

Rabbi Schulweis goes on to explain that drawing distinctions need not involve setting preferences or bestowing favoritism. "Darkness is not the opponent of light...there is no day without night....In us darkness and light, holy and profane, altruism and selfishness cohere." At twilight the evening stars subtly illumine the darkening skyline; there is no stark distinction between light and darkness. So too I have come to see that middle age need not be the either/or choice of being free from responsibility or imprisoned by it. Freedom and responsibility, youthful optimism and mature wisdom, can complement and feed one another, each adding contentment, excitement, opportunity, and renewal to life. There are still horizons to trespass, passions to nourish us, and even responsibilities to invigorate us as we age—as Moses discovered at the burning bush.

As I approach my 50th birthday and complete my 22nd year as a rabbi, I understand that I must work hard to ensure that my rabbinate retains the

powerful satisfaction I currently enjoy. Some might see another twenty years in the same job as a prison sentence. I choose to view it as an opportunity to pave new pathways that can keep my rabbinate engaging and exciting for both my congregation and for me.

My service at Temple Sinai has taught me that longevity offers its blessings. I have watched children become young adults. Performing their b'nai mitzvah ceremonies and then their weddings are professional joys that can only come with age. And there are new classes to teach and new societal ills to confront, bringing Reform Jewish values to the struggle.

Ongoing learning among colleagues and friends is also vital in shoring up a sense of professional satisfaction. Each summer, I spend two weeks of study at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, which renews my passion for Torah, enhances my knowledge, sparks fresh ideas for sermons and classes, and nourishes my soul.

Perhaps most critically, I remain mindful that middle age can generate

new challenges for marriages and families. Ruts, boredom, destructive patterns of alienating communication can set in after decades together. Yet every time a couple in my congregation asks for a public blessing to mark their 50th wedding anniversary, I draw inspiration from their enduring and still fresh love for one another. I am reminded of my own wonderful wife and family, and of my responsibility to nourish those relationships as the years pass and my children grow into adulthood.

In middle age our enemy is stasis, a passive approach to life that assumes that everything will remain, at its best, as it is. But stasis is poison; it saps us of vigor, hope, and happiness. It turns every day into a sentence to be endured, not lived.

It doesn't have to be that way. Even as I measure the weight of my responsibilities and the decades that have passed, even as I consider the limited time I might have left, I am never too old to make passionate choices and meaningful contributions. □

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