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December 3, 2018

Dear Touro Synagogue Family,

I write to you with difficult news to share. Our family has decided that come June, we will be leaving New Orleans. I have accepted an offer for the position of Senior Rabbi at Temple Solel, in Cardiff by the Sea (San Diego), California.

As many of you know, San Diego is a home for me. I grew up splitting my time between Massachusetts and San Diego, where my father lived until his death in 2012. Bob and I met as undergrads at UCSD. We travel to San Diego several times a year to be with family and friends there. I have felt a pull toward the possibility of living there for quite some time. I always knew that for this to happen, I would have to leave Touro. My love for this synagogue community is very profound; I knew it would be so hard. And, it is.

This was a very complex decision for our family. I know this may come as a pretty significant surprise to all of you, so I am anticipating some real questions. I would love to provide generous answers, as best I can. Of course, I'm always happy to talk with you about anything - and I will hold your response to this news with the utmost of care in my heart.

You might be wondering....

Have you been unhappy at Touro Synagogue?

Never for a single moment. From the moment I met the Rabbinic Search Committee in March 2008, I have been plainly smitten with Touro Synagogue. I have often described my rabbinate at Touro with these words: blissful, unshackled, creative, joyous, challenging, exciting, energizing. I love Touro Synagogue very much. That will never change.

How long has this been anticipated? How have we not known about this?

I have been in the confidential process since this summer. My decision to explore this professional change happened when the posting for the job came open in June. The decision to explore did not necessarily mean we would ultimately choose to leave. We had a lot to consider; there was so much to think about.

Were you looking to leave New Orleans?

Our family's extreme love for San Diego propelled this move. There was a strong draw toward that. In all of my eleven years at Touro Synagogue, this is the only opportunity that I have ever considered or pursued. And, it was with great curiosity that we began the exploration. As we progressed through the exploration, it became clear that this is the right time and the right place for our family at this moment.

Is this because of Bob's transition from Cypress Academy?

Although Bob's leaving Cypress is a story with some pain attached, he has begun a new business (<https://www.newtableconsulting.com/>) and has many fulfilling projects in New Orleans. The decision to move has hinged on the opportunity for meaningful and exciting congregational leadership *specifically* in San Diego. As Bob recently said: we moved to Nashville for Bob; we moved to New Orleans for Alexis. The move to San Diego is for our family.

How do Ari (11th grade) and Seth (9th grade) feel about this?

Seth is in love with San Diego and happy and eager for the move. He says what he'll miss most about New Orleans is Touro. Ari is deeply disappointed that he won't be graduating from Lusher and finishing his childhood chapter in this community - but, he is understanding that the timing for openings in the congregational rabbinate does not always cooperate with our personal preferences. This is not easy.

Will you be part of helping us find another rabbi?

My role in the search will be to share with any potential new rabbi the unequivocal delight it has been to serve as your rabbi. I will do this with unbridled enthusiasm. And, a little bit of complex envy.

What do we all do now?

I pray that we will enjoy one another's company; we will celebrate the upcoming seasons' experiences together. I will be here and here for you until the moment I leave. I anticipate short trips to make some housing, school, and professional transitional decisions - but, this will not interfere with any commitments I have here. I very much look forward to savoring the rest of our time together and helping you all - as very best I can - to anticipate a forward motion for Touro Synagogue.

Touro Synagogue is a strong, vital, healthy, beautiful place. This is because of you - make no mistake. In my lifetime, I have never known such holy encounters as I've had with you. Your place in my heart is permanent.

With love,



Rabbi Alexis Berk