

Li'fi Dati (As I See It)

We are now about three months into our adoption of a number of changes in the Shabbat morning service. These were proposed last fall by our Shabbat Committee, in response to a strong desire on our community's part for a service which-while true to the Kane Street values of informality, full traditional prayer, and lay leadership-was at the same time more spirited, engaging, consistent, and skillfully led.

I'd like to report on the progress of this initiative, and share my own reflections. First, with respect to the physical space, the Committee proposed steps to create within our large sanctuary a small area that would foster community, inclusion, and coherence in prayer. Following Synagogue Board approval, we had contractors build a new floor, in the front of the central aisle for prayer and Torah leadership. We have also welcomed to this space a beautiful, handcrafted, and practical new Amud, a portable table for prayer leadership and Torah reading. We separated off the last seven pews of the Sanctuary to create a smaller and more cohesive congregation in the front. A new sound system was also installed.

We are successfully implementing other recommendations of the Shabbat Committee. Joey Weisenberg is leading monthly meetings with our lay Musaf prayer leaders to develop their skills as "Shli'chei Tzibur," to help them support one another, and to learn melodies which are singable and inviting but also conform to the traditional Nusach (musical mode) and spiritual meanings of the Shabbat Musaf service.

The Shabbat Committee also recommended several improvements in the pacing, length, and orchestration of the Shabbat morning service. In response, we have instituted new practical efficiencies in the choreography of the Torah service, a shorter teaching after the Haftarah, and adherence to a schedule whereby the service begins at 9:15 and ends at 12:15 so that we can join at Kiddush with our children's community after they complete their services in the Goldman Center.

We encourage community members to write their reactions about the new Shabbat initiative to Shabbat@kanestreet.org. We take these comments seriously. For example, a number of members expressed discomfort with the movable partitions that cordoned off the new "small sanctuary" in the front. So, we have decided to remove these and instead are installing an attractive braided burgundy rope to separate off the back pews on Shabbatot when we do not need all the pews for seating.

Also, in response to your requests, we introduced in January a second Shabbat morning prayer book, *Eit Ratzon*. This Siddur features a full transliteration of the Shabbat morning service, as well as excellent literary and historical commentaries,

and spiritual reflections. If an inability to read Hebrew has kept you away from our Shabbat morning service, come and try it out with *Siddur Eit Ratzon!*

The charge which was given by our community to the Shabbat Committee, and then from the Shabbat Committee to our Shul leadership, is a huge one: We are seeking to create a service of vigorous spirit and popular engagement in a vast cathedral-like space which is not convivial to the spontaneity and passion of traditional davening. I believe, however, that even in these short three months we have made major strides. There is now on Shabbat morning less distraction and talking. There is more focus, more kavannah (spiritual intention), and much easier engagement of the congregation by prayer leaders and teachers.

I would like to express my appreciation to all the volunteers and staff members who have labored now for 18 months to develop and sustain the current initiative. I am also deeply grateful to the 100 plus regular worshippers of our Shabbat morning service who join together weekly with grace, respect, song, and sincerity even as we make changes. The Talmud calls prayer "Avodah Shebalev," worship, or sacrifice, of the heart. Your open hearts help us to renew our Shabbat community every week. Your kavannah and participation create an atmosphere where all can leave behind the competition and anxieties of our weekday lives, re-connect with our Jewish community, and experience moments of spirituality and transcendence.

Rabbi Weintraub