

Choosing Abundance: A Tribute to Rabbi Roy A. Walter

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This week's parashah opens with the words: "*Eileh toldot Yitzchak ben Avraham*—These are the descendants of Isaac, son of Abraham."

On the surface, the word *toldot* refers to Isaac's biological descendants. But as Elsie Stern taught us recently, Torah's idea of descent is much bigger than bloodline.

Just as we are born from our mother's womb, we also emerge as people from those who shape us spiritually—from rabbis, teachers, and elders whose voices become part of our own.

Many of you consider yourselves the spiritual descendants of Rabbi Rudin or Rabbi Davidson. Not because you share DNA, but because their teachings live in you.

Last week I traveled to Houston for the funeral of my rabbi, Roy Walter. I see myself as a link in his chain of *toldot*. He even officiated at my bar mitzvah on this very Shabbat—Parashat Toldot—exactly 39 years ago.

He was also my best friend's dad, and I practically grew up in his house.

Sitting in the sanctuary of Temple Emanu El—my childhood home, my mother's childhood home, the synagogue my great-grandfather helped establish in 1944—I felt the generations gathering around me. The memories rose up with startling clarity.

The same tree branches still peeking through the windows above the bimah.

The same spot inside the sanctuary doors where I stood for a picture with my grandparents in a brown suit and a red tie.

The same oversized bimah chairs where Rabbi Walter used to sit, legs crossed, so dignified.

I could see him as though he were standing again at the podium, arms raised, blessing the congregation with "ancient words hallowed by time": *Y'varekhekha*... "May God grant you the greatest gifts of all: the gifts of peace, and peace of mind."

Being there felt like stepping back into a version of myself I hadn't been in years.

And yet it was clear that time has moved on. People have passed. The community I grew up in is not the one that exists today.

Or maybe it's me who's different now.

In that realization, I felt the same emotions many of you have named as our own congregation walks its path of change: grief, nostalgia, uncertainty, and the fear that beloved places and moments can't be recreated.

But sitting with those feelings, something else opened up, too: abundance.

A quiet sense that the world around me wasn't *empty* because things had *changed*; it was *full* because of what *remained*—because of the love that shaped me, and the love I have today; because of the Torah I learned as a child, and the Torah I carry as a rabbi; and because of people who made me who I am, and the spiritual lineage I will always be part of.

That shift—from what *was* to what *is*—is everything.

Looking at the world from a perspective of abundance means having the courage to embrace the here-and-now, to trust what can yet be, and to believe that blessing isn't a relic of the past but a promise of the future.

That's the deeper meaning of *toldot*: the fruits of a life that continue to bear blessing, the legacies that endure when we choose faith over fear.

We, the members of TBE, are the *toldot* of the rabbis who built this place, the families who sustained it, the teachers who carried it, the ancestors who dreamed it into being. And like all descendants, we face a choice:

Do we cling so tightly to what was that we miss what is unfolding?

Do we let fear and scarcity define us?

Or do we choose openness, gratitude, possibility, and hope?

Our congregation is in a season of transition. Change always stirs anxiety. It always tempts us to imagine the worst.

But it also opens the door to transformation, creativity, and new beginnings.

We honor Rabbi Rudin, Rabbi Davidson, Rabbi Walter, and so many others not by freezing the world in place, but by living their teachings—and by choosing life.

So, I want to invite us to embrace optimism and pride—for the community we are today, for the love that surrounds us, and for the opportunities that lie ahead.

May we walk forward together with gratitude.

May we choose abundance over scarcity.

And may our own *toldot* continue to unfold in blessing.