

Installation: A Ritual of Transition

by Elizabeth Berke, Elliot S. Schoenberg and Suzanne Stier

Introduction:

Every rabbi has an installation. Usually, the installation is perfunctory and not planned to complement nor ease the transition to a new rabbi. An installation, when carefully planned, can be a powerful tool to reduce congregational anxiety and provide energy for a successful start up. The installation can be a vehicle for easing the transition of spiritual leadership. The key is understanding the installation as a religious ritual.

It is striking that as soon as the Jews crossed the Jordan River and entered the land of Israel, they made the transition from the desert chapter of the Jewish people to the chapter of conquest and settlement with a Passover Seder. The end of one chapter and the beginning of the next is marked with a ritual, a ritual that was familiar but had not been practiced for forty years while the Israelites wandered in the desert. The Pesach Seder is a reenactment of leaving Egypt. A new land is connected to an old promise. An uncertain future is faced with confidence because of a strong history. A new beginning is connected to eternal Jewish values - God's love of Israel and the divine power of the Seder was the formal declaration of transition, redemption for the Israelite people.

An artfully crafted installation can have the same impact and significance for the congregation. So too, the installation can be the ritual that marks the transition from one stage to the next for the synagogue.

What should a carefully planned installation look like?

Sacred Occasion

In general, one of the purposes of ritual is to take everyday acts and heighten them. Everyday acts when heightened become sacred acts. Installation is not a secular event, and it is not just a ritual, but it is a sacred occasion. The installation is where the rabbi, the congregational leadership and the entire congregation meet to recommit themselves to their synagogue, the Jewish people, the Jewish religion and the pursuit of the holy. The installation is a key moment where God's presence can fill the sanctuary.

Program Idea: The installation should take place in the synagogue sanctuary and in the context of a religious service. The synagogue sanctuary is the most meaningful choice because that is where the rabbi functions in his or her most public role. This spatial context also gives the moment an atmosphere of sanctity that would be lacking were it in the auditorium or setting outside of the synagogue.

Program Idea: Whenever possible, schedule your installation at your principle service so maximum numbers of people can attend. Experience has shown that in the context of a regularly scheduled Shabbat Service there is more vitality and energy than at an afternoon tea. While some congregations may opt for a Sunday afternoon setting that includes Minhah, we prefer Shabbat. Nonetheless that may not be possible because of who may be invited.

Public Event

The installation is a public occasion. Congregations are not isolated institutions. They interact, influence

and are influenced by their context and their community. Congregations respond to the needs of their community. The installation of the rabbi is an opportunity for the congregation to make a statement to the synagogue, the community at large, the surrounding Jewish community and the religious community in general, about the past, present and future of the congregation.

Program Idea: Representatives of all these outside communities should be invited to participate in the service, be in attendance or to send written greetings. One example: Invitations should be sent out to the local mayor, school superintendent, town council, local clergy association members, federation executives, U.S.C.J. representatives, J.T.S. or U.J. faculty, and neighboring rabbis of all denominations.
All other synagogue staff should be invited and acknowledged as well at the service.

Program Issue

The question often arises when to do the installation in terms of the tenure of the rabbi. There is no rush. It need not be done before the High Holidays, because the rabbi already has the "authority" to address the congregation from the pulpit. It is probably best to do it in the early Fall after the holidays and before the start of other major programming. Although there is no rush, it should not be put off because of other congregational priorities. The installation should be a priority for the congregation, it is an "event marker," as we discussed below, and its timing provides energy for future work.

Event Marker All rituals are denotative event markers and that is certainly the case with the installation. One period in the congregation's life has ended and a new one is beginning. The installation proclaims that a new chapter has begun both for the rabbi and the congregation. This installation is a time to review, recount and reenact the past history of the congregation and highlight the significant accomplishments of the congregation.

Program Idea: The congregation "historian" should briefly articulate significant events to all who attend this occasion. He or she should end by saying that "now we are ready for the next chapter in the history of our congregation."

Symbolic Occasion The installation is a symbol that contains meaning beyond the specific moment and beyond the specific case of this particular congregation. It is a way to express connection to all rabbis, to all synagogues, to the Conservative Movement, and to the Jewish people. The installation symbolizes a connection to the tradition. Installations remind congregations that they belong to something bigger than themselves.

Program Idea: The occasion can be marked by transfer of a symbol, a gift to the rabbi, that expresses this connection. Many congregations give the rabbi a *yad* (Torah pointer). The *yad* symbolizes both the connection to the Torah and the mandate of the rabbi to "point" the way to his or her congregation. Other congregations frame the installation invitation and hang it in the rabbi's office. Still others give a kiddush cup which symbolizes how many different roles the rabbi must now "fill." (See Appendix "A" for a text about the meaning of the *yad* for the congregation.)

A Moment of Inspiration

Rituals are opportunities to express and re-express values. The reenactment of the Pesach Seder at the shores of the Jordan River was a powerful tool to remind the Jewish people about God's role in their lives even when the people put on their battle gear. The installation should be a special moment to express personal and Jewish values that we all would like to see perpetuated in this particular synagogue.

Program Ideas: A noted rabbi, teacher or respected colleague of the person to be installed should be invited to "install" the rabbi. "Install" means to give a charge to the new rabbi - words of challenge, hope and direction to take. The installer should address the values of the congregation and what the rabbinic priorities of the rabbi should be. He or she should articulate for the congregation the values of the rabbinate. The rabbi, then is given the opportunity to respond. This can include two elements:

- a. The rabbi should start with a brief Dvar Torah. She should talk about herself, her journey to the rabbinate and her career path to that moment. She should reveal something of herself to the congregation. The rabbi should talk about her values. It is not the time for a state of the synagogue address to look at the future. Rather, the rabbi should articulate what aspects of Judaism and synagogue life are important to her and why.
- b. Use a creative Responsive Liturgical Formula to recognize the actual moment of transition and involve the congregation. (Creating a specific script for this liminal moment in the life of the synagogue can help all recognize their feeling at this momentous time. (See Appendix "B".)
Explaining the choice of music would communicate its meaning and reason for its choice and reinforce the purpose of the day.

An Evocative Event

Rituals evoke strong emotions. It is an opportunity for the unexpressed to reveal itself. As Tom Driver writes in *The Magic of Ritual*, "ritual brings people together physically and unites emotionally ... ritual controls emotion while releasing it and guides it while letting it run." Installation is an important opportunity to give expression to the feelings of electing a new rabbi. There will be sadness because of what has been lost, the relationship to the prior rabbi, while there will also be great joy because a worthy successor has been found. No doubt, feelings will run strong and be close to the surface. It should also be a celebration. **Program Ideas:**

- a. Pass a diary around to the congregational leaders in the weeks before the installation. Everyone can write down how they are feeling at this moment between rabbis. Present it to the new rabbi.
- b. A festive oneg or kiddush should follow the tephillot sponsored by the board and or other leaders of the congregation.
- c. Stirring music should be chanted by the Cantor that captures the feelings of the participants. Be mindful of the power of music here. Music, as we all know, beyond words can capture the moment and be inspirational. The right choice of music will make the installation a memorable event for all. (See Appendix "C" for suggestions).

A Time of Appreciation

Many people worked hard to select and engage the rabbi. It has been a long, tense and anxious period, but it has also been successful. It is important to acknowledge the contributions of all those who made this process work. It will set the right tone for the future work of lay people in the congregation.

Program Idea: Go out of your way to invite the search committee to the event. Ask the Chair of the search committee to say a few words about their experience. The President of the congregation. At the installation the President of the congregation should thank and acknowledge publicly the hard work and fine job done by the committee.

Conclusion

The installation conveys a message within the congregation as well as to the general public. The

installation ceremony provides an opportunity for congregants and the congregation as a whole to address the leadership change in their lives and in the life of the larger structure they have created, their synagogue. Installation is a special time for emotional release, education and spiritual transcendence. We wish you the very best on this momentous and joyous occasion. May you go from strength to strength.

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Appendix "A"

Notes on the Congregational *yad*:

The Hebrew word *yad*, means "hand." The *yad* is a pointer used by the Torah reader to keep his or her place when reading from the Torah. This particular *yad* was donated to our synagogue by the previous Rabbinic family of the congregation, Rabbi Ploni. By passing the *yad* to the new rabbi, the Congregation is bestowing on him the role of rabbi of the synagogue community. The *yad* is symbolic of the rabbi's role as teacher of Torah, and interpreter of Jewish tradition in the congregational family. By using a *yad* donated by the previous rabbi, the synagogue is acknowledging the important role that Rabbi Ploni played in the life of the congregation during his tenure at Synagogue Shalom. Although the congregation is passing the *yad* over to Rabbi Almoni, it will continue to belong to the congregation, and will remain in their possession in perpetuity.

Liturgy of handing over the congregational *yad*:

Youth Representative: "As I give you this *yad*, I give you the responsibility for the future of the youth of this congregation. May you guide us, teach us Torah, and inspire us to reach higher in our understanding of Judaism and life."

President: "As I give you this *yad*, I add to your responsibilities the families, single persons, and history of our congregation, whom you will also be guiding. You will be bringing our congregational family to its next level of growth. I give you this *yad*, symbolic of your role as the teacher of Torah in our midst."

Installing Rabbi: "As I give you this *yad*, I add to these stated responsibilities the responsibility you have to the Rabbinate as a whole, and the larger community that you serve - the role you play as representative within your community and outside of it, among your colleagues. May you be given the insights to fulfill all of these roles, and find the strength you will need to see them through."

New Rabbi: "By accepting this *yad*, I am accepting the responsibilities you have put before me. I pledge to bring this congregation to a new level and a new stage in its growth and history. I will be reminded of this pledge every time we read Torah or I teach Torah before my congregational family."

Appendix "B" - Appropriate Music

Max Wohlberg has set a number of passages from Pirkei Avot to music. The following are found in the Hazzan's Manual, published by the Cantors Assembly 1:18, 3:1, 4:1, 6:7.

He has also set others, which are available through the H. L. Miller Cantorial School. They include 2:20, 3:7, 3:18, 5:23, 6:4, 6:9. Some of these include the succeeding Mishna so they are really a combination of two Mishnayot in the song. If desired, only one can be sung. These songs do not have a written accompaniment, but if an accompanist is available something simple could be written that would add to the presentation of the piece.

Also for solo performance, but with piano, is a piece entitled Elu D'varim by Jacob Rappaport. It is a musical rendition of the Mishna Peah 1:1 and the baraita found on Shabbat 127a. It is found in the book *The Golden Age of Cantors*, edited by Velvel Pasternak and Noah Schall, which is available through Tara Publications.

If one should have two cantors available, or a cantor and someone else who can sing, as well as a pianist, there are two duets that can be inserted into the ceremony. Either or both can be performed. One includes the Mishna and part of the baraita cited above. It is also called Elu D'varim and is by Ben Steinberg. It is available through Transcontinental Music Publications (it also has a part for cello that is optional). The other piece is a teaching from the end of Masechet Brachot and is found after Ein K'Eloheinu in our Siddur. It is entitled Amar Rabbi Elazar and is by Robert Solomon. Safam has recorded this piece and it is available through Contemporary Jewish Music Publications. (This piece also has an optional instrumental section that can be done with a number of different instruments, as well as the piano.) This same teaching has been set by Israel Alter for solo voice and is found in his book, *The Sabbath Service*, published by the Cantors Assembly. David Schiff has written an accompaniment to Alter's setting of this piece.

Appendix "C"

New Rabbi: "By accepting this *yad*, I am accepting the responsibilities you have put before me. I pledge to bring this congregation to a new level and a new stage in its growth and history. I will be reminded of this pledge every time we read Torah or I teach Torah before my congregational family."

Responsive liturgical reading:

President and Youth Representative: We, as representatives of our community, now invite all assembled here to rise and recite together the responsive reading you have before you.

Congregation: In Pirke Avot (1:6), we learn the statement, 'Make for yourself a teacher.' Today, as we come together as a congregation, we fulfill this statement for ourselves and for the future generations of our synagogue.

Rabbi: I accept this role as your teacher, and at the same time accept you as my teachers. While in this position, I will respect you, have patience with you, and encourage you to grow.



Congregation: We will also respect you, Rabbi. We will have patience with you, we will be open to your encouragement, and we will challenge you to promote your growth.

Rabbi: From our Rabbis in the Talmud, I learn that the study of Torah along is equivalent in value to such activities as acts of kindness, hospitality to guests, visiting the sick, escorting the dead, concentration in prayer, and bringing peace between people. All of these make up that position of Rabbi, and I intend to be involved in all of these and other parts of life while serving you in this pulpit.

Congregation: We look forward to your guidance and participation in our lives. We welcome you into our congregational family to be our Rabbi and our children's Rabbi. As an assembly, we now call upon the installing Rabbi to finalize this process.

Appendix "D"

Installing Rabbi: I now recite the words that God spoke to Joshua when he became the leader of Israel after Moshe.

"Let not this Book of Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings and only then will you be successful. I charge you: Be strong and resolute; do not be terrified or dismayed, for Adonai Your God is with you wherever you go."

Rabbi: I will not let this Book of the Teaching cease from my lips, but recite it day and night, so that I may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will I prosper in my undertakings and only then will I be successful. I will be strong and resolute; I will not be terrified or dismayed, for Adonai my God is with me wherever I go.

Appendix "E" Sample Program

Minha	
Greetings	Visiting Rabbi
Musical Interlude	Cantor
<i>Hashkiveinu, "Help us to lie down in peace," comp. Adolph Katchko</i>	
President's Address	
Musical Interlude	Children's Choir, led by Cantor
<i>Shalom Rav, "Grant true and lasting peace to Your people Israel"</i>	
Youth Address	
Introduction of Installing Rabbi	
Address by Installing Rabbi	Seminary Professor
Handing Over of Congregational Yad	Youth Representative President, Installing Rabbi
Responsive Liturgical Reading	
Rabbi's Address	