Adat-Elohim. Of course, the river keeps on flowing on and on into the future. It is my hope that this document will be not only preserved, but also added to from time to time.

My fondest wish is that future generations always treasure these wonderful memories.

My mother, Rose, of blessed memory would say....Happy 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary Temple Adat Elohim... You should live and be well !!!!!

And let us all say Amen.

If you would like to submit a story to our temple historian please email Robin Hirsch at [grandeel@earthlink.net](mailto:grandeel@earthlink.net).

I would like to thank Robin Hirsch and Bob Grossmann for acting as historians in this endeavor, Jan Iscovich for editing, Audrey Benesch for keeping scrapbooks since 1967 and all those who contributed their personal stories. - Ken Bock. Updates to our history can be found on our temple website at [www.adatelohim.com](http://www.adatelohim.com).

