

Tifereth Israel: A congregation with one foot in the past and one eye on the future



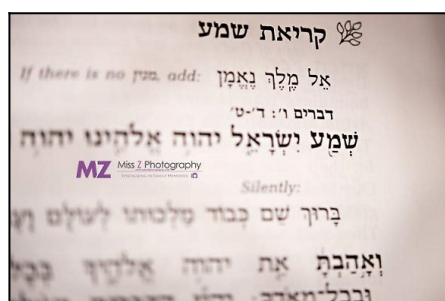
Established in 1922, Tifereth Israel's building was dedicated in 1966. (Miss Z Photography)

Sholom is a Hebrew word that many understand to mean "peace." However, this base definition fails to truly convey the living concept behind the term. It's one we see in movies or perhaps see two Jewish people utter to one another as a blessing or greeting.

These are dead experiences.

It's one thing to see the word used from an outside context, but it's an altogether other experience to be on the receiving end of it. To be accurately summed up there has to be elements of harmony, contentment, and wholeness attached to it. There has to be a *feeling* associated with it. It is an experience that has to be *felt*.

This was exactly my experience when I spent a few hours with the congregation at Tifereth Israel one afternoon. I had an appointment with Congregation President Dorothy Aghai and looked forward to learning something new. I walked into a room full of old friends – I just had never met them before. I was eagerly and warmly received by Board of Director member Abra Salk Zion, Cantor Nathaniel Schudrich, President Dorothy Aghai, executive director Milton Goodman and Rabbi Raphael Kanter. I had expected a casual, informal meeting with one of the officials of Tifereth Israel, but the entire staff showed up. Quite the welcome committee!



Hebrew script developed during the late second and first millennia BCE. (Miss Z Photography)

It conveyed to me the sole importance the congregation placed upon their synagogue and its role in the community. If they placed this much weight upon a meeting with a “little person” like myself, then how did they treat the larger matters and issues?

The meeting was a vibrant, cerebral, jovial one interspersed with moments of levity and spirit. To say that it ran the gamut, would be an understatement. It was a colorful bouquet of experiences that reflected the spirit of the congregation. Here was a non-elitist group of leaders who thoroughly relished rubbing elbows with the bourgeoisie!

The primary reason for the meeting was that the congregation

wanted the community to know that not only was there something going on in this building, but boy was there something going on!!

Tifereth Israel may use the same building as a platform for its community outreach, but the method or protocol has taken a complete 180 from the direction it had previously been going. Tifereth Israel today has a conservative approach to its practice. The objective of strengthening the bond with the local Jewish community remains the same, but with renewed vigor.

Torah

When it comes to *Torah*, the congregation feels that exploration of the Jewish text promotes a “...sense of the sacred in our relationship with God...” Study not only sharpens the mind which strengthens the community at large, but communicates what God wants of each individual.



*Tifereth Israel
offers a number of
Jewish services.
(Miss Z
Photography)*

With that in mind, robust [education programs](#) are in place for

adults and children alike. A number of classes in a variety of topics are offered on a regular basis to help further one's understanding. Bible liturgy, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, a Shabbot morning pulpit, Jewish thought, and Hebrew to name a few.

The congregation feels that their highest education priority are the children as it is more prudent to begin the process of cultivating a positive Jewish identity early on. They offer classes through the Ziskind School of Judaism, for children from Kindergarten through 12th grade. Classes are three days a week up to 7th grade and for grades 8-12, Hebrew High School which meets once per month is offered. Of course, individual instruction for Bar/Bat Mitzvah is available as well.

The congregants stressed the importance that these education programs are accessible, current and executed with the highest, stringent levels of pedagogical excellence. A true *Torah* for the 21st century!

Avodah

In the broadest of terms, *Avodah* refers to service, work or prayer. "Study, like prayer, brings us into a conversation with God. Prayer expresses what we wish to say, and Jewish study hopefully communicates what God wants of each individual." This second pillar is an integral aspect of Tifereth Israel's congregation. Prayer is the opportunity to not only be expressive in your communication with God, but a chance to be open, awake and connected. Unlike the rest of the day, it's the moment where one puts the world aside and one's thoughts in park.

Avodah at Tifereth Israel is centered -pardon the pun- on a spiritual enrichment that has a lasting effect. Through regular prayer one reaps a multitude of real world benefits and the congregant's leaders strive to maintain a balance of tradition and conservatism to best fit the community.

G'meelut Chasadim



*Tifereth Israel has a strong commitment to make this a warm and engaging community that is open to all!
(Miss Z Photography)*

Study and prayer are prerequisite to *G'meelut Chasadim* and must never be relegated to parchment. The practice of *chesed*, must be exactly that: practice. It's *tzedakah*. This was exactly my experience from the moment I walked into the synagogue and further confirmed when they shared anecdotes about 2 Catholic Priests and other Christians who attended services. There is nothing artificial and everything genuine about their practice. I deign to even call it practice, because it's a natural process of spiritual living. Nothing is forced. It's clear that they treat a gentile like myself the same as they would a congregant. They receive the stranger, the poor, and the infirm with equanimity. It's *who* they are – exemplars of *chesed*.

Community, Music, & Extras

In addition to the three pillars of Judaic living there are a number of [community services](#) at Tifereth Israel: a Minhyan Breakfast Club, which is a service followed by a full breakfast, an evening Minyan, Shabbat, and Mincha/Maariv, Havdalah.

The United Synagogue Youth (USY) is a fantastic children's social for grade 5 through high school. There are a host of local and regional activities, dances, Lounges, and the annual Purim Cranival. In additon, there is a Sisterhood community that honors "...our grandmothers, mothers, and friends, [and] demonstrates that Judaism holds an important place in your heart. Your participation offers you a way to connect, learn, and grow with other Jewish women while keeping TI vibrant." The general Sisterhood has been recently complimented with a Sisterhood Book Discussion Group and a Sisterhood Arts & Crafts Group.

Lastly, Tifereth Israel is part of the congregation-based community organizing initiative United Interfaith Action. This is a way to be connected to other congregations like the Catholic "Our Lady of the Assumption," in an attempt to "...intervene with middle school students at risk of dropping out, and working with the teachers' union and school management to establish an innovative Parent Teacher Home Visit program in elementary schools."

Cantor Nathaniel Schudrich, a member of the Cantors' Assembly, is the congregation's *chazzan* and leads the [music](#) aspect of the many events and services like Chanukah, Purim, Shabbat, Passover or other.



Tifereth Israel's congregants breath life into the its building through a number of educational

*and community
programs. (Miss Z
Photography)*

The website is a fantastic resource of information and is regularly updated. Donations and dues can be paid online, there are flyers to print, a calendar, directions, photos and many links.

Shalom is the living, breathing concept that is the life force behind, in front of and within Tifereth Israel. For there is no synagogue without the spirit of its congregants. Indeed, the synagogue is not the building – it's the warm, friendly individuals of the Tifereth Israel congregation led by Rabbi Raphael Kanter, his staff and board members. It's a beautiful building filled with equally beautiful people. I'm just a rube when it comes to conveying the true sense of Judaic spirit that comprises the Tifereth Israel Synagogue and its congregation. So, you would do yourself a great service – pardon another pun – to stop in and find out for yourself.

The three pillars of Jewish living, *Torah*, *Avodah*, and *G'meelut Chasadim*, are superlatively represented at Tifereth Israel along with a strong sense of community. You would be hard pressed to find a finer, more committed living example of these aspects anywhere from here to Israel. *Sholom!*

Would you like to be a member of Tifereth Israel? You can get more information [online](#), reach out via e-mail or phone. In addition, you can keep alerted to special events on their regularly updated [calendar page](#) or join their [newsletter](#).

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