**Rabbi Bruce Block**

**The Road Taken**

My classmates and I walked out of Isaac Mayer Wise Temple on Plum Street in Cincinnati 50 years ago with smiles on our faces and the ink barely dry on the *S’michah* each of us had just been awarded. While I occasionally muse on the roads not taken (law, medicine, teaching), for me, the rabbinate was the road taken.

We were the last class required to volunteer for the military chaplaincy, and some of us were headed to those assignments. Others were headed to assistantships or solo positions in small congregations. Some were headed to Hillel or Ph.D. programs. We were one of the last three classes to be comprised of all males. Sally Priesand would be ordained three years later. Some of us began our studies at the Appian Way campus in Los Angeles. The opening of the Skirball Campus near USC was some two years away, and ordination in L.A. was years away. L.A. students finished their studies in Cincinnati. And we hardly knew our New York counterparts, who studied on W. 68th St. The Brookdale Center campus on W. 4th St. would open 10 years later. Some of us had taken a year’s leave of absence along the way to study in Israel, so we were not ordained with our original entering class. The First Year in Israel for all students was still more than a year away from reality.

I was among those headed for an assistantship in a large congregation with a seasoned senior rabbi as mentor. In my new congregation – as in the majority of Reform congregations – the rabbis wore black pulpit gowns (white on the High Holy Days) and led services from the *Union Prayer Book* in rather formal (and often magnificent) sanctuaries. Hebrew was minimal. A formal sermon was *de rigueur*. The organ accompanied a professional choir. Cantors were rare.

The movement was emerging gradually from its Classical Reform era, and, little by little, there were experiments with innovations in worship. So-called “creative” services were offered, often sparked by the congregation’s youth, for whom that was standard practice at regional NFTY conclaves. Such services were composed on typewriters and reproduced on Ditto or Mimeograph machines, until photocopiers began to become more ubiquitous. These services were often intended for one-time use. Recycling became a concern.

So-called multi-media services emerged, using slide projectors (often with dissolve capability) and even movie projectors. While organ accompaniment was fairly standard, guitars and occasional keyboards began to appear on some pulpits. Again, with a hat tip to youth, for whom the guitar had been the standard accompaniment during services at conclaves and camp.

All of the above were part of the impetus and also the forerunners of the efforts by the CCAR to develop a new prayer book, which resulted in the emergence of *Gates of Prayer* a few years into my early rabbinate during my tenure in my first solo pulpit following my assistantship, followed by *Gates of Repentance*. I was among those rabbis who introduced both of these in that first solo pulpit and in a subsequent congregation a few years later.

I began my rabbinate in a congregation where neither the rabbis nor the congregants wore a *kipah* or a *tallit* and little Hebrew was heard*.* By the time I retired and became an emeritus, most rabbis and many congregants had been wearing both *kipah* and *tallit* for quite some time, and hardly any rabbis were wearing a black pulpit robe. The “Gates” series of prayer books have given way to “Mishkan,” more prayer is offered in Hebrew, and Cantors share the pulpit.

My rabbinate has spanned an era of enormous change in our movement. I was part of some of it, but not all of it. And, in reflecting on the past 50 years as a rabbi, I understand even more the truth behind the title of a UAHC program I participated in and was trained to lead earlier in my career. It was called “Reform is a Verb.” It most certainly is.

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