

The Beth Abraham Synagogue Windows

*By Renate Frydman
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"The windows, the windows. What is all this about the windows?" Jay Brown, architect of our new Beth Abraham Synagogue at Sugar Camp, asked me the first time we met.

He soon found out that these beautiful works of art were an integral part of the Beth Abraham psyche. As Jay Brown began to understand their meaning to us as a congregation, he used his artistic ability to recreate their beauty. He brilliantly devised a new configuration of the same precious windows into the design of our new sanctuary and chapel. When they reappeared at Sugar Camp, everyone once again marveled at their beauty.

Sitting in the new sanctuary with its muted earth tones, the vivid colors of the stained glass panels lead the eyes upward. The light, coming from the clear windows, brings in nature with its background of green trees and blue sky, giving a sense of serenity to the entire space.

So, once again these works of art enhance the Beth Abraham holy spaces. There is a long history in the design, installation and development of the stained glass which fills a thick folder. Since their creation began with the building of the old Beth Abraham, the flow of letters back and forth covers a period of years from 1947 to 1954.

Many obstacles stood in the way, starting with the sudden death of **Todros Geller**, designer of the first two High Holy Day windows. When he passed away in March 1949, the B.A. building committee, assisted by then Rabbi Jacob Agus, scurried to find another artist. **A. Raymond**

Since this was before the computer age, all the planning was carried out by regular mail. Endless correspondence went between Dayton, New York, (where Raymond Katz lived) and Chicago.

Most of the history of this

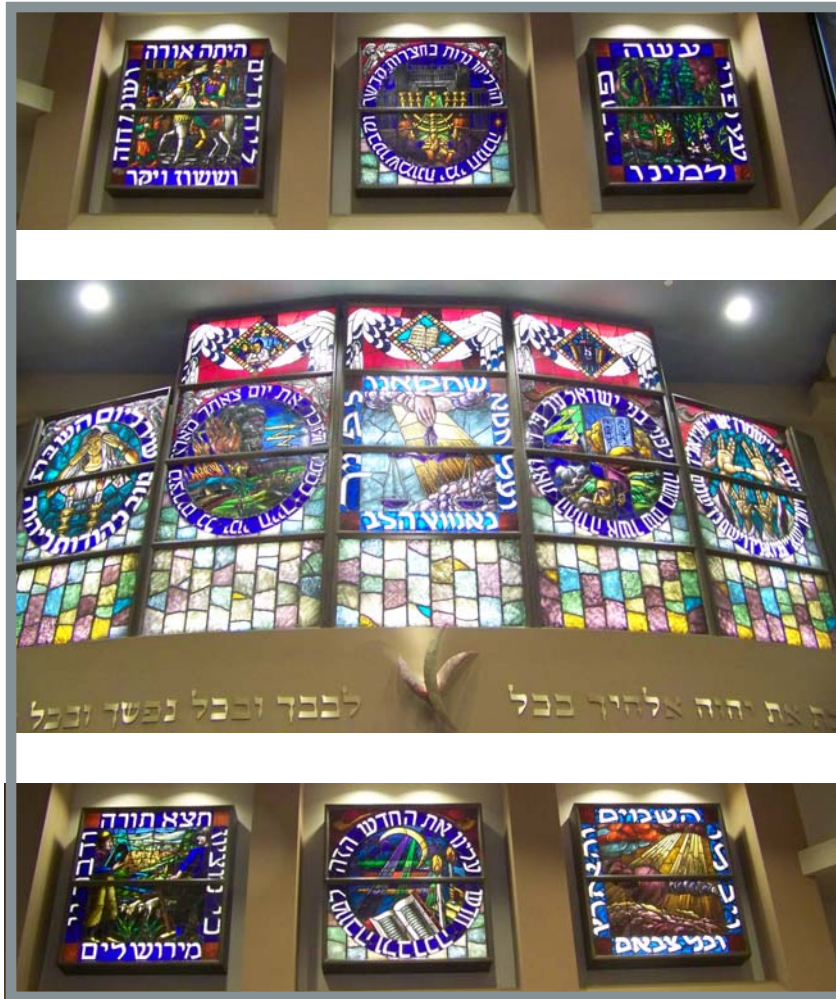
correspondence is in a folder. It contains all the copied letters, typewritten on thin tracing paper or on handwritten note paper. Rabbi Joseph Sternstein took over the letter writing after he succeeded Rabbi Agus. Boris Sokol's name was frequently seen on the correspondence as he was chairman of the board of directors of Beth Abraham.

After wading through this historic memoir, one feels once again the important legacy that our synagogue forefathers left to us. They never had a doubt that the windows would

always remain with us. And now, we have kept that promise.

So let us again explore these stained glass treasures and their transcendent messages.

As one enters the beautiful sanctuary of Beth Abraham Synagogue, immediately the eyes are drawn to the stained glass panels high on each side of the Bimah and over the top of the Holy Ark.



Katz of New York City was found and commissioned to design the six remaining festival windows. He was urged to use the same colors and style as in the first two. The Ten Commandment windows, now in our lower hallway, were created by **David Bekker**, of the D. Bekker Art Stained Glass Studio in Chicago. The Drehobl Bros. Art Glass Co., also in Chicago, manufactured and installed the windows.

The first section of three panels on the left wall depicts the holiday of Purim. Since this holiday celebrates our victory over tyranny and



oppression, it shows the disgraced Haman leading the righteous Jew Mordechai on a princely mount

through the streets of Shushan. The inscription surrounding this panel is from the Book of Esther: "The Jews had gladness and joy, a feast and a good day."

The center panel depicts the holiday of Hanukkah. It shows the ancient, seven-branched candelabra used in the Temple when the miracle happened. It miraculously kept burning for eight days, even though the cruse of oil only contained enough oil for one day. The Feast of Lights came into being with the acclamation, "And they kindled the lights in Thy sacred courts and they established the eight days of Hanukkah." This quote comes from the special prayer inserted into the Amidah during the eight days of Hanukkah.

The third panel on the left wall illustrates the lush and colorful trees and flora for which Israel is renowned. It honors Tu B' Shvat, the Jewish Arbor Day. The inscription surrounding the panel is from Genesis, "The fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind."

Facing the center of the sanctuary, above the Holy Ark, are five panels representing five important holidays in the Jewish calendar year. Together they give the drama and enormity of the Lord's mighty power.

First on the left, the panel represents Sabbath. After the Six days of Creation, on the seventh day, the Lord rested. A woman is kindling the Sabbath candles, saying

the traditional prayers. The quotation surrounding this familiar act of faith is, "A song for the Sabbath Day. It is good to give thanks unto the Lord," from psalm 92. This quote suggests that there should be joy in observing the Sabbath.

Next is a panel that shows the Divine power leading the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, "With a Mighty hand," leading them with pillars of fire and cloud. The inscription proclaims, "In order that you remember the day of your exodus from Egypt all the days of your life," from Deuteronomy. This verse, reiterated each year at Passover, is embodied in our historic consciousness.

The square center panel dramatically symbolizes the weighing of a person's deeds, good and evil, by Divine Judgment on Rosh Hashanah. The words which surround the scales of justice pronounce, "For the sin which



we have committed before Thee by hardening our hearts," from the Machzor.

Shavuoth, the Feast of Weeks, is the celebration of the giving of the Law by the Lord to Israel, accompanied by awesome phenomena. The quotation from Deuteronomy says, "This is the Torah that Moses placed before the children of Israel upon the word of God."

The panel at the right front is from the striking High Holy Day window with the priestly hands stretched forth in blessing. It is surrounded by the three-fold priestly blessing from the book of Numbers, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious to thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace."

Turning to the right wall, the first panel portrays a scene of laborers

and scholars working together in close fellowship, rewarded by the vision of Jerusalem restored. Surrounding this idealistic scene is the ancient dictum, "Out of Zion shall come forth the law. And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem," from Isaiah.

The middle panel came from the Rosh Chodesh window. Blessing the New Moon upon its first appearance in the heavens is a tradition. Surrounding the panel are words from the Musaf Amidah for Rosh Chodesh,

"Renew unto us this month for our good and blessing."



The last panel on the left represents the majesty of the creation of the universe. The origin of the Sabbath indicates our desire to

emulate the Almighty in resting on the seventh day after He completed the universe from chaos. "And the heavens and the earth and all their hosts were completed," from Genesis. Thus, the Sabbath came into being and is forever our day of rest as humans.



THE BETH ABRAHAM CHAPEL WINDOW PANELS



Enter the Beth Abraham Synagogue Chapel and draw a breath of amazement. The jewel-like quality of this space draws one into the brilliant surround of the art on its walls. Whereas the window panels in the sanctuary across the hallway are high and lofty, the window art in the chapel is close and personal.



Along with the vibrancy of the colors, is a sense of peace and tranquility that lends itself to the smaller space for prayer. This is a place to come and be comforted.

As you enter and look to the right, a beautiful gazelle seems ready to leap from a background of leaves, flowers and fruit. The panel depicts an unusually beautiful portrayal of the verse from the Song of Songs read during Passover showing the love between God and Israel. "Make haste, my beloved and be thou like a gazelle or young roe."

Next on the right is the panel for Sukkot depicting the hourglass of time surrounded by the four seasons, seen in their ever changing moods and colors. It is the artist's conception of the words of Koheleth that are read on Sukkot. "To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven."

Continuing with the festival of the beautiful, festival table set for open sukkah top, through which can Almighty's comforting words from "On that day I shall raise up the

The window panels on each side the larger windows at the old Beth shows a prayer book open to the hymn, *Hasha-Nah*, "Please save us," congregation circles the bimah



Sukkot, the right front panel shows the holiday. It is surmounted by the be seen the heavenly stars. The the prophet Amos encircle the scene: fallen Sukkah of David." of the Ark were originally also part of Abraham. The right front panel liturgical excerpt from the moving chanted on Sukkot as the carrying lulav and etrog.

The left panel has the Torah open and the Hebrew inscription from the Kol Nidre prayer of Yom Kippur when God is asked to release man from all vows: "All vows, bonds and promises."

Left of the Ark is the scene of children planting the ideals of Zion in the sacred soil of Israel. The holiday of Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day, has assumed religious as well as national significance. This picture showing the rich promise of Israel fulfills the prophecy of Amos, "And I shall plant them once again on their soil. And they shall no more be plucked up out of their land, saith the Lord."

The panel to the left rear of the chapel is a beautifully done reproduction of a rare Tablet representing the counting of the Omer - done the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot. The verse is from Leviticus, "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the day of rest, from that day ye brought the sheaf of the waving; seven weeks shall there be complete."



All of the panels are surrounded with the original art depicting the flowers, fruits, leaves and vines of the Holy Land in the most vivid of colors; brilliant red, green, gold and purple. The glass panels, lit from behind, surround the entire chapel, inside and out. They are all parts of the original Beth Abraham windows, once again in full glory in their new home.

