



THE
UNITED
SYNAGOGUE OF
CONSERVATIVE
JUDAISM

נֵר ה' נִשְׁמַת אָדָם

Sample Presidential Speeches

Yom Kippur

SYNAGOGUE RESOURCE CENTER

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KOL NIDRE 5763

PRESIDENT'S SPEECH

The powerful and moving Kol Nidre prayer always manages to fill me with a certain nostalgia. Perhaps it is the melody, it's rhythm or it's words, whose familiar sound transport me back to my youth, evoking vivid childhood memories of the synagogue where I grew up, of the High Holy Days and other Jewish festivals observed and celebrated together with my family. In our fast-paced and forever-changing world, the liturgy and traditions that are a part of our rich Jewish heritage are a kind of constant, - a thread running through the tapestries of our lives, connecting the past to the future.

What are the memories and experiences - Jewish memories and experiences, - that we hope will be a part of **our** children's lives, to be treasured and passed on to **their** children and grandchildren?

What will be the thrival and survival rates of our children's, and grandchildren's Jewishness? As Arthur Hertzberg, noted author and former president of The American Jewish Congress states in a recent interview: "the deepest problem facing the North American Jewish community remains the transmission of their Jewishness to future generations".

Are we, as a synagogue, effectively fulfilling our role as a catalyst in creating the memories and experiences that will help forge our children's identity as Jews, and help ensure Jewish continuity into the foreseeable future? What is the future that we envision?

As someone once remarked: "the future - isn't what it used to be".

Our responsibility to pro-actively and creatively address these questions and concerns continues to guide our efforts, as we chart a course for the future for our synagogue. Our commitment to responding meaningfully to the diverse and evolving needs and expectations of our members, continues to drive our efforts, as does our duty to ensure that the things that we are doing, **do**, in fact, reflect and facilitate our desired future. The future, after all, doesn't just descend like a stage-set, but rather, is constructed and shaped by our visions and dreams, and by the actions and concrete steps that we take today.

One of those steps, and not the least of the challenges facing our congregation, is creating the long-term financial stability necessary in order to fulfill our mandate.

As you may recall, when I began my term last year, I outlined the need for our congregation to put in place a comprehensive long-term strategic plan, in order to provide us with a direction, as we address our current and future financial needs.

As I indicated at that time, the costs of delivering the many programs and services which we provide for our members continue to rise. And as our facility continues to age, we will be faced with additional, and substantial, maintenance and capital replacement costs in the future. Faced with these realities, it is clear, that in order to manage and operate our synagogue in a fiscally responsible manner, we can no longer rely on a year-by-year approach. We must take a more pro-active and long-term approach, if we are to ensure the financial stability and viability of our synagogue. As any financial advisor will tell you: "Failing to plan, is planning to fail".

The process of formulating a Long-Term Strategic Plan for the synagogue has already be~ and will be a major focus for us this year. Once in place, our long-range plan will serve as a blue-print for the future, and a framework, through which we will be better able to assess our needs, review and set priorities, and appropriately allocate resources. And in the context of that plan, our membership dues will be re-evaluated, to determine whether their current levels are, in fact, reflective of our long-term budgetary needs. Although we are still in the process of formulating our plan, it is already clear that meeting the anticipated capital replacement costs that we will be faced with down the road, is not something that can be accomplished within the parameters of our existing annual budgets. In addition to continuing our efforts to develop new fundraising initiatives in order to create additional sources of revenue for the synagogue, it will also be necessary to establish and maintain a Capital Reserve Fund. The reserve fund will provide us with the

necessary means to meet the financial challenges of the future on a firm footing, and ensure that we have a secure and solid foundation for future growth.

While budgetary and financial concerns are of critical importance, they are not the end or the purpose of the synagogue. On the contrary, budget is driven by the services and programs that we provide, and that, in turn, is driven by our mission and goals, and by our commitment to meeting the needs of our membership, by providing them with the tools and environment needed to inspire and encourage individual Jewish growth. As a non-profit organization, - and a quick glance at our auditor's report will confirm that we are definitely non-profit; our bottom line is the level of services and programs that we provide, and the measure of our success is, ultimately, the vibrancy and quality of Jewish life that those things generate.

To that end, one of our primary focuses in the past year has been in the areas of outreach and programming initiatives. Through the establishment of a new social group, called Geshet, we are outreaching to our university-age young single adults, to keep them connected. For our young families, we offer a host of multi-generational programs, from Family Education days to Shabbat family dinners, and a Jewish Cultural Festival. From opportunities to volunteer at a soup kitchen, to Adult Education classes, and a Jewish Film Festival, we continue in our efforts to create and develop new gateways of entry, and new avenues for meaningful and rewarding participation.

From our ongoing efforts to enhance our prayer services, and make them more participatory, to the drafting of a new and updated set of bylaws, which will provide greater clarity and direction for addressing questions or issues that may arise in the future, much has been accomplished in the past year, in numerous areas, and many changes have been implemented. And for a full report of all of our activities over the past year, I invite all of our members to attend our upcoming Annual General meeting.

Making all of these things happen would not be possible without our single most important resource: - which is: - people. Whether it be the members of my Executive, whose support, commitment and tireless enthusiasm I value so greatly, the hard-working members of the board of directors, or the many others who serve on committees and man our fundraising events, - our volunteers are the backbone, and greatest strength of this congregation, and each and every one of them is to be admired for their dedication and readiness to give so freely of their time, energy and talents, for the betterment of the synagogue.

And there is, of course, one other group of dynamic people whose skills, initiative and leadership we rely on: - and that is our professionals -- our Rabbi, Cantor and Executive Director.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and express our gratitude to our former Executive Director, Mr. Harry Sherman, who, as you know, has retired this past year. Harry served our congregation with commitment and devotion for the past 14 years, and, as he begins his well-deserved retirement, I know that the entire congregation joins me in thanking him for all that he has done for our synagogue.

Together with our spiritual leader, Rabbi Saks, our new cantor, Cantor Alex Stein, and our new Executive Director, Bernie Rabinovitch, we continue to strive to make Beth Tzedec a place that is warm, welcoming and inclusive, and a place that has relevance and value for its members, by virtue of its ability to serve their needs, and to impact and enrich their lives.

Our synagogue is, after all, a place that is filled not only with the sounds of prayer, the words of Torah, and the rhythms of the Jewish calendar, but is filled also with the rhythms of our lives. - A place where our children are married, where babies are named and welcomed into the covenant of our people; a place where lives are touched, and where people connect - with one another and with their Judaism. It is a place where we come for comfort and support, and a place where community is created and built. A place where we can express and celebrate our Judaism; where we can learn and grow as individuals -and most importantly, it is a place where we create the memories and meaningful family experiences through which we instill in our children, a sense of comfort with their Judaism, a sense of pride in their rich past, and a sense of commitment to our shared future. "Teach your children diligently" says the Torah, and the Rabbis of the Talmud tell us that "It is our children, when they are learning, whose every breath sustains the world."

Our synagogue is a place that I, for one, feel proud, and blessed, to be a part of.

It has been suggested that perhaps, we are, each of us, not so much human beings on a spiritual journey, as we are spiritual beings on a human journey.

I invite you to make Beth Tzedec a part of your journey, by actively participating and availing yourselves of all that the synagogue has to offer to you and to your families. The leadership of the synagogue can formulate visions and set goals, - and we have; we can outreach and we can create programming initiatives - and we do; we can advocate, legislate and set policy - and we do that too; but realizing and fulfilling our full potential as a synagogue can only be achieved in the context of a partnership with an actively participating membership.

And many of you **do** participate. Attendance at our Shabbat morning services continues to grow, our youth groups are vibrant, and the positive response to the many events and programs that we offer throughout the year is evidence that we are answering a need that is there, and is real.

For those that are not yet taking full advantage of your membership, I invite each of you to join us, and become full and active partners, and joint architects in building and shaping our shared Jewish future.

As our congregation begins a new year, may it be a year guided by clarity of vision and unity of purpose, a year of creative growth and building for the future, and a year in which, together, we create the memories and meaningful family experiences that will enrich our own lives today, and sustain and fuel the aspirations of our future generations.

The future may not be what it used to be - but it is in our collective hands, and it is only a breath away.

On behalf of the executive, my family and myself, I would like to express our wish, - to all of our members, - that you be inscribed for a year of health, happiness and fulfillment, - and that it be a year of peace and security, - in Israel, and the world over.

G'mar Chatima Tova!

Alexandra Cyngiser
President, 2002
Beth Tzedec
Calgary

President's Speech - Yom Kippur - Sept. 16, 2002
Lorne E. Rozovsky
Temple Beth-EI, Richmond, Virginia

This is my second Yom Kippur speech to you. It is also my last. I have a number of things to say, but first of all, I want to thank you for the opportunity you have given me to serve this congregation. I have been on the board and secretary of two congregations now, a much smaller one in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and here at Temple Beth-EI, but nothing compares to being a shul president.

I want to tell you that so far it has been a remarkable experience to be directly involved in the continuation and vitalization of Jewish life. I have been given an opportunity to meet and to know some wonderful people. Really fine people. - in the old fashioned sense of the word. They have added enormously to my life, and I thank you all for that.

However, if at any time during the past year I have offended or wronged anyone of you, or my colleagues on the board or our rabbis, cantor, executive director, or education director, or any of my friends, or my wife or my children, I use this Day of Atonement to apologize and to seek your forgiveness.

I came to you with a very basic belief. It is that regardless of all of the other institutions throughout the Jewish world, the schools, the community centers, the social service associations, the Jewish cultural organizations, the political groups - all of which have enhanced our lives, and the lives of our fellow human beings, the central core of Jewish life is a strong and vibrant synagogue. Without that, all our other activities are insignificant. With that, the other aspects of Jewish life both in this country and throughout the world, will flourish.

With this in mind, there were times, when I truly felt that we as a people were finished. We always seemed to be under attack. The situation in Israel, the hypocrisy of other countries, and attacks in this country and other parts of the democratic world against synagogues and centers of Jewish life, and the unspeakable acts of a year ago, have filled me with a feeling of frustration and sometimes despair. When my own son had to travel in an armored bus to get back and forth to the AIPAI conference in Washington, and at one point was surrounded by people one of whom screamed "Kill the Jews" my heart breaks. That is why my entire family left Russia and settled in the safety of Canada. He was also involved in demonstrations at Virginia Tech with the Jews on one side of the road and Arabs on the other. Last week, there was a full scale riot at Concordia University in Montreal where I became Bar Mitzvah. It prevented a speech to be given by Mr. Netanyahu - in a country which regards itself as being among the most democratic countries in the world. I weep for where we are heading.

We are fighting battles which are different than in the past. We cannot just collect money and help Israel buy more tanks. Even if we rose up and all made aliyah, that would not solve the problem. There is no guarantee that anything will work. We just want the feeling of desperation to go away. We cannot hide from it. We cannot be like the Jews of Europe in 1939.

At the same time, we seem to be losing the internal battle here at home, in the Diaspora, in the United States, in Richmond. We are losing the battles of numbers. While we have been enormously blessed, particularly in Beth-EI by having so many people leave the safety and comfort of the outside world, and join our faith and our people. We and they have followed the tradition of Ruth.

However, thousands simply drift away, by intermarriage or by disinterest which takes hold over a period of years. The number of unaffiliated people is enormous. The number of people who are affiliated with a synagogue, this one or any of the others in town, but who only affiliate in name, may even be larger.

This is not a time to condemn, or to criticize. Everyone has their reasons for doing what they do in life, or perhaps their journey in life simply took them to parts which they did not expect.

On your behalf therefore, I have tried to concentrate our efforts on strengthening what we already have - a religious institution that is for many, and must be for more, the foundation and central core of our Jewish lives. Only with a strong Temple Beth-EI and synagogues of every denomination and ethnicity, will we survive the current disarray, error and war.

From a practical point of view this takes organization and it takes money, but in my view organization comes first. First we have Rabbi Rosin to work with Rabbi Creditor and all of us. This is an important step in our development as a Jewish community. We welcome Rabbi Rosin on his first High Holy Days with us.

I have appointed a long term planning task force. We have revitalized the membership committee, and have an active young adults committee. We are trying to rationalize the use of our buildings and bring in extra income from them, along with our bingo income, so as not to increase the burden on our members. Numerous additional services have been scheduled particularly for families and young children.

However, we need your help on two matters. The first is to increase our attendance at shabbat and daily services. No matter how many children we have in the religious school, or members of the Sisterhood, or volunteers for bingo or on any committee, without a vibrant religious attendance, we will not have a place of worship for ourselves or for our children.

The second is to think of what we must do to perpetuate Temple Beth-EI for our children, our grandchildren, for this community and for the Jewish people. How do we keep it going in years to come?

At our last Congregational meeting, you changed our constitution to establish a permanent source of funding. The result is the endowment committee which is now working on plans to set up a fund to ensure that this synagogue will not only survive for years to come, but flourish. We are following the lead of universities, art galleries and scholarship funds so that enough money can be put away, so that Temple Beth-EI can live at least partially off the interest. You will be advised as the plans develop. If you have questions or suggestions, call the Endowment Committee chairs Helen or Hal Horowitz, or Carl Hayslett. This will not only keep this community strong, but will provide the bulwark of the defence in our current difficulties. We must start the fight at home. Without it, I dread the consequences.

We are blessed with not one but two rabbis from not one, but both Conservative seminaries in the United States, a cantor who has added meaning to our lives, an education director who is helping us build a real center for Jewish education, and an executive director and his staff who keep our corporate ship heading on course. I thank all of them and our rebbitzin, for their help, their guidance and their dedication. I thank all of you. I thank my wife Fay, and our sons Joshua and Aaron, and in the words of the priestly blessing, May the Lord truly bless us and keep us, our families, our community and the people of Israel. Amen .