

Q&A

RESIGNATION OF SENIOR RABBI ALEXIS BERK

Just after the Thanksgiving break, Senior Rabbi Alexis Berk informed President Teri Hunter that she has accepted a position and signed a contract as the next Senior Rabbi of Temple Solel, in Cardiff by the Sea (San Diego), California.

Governing Philosophy:

Touro Synagogue is a unique congregational community. Our past, current, and future vitality is a reflection of that uniqueness. We thrive because **we** are Touro Synagogue. All transitions bring with them a measure of anxiety. The vibrancy and vitality of our beloved Touro Synagogue, however, is grounded in the constancy and resiliency of our community. Together we will ensure that we move from strength to strength during this current transition. Rabbi Silverman, Cantor Margolius, Kerry Tapia, our staff, Teri Hunter, and the Board of Trustees are here to anchor our congregation as we look toward transition.

Key Questions:

1. Why is Rabbi Berk leaving? Is she not happy at Touro?

Rabbi Berk has always expressed her love for Touro Synagogue and the Touro community. She and her family were seeking a move to San Diego for purely personal reasons. She has repeatedly shown her appreciation for Touro's past, present, and projected future. She is very grateful for Touro's generosity with her, as reflected in her contract and in all respects. She is moving for family reasons.

2. Are there any problems at Touro which are causing her to want to leave?

No. Touro is a strong and thriving synagogue. Rabbi Berk's leadership helped to make that so and we will forever be grateful to her for the many ways that she helped to build upon our strong community. Rabbi Berk is leaving for personal, family reasons. She wants to be in San Diego and a unique opportunity at Temple Solel became available.

3. When did the Board learn this news?

We held a meeting to inform the board on the same evening that we shared the news with the rest of the congregation.

4. When did the Executive Committee Learn this news?

Shortly before the announcement to the full Board and Past Presidents.

5. How long has Rabbi Berk been in the search process?

Rabbi Berk informed Touro's president, Teri Hunter, this summer of her intention to apply for this job.

6. Why are we just hearing about this now?

For three reasons. First, The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) guides all placement processes for rabbis. CCAR insists on complete confidentiality for rabbis engaged in applications for new positions, and they insisted that Touro Synagogue

adhere to their confidentiality requirements in this case. Teri Hunter was in direct contact with CCAR, and CCAR insisted that not even the Touro Synagogue Executive Committee be informed of Rabbi Berk's application. Only with a signed contract with another congregation was news allowed to be shared.

Second, confidentiality was important because the outcome of Rabbi Berk's application was uncertain. Because it was not at all certain that her application would result in her leaving Touro Synagogue, it was important for the Touro Synagogue community's relationship with Rabbi Berk that her application be kept confidential.

Finally, Rabbi Berk did not sign her new contract until after Thanksgiving. The L'Chayim Dinner was days away. It felt important to the Task Force (see below) to allow our community to celebrate the L'Chayim Dinner without the distraction of this news. Teri informed the executive board, board, past presidents and then the full congregation on the Monday after the L'Chayim dinner.

7. Is the President the only person who has known this all along?

No. Teri formed a Rabbinic Transition Task Force, which is comprised of Teri Hunter, President; Lisa Herman, Executive Vice President; Susan Good, Immediate Past President; and Laura Levy, Board member. Teri appointed Laura Levy to be the Rabbinic Search Chair in the event that a search would be needed.

8. How much information was the Task Force given during Rabbi Berk's application process?

As per CCAR, the Task Force received very little information. In late October, Teri was contacted by a congregation about a reference for Rabbi Berk. However, the CCAR directed that Touro not be involved in any further steps until Rabbi Berk had a formal, accepted offer from Temple Solel.

9. When is Rabbi Berk leaving?

Rabbi Berk will complete this current 2018/2019 programmatic year with Touro and move to California during the summer of 2019.

10. Will Touro be able to find a new Senior Rabbi in time for her departure?

The CCAR has assured us throughout this process that the position Touro finds itself in, including the time frame, is not unusual or problematic. One of the duties of the Rabbinic Transition Task Force has been to prepare the rabbinic application so that it would be immediately ready if a rabbinic search was necessary. That application will be submitted to CCAR in the days ahead.

11. Will it be hard to find a new rabbi?

Touro Synagogue is well regarded as a desirable pulpit. Our congregation makes that so. Further, Rabbi Berk has moved Touro from strength to new strength and retains a deep love and admiration for this congregation and her time with us. We are financially and communally healthy. All of these factors will help us find our next rabbi.

12. What are the next steps in the process?

Laura Levy, Search Committee Chair, has formed a committee. Touro's application(s) for a new rabbi have been posted with CCAR and the search process has begun. Laura has

been in close contact with the Head of Placement at CCAR.

The congregation will be kept abreast of developments.

Congregational members in good standing will be provided an opportunity for input as per our Bylaws and CCAR guidelines.

13. Who are the members of the Senior Rabbi Search Committee?

The task force took great care to form a committee that is representative of the many different 'constituencies' within our congregation and also of a size recommended by the search process. The make-up includes both board members and non-board members.

Laura Levy--Chair

Teri Hunter--Co-Chair

Lisa Herman

Susan Good

Ann Fishman

Liz Herman

Jill Israel

Larry Kullman

Jeffrey Fingerman

Steven Bain

Sharan Lieberman

Gary Silbert

Brian Weimer

Benjamin Wilkins

ex-officio: Cantor Margolius, Rabbi Silverman, Kerry Tapia