



Russ Joseph z"l
Baruch ben Mordechai HaLevi v'Shayna
January 25, 2019 / Shevat 19, 5779

The first reason Russ took the job at Holy Blossom Temple was for his first love – his family. Becoming the Executive Director of Holy Blossom Temple was Russ and Jan's way to be close to their children and grandchildren. The best decision.

The second reason Russ took the position at Holy Blossom Temple was for his second love – the Jewish People. Becoming the Executive Director of Holy Blossom Temple was Russ's way to continue to serve the Jewish People, to devote himself to Jewish continuity, to weave his life's story into the fabric of Jewish history. Mission accomplished.

Jan. Michelle and Andrew, Lisa and David. Adam, Levi, and Jaden. Gary and Audrey. I hope you feel the embrace of the Holy Blossom community today. There are many Holy Blossom-ites here who have come to honour Russ's contributions, to personally thank him for all the ways he strengthened our congregation, and to do our best to comfort you. Russ's second love is here now for you, his first love.

Psalm 90

Three thousand years ago, the Psalmist reflected on life and its limits, on life and its possibilities for meaningful impact, on life and its opportunities for sacred service. He concludes Psalm 90 with the voice of longing.

***Dear God, let the work of our hands endure for us.
Let the work of our hands endure!***

Almost pleading....

Umaaseh yadeinu kon'nah aleinu.

Umaaseh yadeinu kon'neihu.

Russ didn't talk about these themes, he just did them. He got to work. From a young age, he learned the dignity and blessings of work. And for much of his adult life he went to work for the Jewish People. I admired him for it. Russ pursued a meaningful, purposeful, crazy-making work for the sake of the Jewish People. And for nearly five years now, we at Holy Blossom were the beneficiaries of that devotion.

How many emails did he write and receive day and night and middle-of-the-night? Endless.

How many meetings around how many tables with how many colleagues and lay-partners? Immeasurable.

How many confidences did he keep for those who sought his wise council? Countless.

How many warm Shabbat Shalom handshakes? How many miles did he walk up and down the aisles of our Sanctuary? Countless.

Russ Joseph has left a lasting legacy at 1950 Bathurst Street.

Umaaseh yadeinu kon'nah aleinu.

Let the work of our hands endure for us.

Nearly two months ago, Holy Blossom dedicated our new spaces. Russ was determined to be there. He used a walker, but he dressed in suit and tie and proudly took his place on the bima. He delighted in seeing everyone again and we delighted in seeing him.

Russ was unusually pensive that day. He may have known something we didn't about that occasion. For many, it was a last meeting. Looking

back on it, I am moved he was able to muster the strength to be there that glorious day, to witness with his own eyes what he helped to build with his own hands. Russ fought through pain and exhaustion in order to be able to join with his congregation in lighting the first candle of Chanukah and joining together in the *Shehechyanu*. Thanking God for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach that moment. I stood by Russ for that *Shehechyanu* and I believe he was overcome then, with satisfaction and pride, with a sense of accomplishment and gratitude for having had a hand in securing the Jewish future.

***Umaaseh yadeinu kon'neihu.
Let the work of our hands endure.***

That scene in our sanctuary was Russ's swan song with his second love. Two days ago was his swan song with his first love. Jan, Lisa, Michelle, Gary – I saw you gathered around Russ's bedside as if he were a Biblical patriarch. May his memory continue to protect and guide you as your family grows. May memories of your Zayde, continue to fill Adam, Levi and Jaden with pride. *Zichrono livrachah*. May the memory of Russ Joseph be a blessing for us all. And may *Baruch ben Mordechai v'Shayna* now be at Peace.