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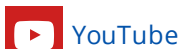
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Tendler Resigns Under Cloud

by Amy Klein

Posted on Mar. 9, 2006 at 7:00 pm

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Rabbi Aron Tendler has stepped down six months early from the pulpit of Shaarey Zedek, an Orthodox synagogue in Valley Village, because "it was no longer appropriate for Rabbi Tendler to continue," shul officials said.

Tendler, 51, first announced his resignation in a January letter to congregants. At the time, he said he planned to remain leader of the synagogue until the High Holidays in September. But in a March 6 letter to congregants, shul president Jim Kapenstein and board chair Yacov Yellin wrote that Tendler would be stepping down immediately in light of "new matters which had recently been brought to our attention "

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brought to our attention.

The letter offers no specifics and shul officials declined to elaborate.

Separately, The Journal has learned that Tendler was once accused of inappropriate conduct at the Yeshiva of Los Angeles (YULA), an Orthodox high school in Pico-Roberston where he had worked from 1980 through June 1999, first as a teacher and then also as a principal. The 1987 investigation was inconclusive, but Tendler transferred from the girls school to the boys school, which is located on a separate campus.

Allegations against Rabbi Tendler surfaced on Jewish blogs -- web logs -- more than a year ago, citing anonymous sources who alleged the rabbi had behaved inappropriately toward women and girls. These rumors were alluded to briefly in articles published in two East Coast newspapers about problems facing the rabbi's brother, Mordechai Tendler, who is currently defending himself against accusations of sexual misconduct.

Aron Tendler could not be reached for comment. In January, when he originally announced his departure, Tendler declined to be interviewed, referring The Journal to his resignation letter. This

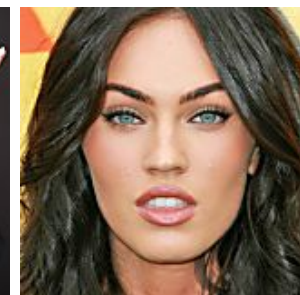
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week, he did not return calls or e-mails.

In his Jan. 18 letter to the congregation, Tendler characterized his resignation, after 22 years of affiliation with the synagogue, as voluntary.

"This has been a decision I have contemplated for some time, and after great soul-searching and deliberation and with the full support of [my wife] Esther and the family, I decided that it was time to explore other opportunities and embark on a new aspect of my personal and professional life."

Tendler wrote that he intended to stay in the community but wanted more time with his family and to pursue writing, teaching and other projects: "On occasion, I would like to sleep for more than four hours. Selfishly put, I want more time, and if not now, when?"

Tendler is regarded as a charismatic leader and an inspiring teacher and speaker -- someone who could turn around troubled youths, leading them to more religious, more successful lives. In 1999, he received an educator's award from the Milken Family Foundation.

This week's letter to congregants notes that the stepped-up departure was agreed upon by Tendler, board chair Yellin and president Kapenstein just prior to Tendler's recent trip to Israel: "At that time we agreed that current circumstances [which include new matters that had recently been brought to our attention] have caused us to conclude that it was no longer appropriate for Rabbi Tendler to continue with his previously announced rabbinic transition."



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by Taboola 

The letter went out to congregants Monday.

"In short, the decision was made that, in the best interest of the shul, Rabbi Tandler's resignation should be accelerated and Rabbi Tandler agreed it was prudent to do so," the letter said.

At the same time, an unofficial source close to synagogue leadership said that no congregation member had made any first-hand allegations about improper conduct against the rabbi.

For their part, YULA officials declined to speak for attribution, but a source close to the administration recounted events surrounding the 1987 Tandler investigation in a prepared statement provided to The Journal.

While Tandler was at YULA "there was a charge regarding inappropriate behavior, not sexual relation[s]," the source said.

"Immediately upon receiving the report," according to the statement, "the school administration requested that a nationally renowned investigatory lawyer come to Los Angeles and conduct a thorough investigation." The results of the three-day investigation were "inconclusive."

"It was unclear what happened and the version of events and the motives of the participants were contradictory. There was no corroborating evidence," the statement said. "Immediately after the investigation, [the] school administration, to remove any doubt, and to be careful and mindful of the students' well-being, permanently removed Rabbi Tandler from his position at the girls school, and Rabbi Tandler replaced those hours with more hours at the boys

school. Rabbi Tendler had no further official contact with the girls school. After his transfer to the boys school there were no more reports of any kind concerning Rabbi Tendler's behavior."

The source added that the school has a zero-tolerance policy regarding misconduct toward students.

Students and parents were never informed of either the accusations or the investigation. Some alumni family members, not speaking for attribution, said they were outraged that the issue had been concealed.

YULA was founded in 1977 by Rabbi Marvin Hier. It's affiliated with The Wiesenthal Center and the Museum of Tolerance, which Rabbi Hier also heads.

Jewish schools have emphasized a "zero-tolerance policy" against sexual abuse and other forms of misconduct since the widely publicized case of New York-area Rabbi Baruch Lanner, who went to prison after leaders in the Jewish community had, for years, brushed aside allegations of inappropriate behavior against him.

"We intend to uphold appropriate conduct not only in sexual abuse but other types of conduct," said Rabbi Avrohom Union, the rabbinic administrator of the Rabbinical Council of California (RCC).

The RCC oversees the rabbinical court and matters such as kashrut, or Jewish dietary law. Union said it was against the organization's policy to comment on whether the RCC was conducting an investigation. "We expect rabbis who are spiritual leaders in the community to behave not only in a manner appropriate of their position but also in a way becoming Orthodox Jews."

Rabbi Aron Tendler comes from a prestigious rabbinic family. His grandfather was the illustrious Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, one of the de facto heads of the Orthodox community in the 20th century until his death in 1986. His father, Rabbi Moshe David Tendler, is the rabbi of The Community Synagogue of Monsey, an ultra-Orthodox community in Rockland County, New York, and an expert on Jewish medical ethics.

The New York Post reported that Aron's brother, Rabbi Mordechai Tendler, was suspended by the leadership of his synagogue, Kehillat New Israel, which also is located in Rockland County. In December, a former congregant sued Mordechai Tendler, alleging that he claimed to be the "Messiah" and gave her "sex therapy" to help her find a husband during counseling, the Post wrote, citing court documents. Mordechai Tendler has denied any wrongdoing, challenges the validity of the suspension and has taken his case to religious court.

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