

KOL NIDRE SPEECH- SEPT 27, 2009

Your Accomplishments.

Gifts on your birthday.

Your Home.

Antiques.

Family Heirlooms.

If we were playing one of the old T.V. game shows from the 60s or 70s, like Password or Pyramid, where one person gives short clues and a celebrity teammate tries to guess what his partner is trying to convey while a time clock is ticking down, the words I just spoke might have been clues to elicit the following correct answers: The exchange might go something like this:

Your Accomplishments Things we take pride in.

Gifts on your Birthday Things we want to receive.

Your Home Things we want to protect.

Antiques Things we want to preserve.

Family Heirlooms Things we want to pass on to our children.

But what if we were playing a Jewish version of the game?

What if we were playing a Synagogue version?

If we were playing the Jewish version and were given the clue:

“Our heritage”

Or playing the shul version we were given the clue:

“our diverse and inclusive membership”

Would we answer: “Things we take pride in”?

More clues:

in the Jewish version: “God’s blessings”

**In the shul version: “A call or visit from the Rabbi at a
time of illness or loss”**

Would we yell out as the time clock wound down:

“Things we want to receive”?

And what about the things we want to protect?

**Would “the continuity of our people” be a good clue in
the Jewish version of the game?**

How about “a close-knit sense of community” in the shul version?

What is it that we want to preserve?

In the Jewish version, would we answer: “Our traditions”?

In the shul version, how about: “A steady stream of simchas to celebrate”?

And what, my friends, are the things we want to pass on to our children?

Might our clue in the Jewish version be:

“A sense of yiddishkeit?”

And what about the synagogue version? What if getting the correct answer: “What we want to pass on to our children” was actually determined by the clue you gave. What WOULD your clue be in the shul version of the game?—

Think about it. And if you don’t have kids of your own, think of your nephews or nieces or your friends’ children.

Go ahead. The clock is winding down. The game is on the line.

You have to hit the buzzer. What is the clue YOU would give?

The truth of course is that whether we call them clues in a made-up game or essential parts to our Jewish lives, they are all right here , today, right now:

That diverse, inclusive tight knit community, that sense of yiddishkeit, that heritage, our future stream of simchas, our traditions, our many blessings from Hashem—they are all right here. We can see them. We can feel them.

Tomorrow night we'll even be able to taste some of them!

But will they all be here next year?

Well, it depends.

I attended a class years ago at a friend's home being taught by one of our community's exceptional rabbis. He began by posing the age-old psychology question: "Is a 16 oz glass containing 8 oz of water half full or half empty?"

The rabbi continued: "Well, it depends." Okay, rabbi, tell us: on what does it depend?

He went on: "It depends upon your relationship to the glass."

Great. What in the world does that mean?

"Ah," he said, "it depends on whether you fill the glass with water or simply drink from it."

"You see," he continued, "if you participate in filling the glass, you are a contributor, you have a stake in the glass, and you will always feel like it is half full, you will always see its potential, and you will always strive to fill it up. On the other hand, if all you do is drink from it, you will always see it as half empty. Not only will the glass never seem filled, but YOU will never feel "FULFILLED."

And just as this is true for cups of water, I believe it true for communities. It is true for our B'nai Torah community, but with one exception.

Whether you come to shul one or two days a year, (perhaps tonight, perhaps to say Kaddish or at some other time that is meaningful to you), perhaps you come almost everyday, or somewhere in between, we have or we will all reach out to our synagogue at some moment in time. Everyone, yes EVERYONE, will drink from the shul cup.

It may be a simcha such as the birth of a child or grandchild, a bar or bat mitzvah, an auf ruf or a wedding,

Or it may be at a time of serious illness or death of a loved one.

It may be to enrich your Jewish education,

Or it may be for counsel while struggling with issues surrounding intermarriage, homosexuality or addiction.

**It may be when grappling with the loss of your job ----
or simply the loss of your way.**

**It may be due to a disagreement with a family member or
friend,**

Or perhaps it will be due to an argument --- with God.

**Yes, at some moment in time, you are going to need to
drink from the synagogue cup.**

Will you have to turn away thirsty?

**The optimist in me would like to believe that I do not
have to ask you this evening to make a Kol Nidre pledge. But
the realist in me knows that I must. I must because this is not a
game, with clues and buzzers, but serious business. I must
because I cannot merely make the assumption that you will do
it. Indeed, such an assumption would fly in the face of this
most disconcerting fact: last year 52% of our members did
NOT make a Kol Nidre pledge in any amount.**

My friends, I want you to know something: a full 20% of our entire operating budget is generated by our Kol Nidre Appeal. And this year more than ever, the success of tonight's Kol Nidre Appeal is critical.

This year, more than ever, we need those who made a Kol Nidre pledge last year to at least equal that pledge and for those who have not done so in the past to do so this year.

Many of you already have, some of you as a result of the extraordinary efforts of several members who began a pre-Kol Nidre phone drive to solicit pledges from members who did not make a pledge last year.

Those volunteers have already raised several thousands of dollars and we are so thankful for their efforts and to those who responded positively.

Once again your Board of Trustees has demonstrated its leadership and commitment to this cause through its one hundred percent participation, also raising thousands of dollars in Kol Nidre pledges this year. We appreciate that support and let me tell you, we are grateful for the contributions, in money, services, goods, supplies, as well as volunteer efforts received throughout the year, and especially from 36 families who became sustaining members this year, helping us raise over \$43,000.

The leadership of your congregation is not blind to the financial difficulties that many have faced and continue to face these days. Indeed, one of our primary objectives is to provide dues assistance to an increasing number of members in need.

But EVEN for those of you having a tough time financially, I would urge you to make at least a small Kol Nidre pledge. And I ask you to do so, not only for your shul, but for yourselves, as well.

A very short, but true story:

In 2001, Atlanta hosted the Maccabi Games for Jewish teens. This is an incredible annual event which for years has been the focus of tremendous volunteer efforts of many of our own members. There is always a community service component to this week-long sporting event. In Atlanta that year, we collected children's books, brought them to the zoo, and invited inner city youth to join us. I thought we were giving the books to those poor inner city kids.

How silly of me. That was not the idea at all. The idea was to have these disadvantaged children gift wrap the books. **THEY would then deliver the books as gifts to sick children in Atlanta area hospitals. The message was clear: everyone, no matter their circumstances and capabilities, for their OWN benefit, needs to personally experience the feeling of giving, the feeling of participating in a just cause, the feeling ---of filling up the cup.**

To go back to the beginning, I hope that every person sitting here tonight will contemplate for a moment what it is Jewishly, what it is as a member of Congregation B'nai Torah, that YOU are proud of, what it is that YOU want to receive from your shul community, what it is that YOU want to make certain is preserved, what it is that YOU want to know is protected, and what it is that YOU ---WILL pass on to generations to come.

You will be asked after the Rabbi's sermon to turn in your Kol Nidre Booklets in to Board members who will collect them. Several people made the great suggestion that we provide booklets in advance so they can be reviewed and discussed. We provided access to a "virtual booklet" to you via email a few days ago so that you could do just that. The Booklets reflect multiple ways in which you can participate in this important mitzvah, whether it be financially or thru important volunteer commitments.

If you did not have a chance to do so before, then take some time to review them before they are collected.

On behalf of my wife, Rita and our entire family, we want to wish you each a happy and sweet new year and a meaningful fast.

May each of you feel the warmth of our loving, extraordinary shul.

May each of you experience the joy of God's many blessings and be sealed in the book of life.

And may each of you leave here this evening having personally ensured that our synagogue's cup—truly runneth over.

Thank you.