

Coming To America

Cantor's Corner

At a recent Etz Hadar *Kabbalat Shabbat*, I related the unusual events of my departure from Toronto, Canada and official arrival in the U.S. one year ago (December 24, 2006). In the light of recently announced and appreciated efforts to soon formalize my role in the Etz Hadar community, let me share this episode with you all, and reflect on its prophetic nature.

I arrived at U.S. Customs bleary eyed at 6 a.m. with documentation requesting an R1 (Religious Workers) visa, allowing me to work in California. Shunted to a secondary enclosed office, my passport and papers were politely “confiscated” to be adjudicated by a duty officer before the inevitable interview.

One interminable hour later, an elegant gentleman – with the name Macintosh on his lapel – ushered me towards his tiny office. A second official was already seated across the table from the chair to which I was directed.

After closing the door, Mr. Macintosh turned to me with a smile and proclaimed, “*Baruch habah be'shem Adonai*” (Hebrew for “Welcome in the name of God”).

Instantly awake, I returned the smile and enquired as to his source for such a phrase. His own grin widened with a promise to explain after we completed our business.

It quickly became apparent that I was most welcome in America and was to be given a full three-year term on the visa. As we filled in the last forms, the interview was limited to requests by Mr. Macintosh for a list of recommended cantorial CD's and eager questions about my training and previous positions. It seems Mr. Macintosh is a member of a Messianic Christian church in Toronto, where Hebrew chanting is common throughout the service.

Walking dazed but euphoric to the departure gate, I realized that any apprehensions I might have harbored about a move south and west had just been dispelled: I was “being moved” for more profound reasons.

In the past year I have been honored several times to participate in life cycle events – both joyous and sad – with Etz Hadar families. In each case I was quickly made to feel very much a member of the family and warm friendships have already followed.

I am looking forward to getting to know all of you better. Please let me know how I can be of service to you and your families. You can send me an email at cantor@etzhadar.org or call me at 909-948-8666.

My transition has not been from congregation to congregation, but truly from home to home, and for this I am eternally grateful to you all.

Be shalom, Michael