

A Chapel Unique
Dedication of Milton and Corinne Livingston Chapel
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Temple Israel
Omaha, Nebraska
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The origins of things are always mysterious. The diligent search for beginnings, especially in the saga of human life, brings us much knowledge, but also to a profound sense of wonderment.

No sooner do we have the satisfaction of discovery, than more remote influences lures us further. The fact is that behind every disclosure of reason there is the unexplainable.

Put another way, all truth, in whatever field, leads inevitably to God. We cannot isolate the meaning of even the most significant moment in a self contained vessel because no experience is ever completely understandable in itself. Our history is like a great mosaic with no outer limits, no final frame. So each episode of our lives relates to others and becomes one more interlocking segment to compose the total pattern of the great design. That is why the smallest act or thought has in it the hint of cosmic proportions. It might be said that the story of the lovely Milton and Corinne Livingston Chapel had its beginning in the dreams of those who found our former Chapel dull in artistic treatment, too small to accommodate our worshippers. We must say that the fulfillment of those dreams and the beautiful completion of the Chapel were accomplished by Milton Livingston, and his graciousness, his generosity, his devotion to this congregation and, above all, the tender expression of love for his ever lamented wife, Corinne.

All of this is obviously and completely true.

These deep and abiding sentiments have deeper roots and more distant beginnings. The motivations which brought this chapel into being would never have stirred in any heart had we not all been caught up in the force of our immediate and our long gone past as faithful Jews.

We think first of rabbis and laymen alike, who, from the human beginnings of our congregation, preached faithfully the word of God. Even this leaves the spiritually sensitized Jew unsatisfied.

To speak to us of a generation or two is like excerpting an hour or a day from a man's life and characterizing him by that brief moment alone. To do such would be, as far as it goes, accurate, but unfair, true but incomplete. We Jews twist and turn in the constraints of any single event considered by itself. We need, we demand relatedness. For only in relatedness is there measured the continuity of our purpose, our reason for existence, our insistent response to something beyond the desperate brevity of life, that justifies the years from birth to the grave.

We are not good tragic existentialists. Even at his very best and worst, the Jew strains to peer at the world through the eye of God, as it were, even if only to get a glimpse of the large vista of the marvelous course of humanity's experience, of which his own is a tiny, but indispensable fragment.

Down through the ages at every great moment of experience and at each recurrent remembrance of it, has come in one form or another the cry:

"Remember the days of old

Consider the years of many generations

Ask Thy Father, and he will declare unto Thee

Thine elders and they will tell Thee."

History courses through the life stream of the Jew nourishing his mind and heart and soul. History is man's story and history is, for Judaism, God in action. History is testimony to truth and our history as so magnificently displayed in our new Chapel bears the irrefutable running argument against the futility of life and scorns the surrender of man's integrity and his immortal soul.

Look well at our Chapel! Where now was its beginning?

Better to ask where and when was the first time a man sought to fashion a lovely place to spread forth his hands and say:

"O Lord, God, we worship Thee."

There is a quiet serenity in the Chapel, and I beg you tonight and always not to break that silence with anything other than words of quiet prayer. For only in peace can you hear the strange and distant voices there, voices out of our past, voices of men and women and children who were flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, and soul of our souls.

Look upon the sacred Torah Scrolls resting in the Ark. Each was once the proud and revered possession of our fellow Jews in widely separately places. Look upon them and see again the sure and final refutation of our disappearance as a People of Faith and a religious community.

Tonight in this very Synagogue are men who, with their own hands, performed the
the commandment to raise up the Torah of Israel when others
no longer could hold it aloft in dignity and honor.

Walter Gottlieb and others in his family had gone to the doomed Jewish community

of Hochstetten to hide the sacred Torah and to protect it from despoliation until it could be brought to this country. When later they fled the German horror, they brought with them the Torah that we have so cherished. Today the community which once heard the word of God from this scroll is no more. the People of Israel and its tradition lives *here* among us, in this free land of the United States of America.

And still, despite the Nazi horror (or is it strangely because of it?) oppression still plagues our People today. Some of our People remain to persist and care and love. From their hands came the exquisite Torah-Scroll in the Sephardic or Spanish style that stands side by side with the other.

Received by Calvin Newman in Cairo just a few years ago from a faithful Jewish family (whole daughter is here tonight), that scroll was smuggled by him out of Egypt, and it too gives final answer to those who would think to erase the truth of Judaism by the killing and oppression of Jews. The community of Jews in Cairo dwindles. But the People of Israel and its tradition *lives* on here among us in this community, in this congregation, in the free land of the United States of America.

Like dissimilar twins, both scrolls in the Ark of our Chapel were born of the same parent-tradition in the 18th Century. Each has a different face, a unique style, through each bears the identical flawless text.

These scrolls are now each remounted in their own authentic manner--the Ashkenazic

in the familiar velvet mantel and the Sephardic Torah contained in a newly fashioned upright case.

To behold them through the eye of history one recalls with the Hebrew poet the reverent remembrance of all whose martyrdom and faithfulness they symbolize:

"These things do I remember; through all the years
Ignorance like a monster hath devoured
Our martyrs as in one long day of blood.
Rulers have arisen through the endless years
Oppressive, savage in their witless power
Filled with a futile thought, to make an end
Of that which God has cherished." (UPB II, p. 316)

How prophetic the words of Isaiah that now frame the Ark itself: "And the remnant that is escaped of the House of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward." Indeed the remnant has escaped. True, here among *us* the faith of Judaism takes new root downward in our free soil and bears fruit upward in the learning of our children, the loyalty and love of us all, who will not let our Judaism perish. To this our very presence here attests as the artistic treatment of the New Ark Doors suggests in the "tree of life."

The fruitage of the Hebrew ledgers and words reaches upward despite the brutal attenuation of some branches of our People.

This is our History. This is our Truth: We hold now the Torah from Germany and the Torah from Egypt. They have found their home with us in our new Milton and Corinne Livingston Chapel. They stand against the background of America. They are our past. But they point our future. Who can escape the sense of duty and responsibility those scrolls impose upon us?

We have enshrined them in beauty. Now let us study their words. We pay homage to the tradition. Now let the tradition refine our ideals and select our values. May our Chapel enrich our spiritual lives and may we bring to our worship there the most precious offerings to God: Sincerity, devotion and love.

When was the beginning of our Chapel? Could it have been when another man dedicated his Temple to the worship of God? Overawed, he offered this prayer:

"O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like thee in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to thy servants who walk before thee with all their heart.

"Now therefore, O God of Israel, let thy word be confirmed, which thou has spoken to thy servant David my father.

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven

and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this
house which I have built!

"Yet have regard to the prayer of thy servant, O Lord,
My God, that thy eyes may be open night and day toward this
house, the place of which thou hast said, 'My name shall be
there,' that thou mayest hearken to the prayer which thy servant
offers toward this place."

Such was the prayer of Solomon the King. May it be our prayer as with full hearts
we dedicate our Chapel, our Congregation, our very lives to the God of Israel and all the
Universe.