

## Notes on Installing a New Rabbi

The installation of a new rabbi is the moment when the congregation formalizes the relationship. There is no set time for this to happen. It can be done at almost any time during the rabbi's first year. Often it is around a holiday – Sukkot, Chanukah and Passover being the most common. It is usually done over a Shabbat to maximize attendance and involvement. Below you will find information to help you – rabbi and congregation – plan the installation.

### Guest Speaker and Congregational Events

The most common option is for the rabbi to invite a teacher or colleague or a well-known figure in the Jewish world whom he/she knows to speak at services, but this is not necessary. (The congregation covers all expenses including transportation, food and a hotel, but there is no honorarium.) The context is often a Friday evening service, and usually there are several events over the weekend that are planned by different groups in the congregation such as the youth group and religious school. It is important for as many different groups as possible within the congregation to have a piece of the weekend - each in its own way. They should understand that this is the official welcome to the rabbi, and each should find a way to express its welcome.

The speaker should teach but not install – this is for the congregation to do. It is also common to invite local clergy and community leaders. Note that in a city with a larger Jewish community where it is hoped that other rabbis will attend, a Sunday event may be a preferable time to Friday night or Saturday morning for the formal installation. Another approach to a full public event on Sunday could be to have the installation/formal welcoming service on Friday night or Saturday morning, and then have an installation event on Sunday for rabbis and representatives from the larger Jewish and larger community. Having the formal installation on a Sunday changes the event from congregational to communal. If the installation takes place on a Sunday, then the rabbi and congregation can put together a brief service and use the model below for processing in with a Torah as a central part of the program.

### Congregation

The service should be created by the new rabbi with input from the congregation.

The president of the congregation and/or the congregation should in some form say the words that install the rabbi, who is the rabbi of the congregation, not of the guest speaker.

Many congregations do a ritual involving the Torah. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Have a Torah service** on a Friday night (see below) or have the installation on a Saturday morning with the entire congregation rising and calling the rabbi for an aliyah. The rabbi does the Torah blessings before and after the Torah reading and then teaches. The aliyah can serve as the act of installation, or a prayer can be read by the congregation (see below) or both.

2. **Process in with a Torah.**

Here are the major elements of what a congregation can do on a Friday evening:

- Processional (even if the congregation does not normally do this).
- Participants in the processional can include:
  - New rabbi and guest speaker
  - *Bimah* guests (past presidents or founders or invited other dignitaries for whom it would be easier not to walk in the procession)
  - Past presidents
  - Transition committee
  - Current officers
  - Youth group leaders/representatives of the teenagers in the congregation
  - A recent bar or bat mitzvah
  - One person carrying a Torah – current president or senior member of congregation
- The cantor/soloist/designated song leader can lead singing during the processional.
- The Torah is passed to past presidents.
- The immediate past president passes the Torah to the current president.
- The current president passes the Torah to the youth group president or teen representative.
- The youth group president/teenager passes the Torah to a recent bar or bat mitzvah.
- The bar or bat mitzvah passes the Torah to the new rabbi.
- The new rabbi places the Torah in the ark.
- The current president leads a congregational responsive reading appropriate to the moment – prepared by the new rabbi and ending with the president offering brief words of installation.
- Service: a regular, Friday evening service.
- During the sermon: the guest speaker speaks first, followed by a response from the newly-installed rabbi.
- Regular completion of service.

The physical symbolism of passing the Torah through the generations of the congregation, and then having the new rabbi place the Torah into the ark is a powerful way to start the relationship.

This also helps make it clear that the congregation is installing the new rabbi and not the guest speaker. The processional and Torah passing signal the congregation's role in the selection of the new rabbi and their future with that rabbi.

3. **Take a Torah from the ark during the service** and pass it from one congregational representative to another until it reaches the new rabbi, who returns it to the ark. The representatives might be the leaders of the congregation on the bimah, representatives of the generations of the congregation, or a combination of both. Then words are spoken by the congregation to install (see below).
4. **The rabbi and the president** each takes a Torah from the ark and holds them while words of installation or a prayer of installation are spoken (see below). Then the scrolls are returned to the ark.

## **Resources**

### **Example of a Blessing of Installation**

May the one who blessed our ancestors Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, bless and sustain Rabbi\_\_\_\_\_.

*Grant her/him wisdom and compassion in equal measure to teach and comfort those in need. Give her/him strength to continue work in difficult times and generosity to share abundance when life is full.*

*May s/he be blessed with a welcoming and supportive congregation and community.*

May Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_ help (name of congregation) continue to be a home for celebration and exploration of Jewish learning, spirituality, and community.

*May Torah and tradition continue to be a source of joy for her/him, and may s/he be blessed with insight and inspiration as s/he contributes to Jewish learning and practice.*

May words of wisdom come from her/his lips and compassion fill her/his heart as we move together from strength to strength.

*We welcome you as our rabbi. Amen.*

### **Example of an Installation Prayer**

Rabbi\_\_\_\_\_, we, the members of (name of congregation), stand before you to welcome you as our Rabbi. We have come to know you as a teacher of Torah, a leader in our worship and prayer, as a spiritual guide in our life cycle events, and, with your family, as a member of our community. You have articulated a vision of a dynamic, inclusive congregation committed to Jewish values and learning. We promise to work with you to help all feel welcome and respected in our community. We look forward to continuing the journey that we have begun together.

(Rabbi then briefly responds.)