

Rabbi Hanan and Barbara Balk began their lives in St. Louis, where they attended the same synagogue and became classmates at its Hebrew School at age ten. A synagogue affiliated class trip to Moshav Nir Galim when they were fifteen had a major impact upon their religious observance, which intensified in their high school years when they became close friends. They eventually both graduated from Columbia University (Barbara from the JTS - Columbia Joint Program) and also both received an M.A. in Education from Columbia's Teaching College. Rabbi Balk pursued rabbinic studies at Yeshiva University as Barbara worked at a Talmud Torah in Great Neck, Long Island. Along the way the Rabbi served as a *hazzan* for the High Holidays at synagogues in St. Louis and New Jersey, having been imbued with a love of *hazzanut* by his grandfather and the cantor at the congregation where he was raised.

In 1984 Rabbi Balk took his first position as the spiritual leader of The Young Israel of Stamford, CT, a congregation with thirty families that had no building of its own, and which held services, other than the Shabbat morning services, in the Balk living room. The Rabbi also taught at the City's day school and continued to commute to New York to study at Yeshiva University.

The congregations' membership grew and Rabbi Balk became active in the Federation, JCC and other community institutions, and authored a weekly column in the local Jewish newspaper entitled "The Rabbi's Corner." At the same time he began to write in scholarly journals and lecture on halachic issues in the greater New York area. Finally the congregation had reached a point where they had to have their own building, and they successfully reached that milestone under the Rabbi's leadership. But the Balk family had three girls by now and the time to seek a full-time pulpit had arrived.

In 1988 the Balk's decided they wanted to return to the Midwest to be close to their families. And while they had established numerous bonds with friends in Stamford and in the East where they had lived for twelve years going back to their college days, they looked forward with excitement to serving a new congregation which had thrived under the leadership of Rabbi Dr. David Indich - though for those who remember Rabbi Balk's 'tryout' Shabbat, he indicated in his sermon that some adjustments would be necessary, since: "I am from St. Louis, and yes, I am a St. Louis Cardinal fan."

Ten years ago, the Executive Board of Golf Manor Synagogue was seeking an individual with vision and vigor to lead its congregation. A youthful Rabbi Hanan Balk, together with Barbara and their three children, met the challenge. And from the beginning, their commitment to the values of Torah Judaism, to their family, and to the congregation and beyond, was apparent. Rabbi Balk became active in Jewish community organizations from the start, serving on the Boards of Cincinnati Hebrew Day School, Jewish Community Relations Council, and later, RITSS, Cedar Village and the Vaad Hoier. He currently chairs the Rabbinical Council of Cincinnati, the Rabbinical Advisory Board of CHDS, and the Vaad Hakashrut of this city. He is a former co-chair of the Federation's Super Sunday fundraising event, as well as the Rabbinic Division of the Jewish Federation Campaign, and the Federation's Russian Resettlement Jewish Education Committee. Balk is a member of the National Rabbinic Cabinet of the United Jewish Appeal and a recipient of the Rabbinic Service award of the Cincinnati Jewish Federation. Rabbi Balk also has the distinction of having led Golf Manor Synagogue to Israel Bond purchases worth millions of dollars.

Aside from his duties as a pulpit rabbi and as an active participant and leader of community organizations, Balk's expenditure of time as an educator outside the walls of the synagogue is remarkable. He has been a teacher at the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School since its inception in 1991. There he has made great strides introducing Jewish adults to the tenets of their religion. Balk's teaching style has been applauded by students consistently, and accordingly, a demonstration video of Balk in his role as Melton lecturer was made for use by Melton instructors on a national level.

Rabbi Balk believes strongly in community outreach. His efforts to make Jewish learning easier to pursue are demonstrated in the "Lunch and Learn" series he founded in 1994 which succeeds in bringing Torah learning to the workplace during the lunch hour, drawing numerous participants to various central locations four days each week.

In 1995, Balk received a Federation grant for Golf Manor Synagogue to employ an individual who would be instrumental in expanding the community-directed learning program, thereby achieving one of his primary goals. Consistent with his focus on extension of Jewish knowledge to a larger audience, when approached by the Cincinnati CBS affiliate to host a radio talk show entitled "Religion on the Line", Balk eagerly accepted the opportunity to familiarize people with Torah, this time over the airways.

It would be remiss to overlook the accomplishments and presence of Barbara Balk. Barbara, as she prefers to be known, is the mother of five girls and a teacher and inspirer of many other children. As Instructor of the Jewish Community Center's Music & Motion Program for toddlers and their parents, she is often recognized and met with excited cries of "Barbara, Barbara!" when she encounters her youngest students throughout the community. In addition to her role as Judaic Specialist for the Jewish Community Center's Early Childhood Program, Barbara also serves on the PTA Board of Cincinnati Hebrew Day School and has chaired numerous school programs over the years. She is co-chair of the Beth Tevillah Mikvah Society Shaloch Manot Project, the main fundraising effort for the Mikvah each year and serves on that organization's Board, as well. With her husband, she co-chaired the Jewish Federation's Super Sunday in 1993.

During the course of ten years, the Balks have impacted the lives of many with friendship, as when hosting guests in their home, and by their myriad of educational pursuits.