



STANLEY SIGAL

Stanley, I know that you're the Gabbai and Assistant Cantor at the shul. Let's talk first about your background.

I was born in Hartford, Connecticut.

I had always liked singing. My father was not as much a chazzan as he was a Baal Tefilah, which is the official Prayer Reader or Leader. He could deliver the prayers. He had a certain way because his father was a chazzan in Russia. My father learned a few

melodies from him, and my father would be called up by the rabbi and say, “Daven Hallel. I want your Hallel.” So he would daven. So I learned his Hallel the same way, and I enjoyed singing.

Even as a child?

Yes. I probably would have gone on to either rabbinical school or cantorial school, but my mother said, “Look, I want you to make a living.” And in those days, the Orthodox rabbis wouldn’t make a living, and I wouldn’t have accomplished anything trying to become a Conservative or Reform rabbi.

What did you end up doing?

My mother really wanted me to be a dentist, but I ended up becoming a pharmacist.

But I was brought up in that type of house with a father and a mother who appreciated Judaism. And the best thing my father could do besides being with his wife and with his kids would be to go to shul. And I felt the same way. And I enjoy it, too, now. I’ve been here ten or twelve years.

Would you tell me about your wife and your involvement together in synagogues in Connecticut?

My wife, Riva, and I were married in June, 1961, in Hartford, Connecticut. We lived in South Windsor, Connecticut.

I was in another Chabad before and that Chabad rubbed me the wrong way. I've always been brought up in Orthodox shuls. With my wife's encouragement, we tried Conservative.

I felt very uncomfortable sitting next to her. I was used to sitting separately, but she liked it. Then they asked me to join the choir there, and that meant I had to sit in a separate room, so my wife says, "Well, I didn't accomplish anything with this!"

We stayed there a while, but the rabbi was a little too liberal for me; he didn't really get to me. In other words, he would allow things that I didn't believe he should allow. I had my image of rabbis that I had grown up with and religious Jews who just didn't do certain things, so I wasn't happy.

About 1968 we went and joined another Orthodox shul, a little one in a country town, in Ellington, Connecticut. I got friendly with the rabbi and he said, "Tell me, you want to be the chazzan?" So I said, "Well, I can tell they're paying you so much, I know what I'll get paid!" So I did, and I stayed with them for a while.

When did you move to California?

In 1978. We were living in Walnut, in Diamond Bar.

For quite a few years, my wife and I davened at home, for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Pesach and Sukkot. We didn't go to shul. My kids davened at home on Yom Tov and then they, of course, went off to school, and they did their thing at school.

All of a sudden, I found out that in a Conservative temple in San Bernardino County, there was an Orthodox rabbi who was going to try to make the synagogue Orthodox. I said, "Gee, with that kind of a goal, I'm going to go and help him." He also was a wonderful chazzan. I started davening with him, and I would sit in with the congregation, and we would do harmony.

He enjoyed it, and I enjoyed it. Then he left, and the minute he left, I left.

So, again, I was at home for a couple years. There was an Orthodox rabbi who took over the shul in West Covina, and I went with him. Then they had a disagreement with him, and he left, and then I left.

Then a friend of mine who also was looking for a more traditional, more Orthodox type of service, told me about Chabad coming to Oakland. She said, “Why don’t we go for Rosh Hashanah? It’s going to be in a hotel.” “Woo, woo! Stay in a hotel, have a good time.”

We went for Rosh Hashanah, and I started to daven with them. Then the rabbi said to me, “You daven like you’re not from here.” I said, “Well, no, I’m not from here. I’m from the East Coast.” He says, “Where?” I said, “Hartford.” He says, “Oh. But—” I said, “What you’re seeing is a product of my father’s teaching,” and I told him my father’s background. My davening was Ashkenazi, and we daven a different nusach, which is called “Nusach Hari.” The Chabad nusach is different. It’s more like the Sephardic than is the Ashkenazi.

He said, "Why don't you come to daven with us? We would enjoy having you." I said, "Oh, all right." It was a brand new congregation. Before I knew it, he made me Gabbai and I started davening to them.

Then something came up with the lack of respect that the members had for this gentleman. That tears me to pieces. I just couldn't stand it. I couldn't be a witness to such disrespect. My father taught me, "If he's a Rov, then you treat him like a Rov." So I told the rabbi how I felt. I said, "You know, I'm really very uncomfortable." He tried, but nothing worked out. I guess either you command the respect, or you don't.

Then my daughter at that time was getting married, and she didn't want that rabbi to marry her. I said, "That's fine, but find an Orthodox rabbi if you want me to come."

They were going around to different shuls on Friday nights, and they came here, and evidently she befriended Rabbi Eliezrie. One day, she said, "Dad, we know who we want to marry us." So I'm right away nervous and I'm not sure. She said, "We went to the

Chabad of Yorba Linda.” I heard “Chabad” right away. Oh, I got excited. I said to myself, “I’m going down there a couple of Shabbats to meet him.”

I was very impressed. His sermons were out of this world. Even today, his wife Stella says, “If you were any more excited about my husband’s speech today, you would be off the chair. I was waiting to see you rise up off the chair completely and off the ground.”

He knows what he’s saying and he emphasizes the right things. To me, there are certain things that a rabbi will say for good grammar, so to speak, but then there are things that he says, that are what I call “meat and potatoes,” which I like. He’s a person of conviction. He’s not afraid to say what he should say. If I’m coming here to be entertained, it’s one thing, but if I’m coming here to learn, and that’s what I’m doing here, I need somebody like him to teach me. He’s turned me on.

And now, with the age of computer, I’m into websites too. Besides the Chabad websites, and there are about six of those, there’s Shma Yisrael Torah Network that I look at, and I look at the Rabbinical Council of

America website. I'll read Sheva, the website out of Israel, and the Jerusalem Post. Then I read all the local papers. I read a lot of that because he's made me have a thirst. I had one before, but he's increased my thirst for knowledge. I love to do it. I love to read. I love to hear his ideas, and yet I wouldn't think anything quietly on the side of saying to him, "I don't agree with you on this," or "I don't agree with you on that." I wouldn't think of ever doing it in public.

When I started here, there was the little yellow house. It was a little broken-up house, but to me it had such holiness in it. Like the rabbi says, "Look at our shul today." I say, "Yes, it's wonderful, but I liked the yellow house." I keep saying that, and sometimes when he's speaking about it, he says, "But Stanley likes the yellow house." To me, it represented a shul much like the ones where I davened a lot on the East Coast. I used to go with my father to the cities, and we'd be traveling and then all of a sudden we'd look for a shul. We'd go to this little shul; you could hardly see what you were davening in. The lights were very dim, and it was an old shul. The wooden pews, and the walls were cracked, and everything. But to me it had holiness. I knew that if

there was a way to get closer to God, it would be in a place like that.

So the thing is, it's beautiful and I like it, but still when I come up and I stand there, when I come to minyan, I stand right up here on Shabbos, and I say the Amidah, the solemn devotion, and so forth, and to me, I'm talking. When I'm davening at the Cantor's pulpit, as the Assistant Cantor, people say, "Gee, you know, you look like you're having such a good time." I say, "Have you ever talked to your father?" "Oh, of course." I say, "Do you like talking to your father?" "Oh, of course, I do." "Well, who am I talking to? I'm talking to my Father. In fact, I'm talking to two Fathers. I'm talking to the Supreme Father and my father who isn't alive anymore; I'm talking to him, too." So I say, "How can you not enjoy what you're doing? This is a conversation. Look, if you're listening, that's your business, but I'm talking to my father."

So that's what happened. I wasn't upset that they were building a new building, and I'm not upset that they're building a new school building. I think it's wonderful, and I think that the community needs it. To me, if that's what you need to get the community to

find out what they're missing, that's exactly what it is, because if you don't come to a shul like this, you're missing something that's just marvelous.

You certainly seem to have very special feelings for this shul.

This is one of the finest. I started davening at three years old. My father used to take me to Young Israel back East. I started Young Israel, which is in a converted house. To me, it's worth what you go through the whole week to get to Shabbos here.

We start the minyan at ten, and we're done with davening about twelve thirty, one o'clock. It's a short time. We cover a lot of davening, but there's no flowery stuff.

I had problems with my son when he was in college; he was going around with what I considered the wrong crowd and he had a situation where he didn't want to go to shul. When we joined Chabad, he came here, and one day, he says to me, "You know, Dad, Chabad really knows what it's about. They get down to business here. They get in. They start davening. They say what they have to say, and then you go home, and you

have the rest of Shabbos. They don't do the poetry and the nice readings. If I want to do that, I'll do that on my own, but I don't want that. I want the meat and potatoes."

All of a sudden, things improved. He graduated, and he started looking for a wife. He found my daughter-in-law, who is a Moroccan Jew. They got married, and slowly become more and more frum and then they became Shabbos observant, and then when they had kids, they started sending them to the Chabad in Irvine preschool. He's got them now over to the Hebrew Academy. He likes Rabbi Tannenbaum, but when I say, "Is he a nice guy?" He says, "Yes, but Rabbi Eliezer started this for me." My son likes a thinker. I'm much more outward. He's more inward. He likes to think, and boy, he loves to talk with Rabbi Eliezer.

My wife and I come to shul. She likes to come more when Rabbi Eliezer's here because not only does she want to daven, but she wants to hear his sermon. She likes hearing his sermon.

Is there anything else you want to say about this shul and what it means to you?

First of all, I hope that we will reach more and more of the younger people because when I see younger people come into this shul, I know that there will be a future. And, as much as I would like to be around more than the 120 years that has been allotted to me, so I could stay on, I know that we're going to need the young people.

I'm hoping that more people realize what type of people the rabbi and the rebbetzin are. They're very giving people. We davened in their house for so long while this building was being built. They gave up their family privacy and all these things for the good of the shul, so we would have a place to daven and so forth.

I think that there are people in this area, once they know what is being offered here, who will come. I'm sure. In fact, I don't think they would be able to stay anywhere else if they could learn what's here.

But a lot of people hear "Chabad," or a lot of people hear, "Orthodoxy," and they think, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute, wait a

minute, wait a minute, wait a minute.” In fact, there’s a couple here who were in the Reform movement, and she wanted to sit with her husband; she didn’t care, she was going to sit with him. Of course, not in this shul. But they came here, and she has totally switched. I said to her the other day, “Tell me something, how do you like not sitting with your husband?” She says, “It’s wonderful.” She says, “I sit with women, and I daven. Instead of talking, I daven.”

I just think that it’s a wonderful shul. This is definitely the place to go.



Stanley Sigal and Ira Cohen Carrying Torahs
During the New Torah Dedication Ceremony



Torah Dedication Ceremony:
Rabbi Eliezrie with Ira Cohen
Holding the New Torah

Torah Dedication
Most Blessing, Praise and Glory to the Holy Temple
Dedicated by the Cohen Family

It is the most precious article in Jewish life. Its signs of food, papers are offered in its presence. It is perfectly intact just as we received it some 3,500 years ago.

Since 1898 the first Torah Scroll, One was placed in the Holy Temple one was given to each of the twelve tribes. One is identical to the original.

The Torah scroll is one entity. If one letter falls or is broken, the entire Torah is unfit to use until it is repaired. Our Sages teach that each Jew has a letter which corresponds to his or her soul. Just as each letter is essential, so too each Jew makes a unique contribution to the spiritual destiny of the Jewish people.

Tradition tells us that after a child kissed the Torah the parents would purchase a small piece of the material used for the Mantel (the Torah cover). It is said that this offers special protection for the child. They did this with a sense of pure faith in the *Segulah*—intrinsic in sharing the *Mitzvah* of dedicating a Torah.



A piece of the material used for the Mantel-Torah Cover. This is your remnant from the Torah dedication.

Torah Dedication Souvenir



Ira Cohen with his son Michael, daughter Heather, wife Linda
and his mother, Helen Cohen



RABBI DOVID ELIEZRIE

Rabbi, let's talk first about your background.

I was brought up in Los Angeles. My wife was also brought up in Los Angeles. When I was about fourteen years old, I moved to Montreal. I went to Israel in February of 1968. I studied in Yeshiva there, got