

May 1, 2017

Just returned home from visiting NYC with 15 members of Central Reform Temple. We spent 3 exhilarating days in Manhattan exploring our Jewish roots in this historic city.

This was an unrivaled learning experience for me. Although I grew up in the New York City area and went to school for 4 years in Manhattan, I never had taken the time to delve into the richness of the New York Jewish history. We started our visit at the beginning of Judaism in the New World by visiting Shearith Israel, - "The Spanish- Portuguese Synagogue" which has thrived since its founding in 1654. It was one of 4 "Oh Wow" experiences when we entered the first of 4 magnificent sanctuaries. Shearith Israel is a Sephardic synagogue whose décor was beautiful in its humility with windows designed by none other than Louis Comfort Tiffany.

I knew that Reform Judaism was not singular in its traditions and worship style. The next two synagogues we visited, the famed Temple Emanu-El for the Erev Shabbat Service and then Central Synagogue for Shabbat Morning, each had different prayer books and different styles. Both services were rich and inclusive in the message they sent to all in the congregation. I believe we all felt proud to be part of the richness of our Reform Jewish tradition, exemplified by these two historic congregations. The music in both services was mesmerizing and the rabbis inspiring. Our CRT group was welcomed publicly and warmly at both Services.

On Saturday, with the temperature in the 80's, we trekked to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, standing in long lines and travelling on packed ferries which invoked a sense of the "huddled masses" that made journeys to these locations. Jews emigrating from Eastern Europe disembarked not knowing what their fate would be. Several of us had ancestors that had passed through the great hall on Ellis Island. We celebrated their courage. This experience enhanced our commitment to resist attempts to block the entry of emigrants from other ethnic traditions to our country.

We ended with a trip to the lower east side where we gasped at the beauty and the history of the Eldridge Street synagogue – a stunning example of religious architecture which reflected the eastern European Orthodox tradition. We followed this with a bagel nosh of gluten laded products far superior to anything in the Boston area! Our trip ended with a visit to the Tenement Museum where we learned about the daily life and sacrifices immigrants- Jewish, Irish, German and Italian - made to establish their families in a new world.

Sharing this powerful weekend with Rabbi Berman and fellow Temple members was perhaps the highlight for me. Rabbi's guidance, insight and knowledge made history alive and relevant. The questions asked by the participants in our tour were insightful. The closeness we already felt as a community grew through these powerful shared experiences.

We just scratched the surface of Jewish New York but what richness and joy we encountered!