

## KOL NIDRE APPEAL 5765

One night the rabbi, the chazzan and the president of a shul were having a meeting in the shul. A thief entered the building and came upon the three of them. He said to them that since they had seen him and could identify him, he would have to kill them but he would give each of them one last wish. The rabbi said that last year he had given the most wonderful sermon on Yom Kippur, a full hour and a half and he wanted to give it one last time. The chazzan said that last year he had chanted the most beautiful Kol Nidre, it also took an hour and a half. He wanted the chance to do it one more time. The thief looked at the president and asked his last wish. He said, "Kill me now!"

Good evening. Shana Tova. A good year to all of you.

If I missed asking forgiveness from anyone for any wrong I may have done them, please accept my plea now. As the president of this shul, I also ask your forgiveness for any hurtful actions or words that may have come from any of our officers, board members or volunteers. We are not a perfect group; we do try to learn from our mistakes; and we are working to better our congregational family, our community and our Jewish community.

I offer a quick but very heartfelt Thank You as well, to everyone who has given to this congregation -- given of your time, of your selves, of your dollars. It is our custom to offer a blanket Yasher Koach in lieu of individual thanks when there are so many names to recall. It is better to thank all of you at once rather than individually and forget even a single person. We value everyone's contributions.

I heard a phrase recently which I haven't been able to get out of my head. The statement was "80% of the work is done by 20% of the people." We stand here today at the beginning of our 49th year, just one year short of a milestone. A milestone that will be reached not because of the dedicated work of 20% of the people, but it will be reached because of the dedicated work of many people over many years.

It may be that an overall 20% participation is what has always been, I have no way of measuring that. I do know that as our congregation has grown smaller, the 20% figure produces a lot less active members.

We may have been larger at one point. Wealthier at another. Our hindsight usually better than our foresight. The years -- and the demographics -- have taken a toll. But we remain.

I would like to take a few moments to acknowledge the dedication of those who have gotten us to this point. I begin with our Past Presidents. Through good as well as difficult times, these people stood up and did a job that not many people want to do.

Would all of you please stand and remain standing for a moment.

Next, I would like everyone who ever served our congregation as any of the other

officers to please rise and remain standing. Come on, the VPs, treasurers, secretaries.

Next, would everyone who has ever served on the Board of Trustees please join them and stand.

Over the years, if you ever served as a Committee Chair, please stand.

All committee Members, past and present, please stand.

And lastly, I would like everyone who has attended and supported any shul event to please rise. If you bought a sweepstakes ticket or a raffle. If you worked the bazaar, came to a Sukkot Dinner, Tikkun Leil Shavuot or sent in a Kol Nidre pledge. If you shared your Sukkah or danced with the Torahs here on Simchat Torah, please rise.

While we do not like to applaud in shul, please turn to the person next to you, behind you or in front of you and say, "Yasher Koach."

Good job. Thank you. Please be seated.

I was not my first choice to present the Kol Nidre Appeal this year. I gave the appeal a few years ago. That talk ran about 40 minutes. This one is not much longer.

Actually, this one is much shorter.

Over the past nine months of my term — or the first nine months, depending on how you look at it — I have met with and conversed online and inperson with dozens of other synagogue presidents. From Texas to Massachusetts. Illinois to Ontario. Wisconsin to Florida. New Jersey to Spain. Even Baldwin and the surrounding south shore communities.

One thing I learned was that many of the problems we face right here in Baldwin are not unique to us. Whether it is fundraising problems or attendance on Shabbat, intermarriage of our children or members fleeing after their child's Bar Mitzvah, there are Jews all over the world that face the same issues as we do. We are not alone in our problems, we should not be alone in solving them.

One interesting -- and timely -- topic on the president's LISTSERVE has been how synagogues handle the Kol Nidre Appeal. In fact, a number of them consider it their Yearly Appeal. But the thing that struck me was that the majority of the Appeals were done by the sitting president. Some were done by a financial officer and some were handled by a vice president, but most by the person who is ultimately responsible -- the synagogue president.

As I said, I was not my first choice. Or even the second or third choice. Even after I decided to do it myself, names were recommended to me of people who might give this appeal. But I figured as your elected leader, it is my responsibility to lead in many areas -- fundraising being one of them. And let us be very clear, the Kol Nidre Appeal is the major fundraising effort we will undertake. More than 25% of our operating budget for the year is based on how you respond this evening.

The appeal for funds is not unique to our synagogue. In fact, asking the congregation

for funds goes back centuries. The first building fund was Moses' appeal in the wilderness for donations to build the Mishkan, our original Tabernacle.

The dues we pay to belong are not enough to support our existence. Even when building the Mishkan, Moses did not raise funds by taxing each household, but by soliciting donations. Over the years, through the original building fund, to the arson that burned on this very bimah, to the major repair of our roof, and through other difficult financial times, the congregation has reached out to some members for extra assistance in raising needed funds.

Tonight, this appeal is not as selective; it is for everyone.

We are at a transitional point in our existence. We are no longer a large shul, in fact, according to the United Synagogue classification, we are right on the border between being a "small" and a "very small" shul based on membership numbers. But do not confuse quantity with quality.

Financial issues aside for a moment, I would like to focus on another type of giving. The giving of your time.

In addition to being a smaller congregation, we are also an older congregation. We have only a handful of members that are under the age of 40. The rest of us are split approximately 50-50 in two categories. Half of us are between 40 and 60, and half are 60 and over.

I met a synagogue president last week who said that when he joined his shul thirty years ago he was the youngest member. Today, he is still the youngest member.

Aging is part of the natural order of things but so is the need to guarantee one's future existence. In our personal lives, we marry and have children and grandchildren. In our congregational life, we need to propagate our existence by growing, by getting new members. That is the only way to guarantee our existence into the future.

The other choice is to accept ourselves as a permanently aging group that will eventually die out. If we are willing to accept an eventual demise because there are no Jews moving to Baldwin, or because of whatever reason you choose to dwell on, then it is best to plan for an end. Even Gutterman's advertises, and it is on every page of their calendar, *The Pre-Plan. A Pre-Arranged Funeral Program. A funeral service is a personal matter. . . make your own decisions.*

If we are to be convinced that it is only a matter of time, then we are compelled to prepare for that day. A long- or short-term planning group should start work on this. Phase out the Hebrew School. Subtract from our membership -- and our dues income -- the families with children of Hebrew School age. Yes, we can save tens of thousands of dollars by not having a Hebrew School. But we also lose much more than that.

I do not stand here before you today, nor did I take on the presidency of this great organization to foster in the end of our days. I took on this job because I still see a future here. I see enough life here that can beget a tomorrow for our children.

While any new members may not come from Jews moving into Baldwin, there are

still many that live among us that are not affiliated. Those that may have even left SBJC because their children no longer need "INSTRUCTION." Our first effort must be to encourage those that live among us, to become a part of us.

Yes, the biggest obstacle we face is Secularism. Non-affiliation. There is a story of an elderly Jewish lady at a bus stop who turned to the man next to her and asked: "Farshteis dir Yiddish? (Do you understand Yiddish?)"

"Yah" was his response.

"Gut! Vot time is it?"

You see, she thought she was speaking Yiddish, but was really speaking English with a Yiddish accent.

Many people do that.

They think they're living Jewishly when all they are doing is living an American life with a Jewish accent.

The woman who thinks she is maintaining a Jewish household because she serves herring. Or the person who considers their neighborhood Jewish because there is a deli there. The one who believes that bringing Jews together, for whatever secular reason, enhances Jewish survival. These people think they are speaking and living Judaism, but they are not.

They are representing an essentially non-Jewish, non-religious approach to life with a slight Jewish accent added. Like the lady in the story, they speak secularly but call it Judaism.

Antiochus wanted all his citizens to be united in a single culture, with a single calendar and a single set of habits. He said to the Jews: "you can still call yourselves Jews, but for some of your distinctive habits and patterns you will substitute the Greek way of doing things. It will make everything so much easier for the administration and for yourselves."

"NO!" was the Jews response.

When we encounter assimilation and secularism in this Christian-based country, state, county, town, we must respond with the same, formidable, resounding, "NO!"

The Talmud tells us, "As my ancestors planted for me, so I plant for my children." There are those that came before us, whether it is your parents and grandparents at shuls where you grew up, or whether it is those that founded this congregation and nurtured it so it is here for us today. They planted for us. It is now our obligation to ensure the future for those that will follow.

No, we will not accept the slow death of assimilation. We do believe in our heritage. The values and beliefs of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents remain valid values for us today. As I have said on other occasions, it is our duty to lead by example. Our Board to lead by example to the congregation. And our parents to lead by example to their children.

If, G-d willing, I am able to fill out two years as president of the South Baldwin Jewish Center, my term will conclude during our 50th Golden Anniversary. This major milestone lays at our feet waiting to be plucked; with proper care, attention and involvement, it can be like a shot of B-12 to rejuvenate ourselves. It is certainly an opportunity that lends itself to some excellent marketing, publicity and celebration.

Well before assuming the presidency, some people were aware of my interest in promoting a trip to Israel as part of our 50th Anniversary. Two people have come forward with enough interest to begin planning such a trip.

Our 50th Anniversary celebration, even though the year will not begin until October 2005, is something that deserves the large amount of work that it will take to pull off a successful year of programming and observance. This year, plans are already underway to celebrate our 30th year as an Egalitarian shul next spring.

While these longer-term plans need much input and involvement from you, so does our day-to-day existence. When the call comes, better yet, even before the call comes, please step up and get involved.

To paraphrase President Kennedy: instead of asking what we can do for you, ask what you can do for your synagogue. By helping the South Baldwin Jewish Center, you are helping yourself.

When we learn of the various levels of tzedakah, we find that the highest level is helping someone to be able to provide for themselves. I ask you to help SBJC provide for itself, for "it" is actually all of you.

When it is time to give, I ask you to recall the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, who said, "Do as much as you can and then just a little more than you can. This is vital."

This is our shul and we need to maintain it. Even the least involved members come here for baby-namings, a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, aufrufs, and to say kaddish for those who have left us. This is where we come back every year to listen to the blast of the shofar. This is where we learn our traditions and teach them to our children. Yes, this is where children AND adults come to learn. We are a kehilla kedosha -- a holy community. Of friends and families who support you through times of adversity and celebrate with you at times of joy.

Our goal is 100% participation. Not only in tonight's appeal, but 100% participation in our life here, together. Please try to do a little more than in the past. Our future tomorrow needs your help today.

Over the past seven years, there have been numerous occasions when I have given more of my time than I should have. It is one thing to give of oneself but I have on many occasions taken extra time from my loved ones. To my family, I also ask their forgiveness as well offer my appreciation for their support as well.

Shana Tova. Gamar chatima tovah.