



Rabbis Linda Motzkin & Jonathan Rubenstein

The Temple of Bread and Torah

Story and photograph by LAWRENCE WHITE

As I walk into the side door of Temple Sinai on Broadway, the lovely aroma of baking bread greets me. I see Rabbi Jonathan Rubenstein hurriedly taking loaves in and out of a professional multi-rack oven in the small but highly efficient kitchen. There is a crew of three happy young people wrapping the finished breads in clear plastic bags with labels identifying each recipient.

I then go upstairs to a meeting room where large windows face out to the tree line, providing a lovely soft light that falls on the family seated at the long table, as their son prepares for his Bar Mitzvah.

Rabbi Linda Motzkin is explaining the various steps for making a Torah scroll, from the processing of deerskins into parchment panels to the layered proofreading of the completed text. Temple Sinai pulsates with the positive activity and stimulating intellectual and spiritual conversations.

Born in Minnesota, Rabbi Rubenstein grew up in the Northeast (his father was a Rabbi), and Rabbi Motzkin is from Southern California. Since meeting in

Jerusalem during Rabbinical studies, their personal, spiritual and professional lives have been intertwined. When assigned to Temple Sinai in 1986, they were the first couple to share the sole rabbinic position in a synagogue. Now Rachel, the eldest of their three children, is a Rabbi in Oregon—the third generation.

Rabbi Motzkin serves as Jewish chaplain at Skidmore and has co-authored a dozen books, including *The First Hebrew Primer* and *Prayerbook Hebrew: The Easy Way*.

She also creates “canvases” out of deer parchment left over from Torah making, using acrylics and inks to paint the classic script from Torah in a striking impressionistic manner. “My head is filled with ancient Jewish poetry all the way up to modern-day language. I use it to create the symbols in my art work,” she explains.

After a sabbatical in 2001, Rabbi Rubenstein turned his baking hobby into a profession. Rich Frank, owner of Four Seasons Natural Foods Store, offered his kitchen one day a week so the Rabbi’s idea could incubate. Then Steve Sullivan

at Longfellow’s offered his kitchen on Friday mornings so the Rabbi could bake challah bread. He sold the loaves through Putnam Market and Four Seasons.

“In a short period of time I was able to write a check that replaced lost funding for Meals on Wheels,” Rabbi Rubenstein says with delight. “Then I realized that this baking thing was real, and I went to the board of the Temple to use the kitchen here.” A grant from the Alfred Z. Solomon Charitable Trust helped them update the kitchen.

“I still get the same feeling when I see that the bread has risen.” Rabbi Rubenstein tells me. “When the water and the yeast and other elements come together, it is like the beginning of life on this planet. There is a universe being created in that bowl of dough.”

Proceeds from bread sales benefit hunger relief and other programs. The challah bread is distributed freely to local nursing homes and hospitals. Visit breadandtorah.org **SL**

Lawrence White is chief photographer for Saratoga Living.