

**Remarks by Hazzan David F. Tilman Upon His Acceptance  
Of the JEA Or Zarua Award**

**January 24, 2011**

First, I want to teach you a simple song that I learned fifty years ago from my teacher and friend, Shraga Philip Arian, Z"L, my educational director in Temple Israel in Albany, NY.

*Ani Musikai...*

Members of the Jewish Educators Assembly, my close friends and colleagues in the Cantors Assembly of the Delaware Valley, Dr. Rick Manstein, President of Beth Sholom Congregation, my Beth Sholom Colleagues led by Rabbis DGK, RAM, my beloved friends Rabbi Aaron, Rabbi emeritus of BSC, Sora, and Rebecca Landes, the love of my life, Ellen, with whom I share every idea, project, and article, ladies and gentlemen:

Todah Rabbah, Todah Rabbah!

I am thrilled to be with you this evening for many reasons.

I have great naht that two of my students from Beth Sholom Congregation are now active members of this wonderful organization, and are serving the Jewish people in meaningful and creative ways. What greater Naht can a Jewish professional have that to watch with pride as a student becomes an adult, a parent, and an honored colleague, sharing in this divinely inspired, and yet so difficult work. Yasher Kokhakhem to you both! (Acknowledge Michael Schatz and Phil Nordlinger!!)

Steve Freedman, we have been both good friends and colleagues for many years, and we have shared incredible experiences between our families. I shall forever remember your sincere and heartfelt comments today.

I am both grateful and humbled by this high honor you have bestowed upon me, and by extension, to all my cantorial colleagues, many of who have come here this evening to sing for you.

As I take stock of my career, I really don't consider myself to be especially gifted nor talented. I do feel that G-d Almighty has allowed me to learn from many great teachers of Jewish tradition, of Jewish values, of Hazzanut, of the conducting art, and of music, in fulfillment of the maxim from Pirkei Avot, Asei Lcha Rav; Find for yourself a Teacher. I have worked very hard to internalize their teachings, to make them my own, and to share what I have learned with generations of students of all ages at Beth Sholom Congregation, at the Forman Center of the Perelman Jewish Day School, at the Brandeis-Bardin Institute, at Camps Ramah, and at the Park Avenue Synagogue.

I want to tell you about two of these great teachers, who have made their mark as great educators of the Jewish people, and whose work has impacted generations of Jews!

I grew up in Albany, NY, at an absolutely wonderful congregation, Temple Israel, where I encountered Rabbi/Hazzan Avraham Herbert Feder-my rebbe, mentor, and friend for

more than 50 years, he should live and be well for many, many years in good health. Rabbi/Hazzan Feder brought G-d Almighty into the sanctuary every time he stepped to the Omud, and he still does. This evening, I want to tell you about the Ed. Director of Temple Israel, Shraga Arian Z"L, the greatest synagogue educational director that ever was!!

Shraga was a short and stocky man; he could be profound and earthy, intellectual and intuitive, traditional and radical, scholarly and eternally curious. His desk was a nightmare; on it, in the middle of piles of papers, was a large mayonnaise jar filled with murky water labeled "Ruach." Last week, my beloved wife Ellen asked me to think like Shraga. What was he teaching by this large unattractive jar of who knew what? I think he was telling all who entered his office in Temple Israel that Ruach was virtually ineffable and indescribable. The recipe is mysterious. But when you find it, you know for sure that you have captured an essential component of Jewish experience.

Shraga could neither sing nor dance very well. He was a skilled actor and director, and would appear in professional summer stock theatrical productions. But he knew and understood the power of the Jewish arts to teach Jewish values! I can hear his booming voice telling me when he invited me at the tender age of 17 to be Rosh Musikah at Camp Givah, the Hebrew speaking day camp of Temple Israel: David, Ani Rotzeh shetilamed otanu shir aharei shir bli hafsafah, v'shir hadash b'chol yom! David, I want you to teach us song after song without interruption, and a new song every day!

Shraga died on Labor Day Weekend of 1971 at age 44, and I pray that G-d Almighty lets him know that I have taken his teachings to heart in every possible way, every day of my career. Shraga taught me to be everything I can be all the time, to work with students and make them the absolute best they can become! He stressed the role of Hebrew as the key component of everything Jewish. He carried in his pocket "Ani M'dabeir/M'daberet Ivrit" buttons, that he would pin on students of his school whom he heard speaking Hebrew on their own initiative. "Shraga, Ani Modeh Lkha, v'chol talmidai modim lcha gam ken!

My first summer experience at Camp Ramah was in 1959 at Camp Ramah in East Hampton, Connecticut, not far from Hartford. I learned from several wonderful and inspirational teachers that summer. The Rosh Rikud drafted me to play all the music for the ReKudia-the Dance Festival-a life altering experience for me! I was especially drawn to a young Philadelphian serving as Rosh Edah Bet and Rosh Tefilah, Saul Philip Wachs! Saul was a great division head, and was in charge of assigning chanichim to lead dovening on Shabbat evening, and Kiddush in the Hadar Ha-ochel on both Friday evening and Shabbat noontime. He was a wonderful singer, a demanding and meticulous teacher of Nusah Hatfilah, the authentic Ashkenazic prayer modes, and a complete master of the Siddur-its contents, organization, themes, and structure. I knew then that I wanted to make his values and his skill set my own.

In 1970 and 1971, Saul and I worked together at the PAS, and we both arrived in Philadelphia in 1975. We have remained friends and colleagues for all these 52 years, sharing ideas and projects, consulting, reminiscing, and singing together.

I have been guided in my work by this mission: The goal of the Hazzan is not to make great music, but to make great Jews! I can try and sometimes succeed in making great music along the way, but only if that serves the ultimate purpose of making great Jews!

This Or Zarua Award has important implications for my colleagues and for me. Your granting this honor to me sends an essential message to the professional and lay leaders of the Conservative Movement and to the leaders of our congregations that, in these very difficult times, the role of the Hazzan as an educator of Jewish values and molder of Neshamot of his/her congregants and students is and must continue to be absolutely sacrosanct.

This award validates my life goal and direction.

I pray that I may be able to continue to be worthy of this award, to continue to work on behalf of the Jewish people, for G-d Almighty, for many years to come! May we all be blessed with much good health, happiness, inspiration, and creativity to continue this sacred work together for many years to come!

Thank you very much!

*And now, here are my colleagues of the Delaware Valley Region of the Cantors Assembly! Let us together taste some of that Ruach in Shraga Arian's Mayonnaise Jar!*