

Oct 2014 Kol Nidre

Good Yontif – and Tzom Kal – an easy fast.

Did you read the “Elul” stories that Rabbi Moskowitz emailed to the Congregation daily in the month leading up to the New Year? These were very personal stories from congregants, many of them from childhood, each a reminiscence about the high holidays and their emotional reverberations. Each was wonderfully unique, touching and illuminating. We each have our own backstory. But what struck me and, I think, everyone who read them was how familiar they seemed. That despite our differences, despite how far we individually may have come, we’ve all emerged from common ground, our roots entwined in so many ways.

Look at how many people are here tonight. There will be at least twice as many tomorrow – three times as many when you include the family service.. I think that we, collectively and individually, understand that we are part of a cherished, ages-old community of shared values and beliefs, and that we are coming together now, as we do (at least) every year – and many of us much more often than that - to assert our membership in that community and to receive nourishment from it. Atonement, yes, but nourishment, too. It’s our community.

Unfortunately, the Jewish community at large is increasingly at risk. And we need to do our part in addressing that risk.

Every day, more and more of our children – and I mean “our children” in the broadest sense, all of our children – every day more and more of our children find their commitment to our faith challenged. We need to make the appreciation of their Jewish heritage and of Judaism itself more compelling to our young people. We need to imbue them with the understanding of how important it is, and how satisfying it will be, before it’s too late, to raise their children in our faith. We need to find the ways to have them appreciate the specialness and comfort, the connection and inheritance, that comes from recognizing their Jewishness and taking it into their hearts and into their lives.

Our Temple is a haven, a place where we and our kids can, and should, feel good about ourselves. Our Temple – Temple Beth Torah – does that in ways that no other synagogue does.

During the past few years, our Temple has faced many challenges, but through it all, we have never lost sight of our mission: to educate our children, to provide solace and support in times of need, to be a place of learning, of stretching our minds, to be a community, and much, much more.

We sit here today in the house that Gellman - Rabbi Marc A. Gellman - built. He wasn’t our Congregation’s first Rabbi, or even the first to step onto this bima. But he was the one who swung for the fences and knocked it out of the park, filling this schul, this place of worship and learning, of comfort and community, with a spirit and an ethos, a commitment to Tzedakah, to community, to learning, to Jewishness and Tikun Olam,

that can be found nowhere else; he made this not just a house of worship, but a home like no other.

But Rabbi Gellman didn't do it alone and it didn't happen all at once. It took the support, the commitment, the active involvement and the generosity of a generation of congregants, clergy and lay leaders to make this shared vision a reality.

And now Rabbi Gellman, whom we are blessed to have with us on our bima tonight in the role of our congregation's Rabbi Emeritus, has passed the torch to Rabbi Susie Henson Moskowitz. Who better to build upon that solid foundation, to honor the legacy of Rabbi Gellman while at the same time putting her own unique, inspired and loving mark on it all. Like Rabbi Gellman, she challenges us to think critically, to examine ourselves and the world around us, to make ourselves into better, more socially and spiritually involved people. And she's doing all of this abetted by our energetic, smart and equally challenging Rabbi Rachel Wiesenberg, our glorious Cantor Sarene Appelbaum and our brilliant musical director, Dr. Joe Grafeo.

And isn't that what a Temple should be all about? Nurturing us, yes, but also nudging us out of our comfort zones. To make us better parents, better children, better citizens and better Jews.

In fact, as we embark upon this period of both continuity and transition, we have much to be proud of. Membership once again is on the rise. We have a new, family-run caterer who is committed to making TBT *the* place to celebrate simchas of every kind, while contributing to the economic well-being of our congregation. We have a vibrant Hebrew School, terrific youth programs, an adult speakers program that you'll learn more about this evening, a scholar-in-residence program that Rabbi Gellman will lead in the spring, and much, much more. There are many, many people to thank for these many successes – our clergy, our officers and trustees, committee chairs and members, volunteers – and, of course, especially on the high holidays but also throughout the year, our truly extraordinary choir, our teen band, our ushers, maintenance staff and most especially our beloved Frannie Friedman, who year after year makes all of this happen flawlessly and on schedule.

And so, I ask you both to support your Temple and your Temple community and to become even more actively involved in the life of our temple and in its many activities and events.

I ask you to support your Temple financially – dues, fees and tuition pay only a part of our budget; we are dependent upon your generosity to make up the difference, which is crucial to paying our expenses – mortgage, utilities, salaries and wages, all those mundane but essential things – and to providing for those in need – we turn no one away; to offering the many services and activities that bring this sacred place to life; to educating our young people; and to doing the many, many other “gerunds,” as Rabbi Moskowitz has described them, that are essential to the cultural, religious and social life of our temple and our congregation. And it's easy to give financially. Punch out the appropriate “dot” on your High Holiday ticket, put it – the ticket, that is, not the dot - into one of the envelopes that the ushers will be passing down the aisles, and pass the

envelope back to the ushers. I ask you to be as generous as you can be. On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the Officers of our congregation, I thank you for your generosity.

But there's more we're asking of you. We ask you to engage more than ever before in the life of our temple community. Contrary to what you may think, we don't just want your money – although we do want your money – we want you to participate in everything we do. Volunteer for our charitable and fundraising projects, come to services, attend our exciting speakers series, study with our clergy, join a committee – or two or three. The fall holiday season is a great time to get more involved – help build our Sukkah this Sunday, participate in Pizza in the Hut, come to our marvelous Simchat Torah celebration, be there for our Chanukah Youth Group and JTV fundraising event in December.

And, most especially, join in the celebration of Rabbi Moskowitz's installation as our Senior Rabbi. Be there for the official ceremony on Friday evening, October 17; for the 70's party – no speeches, just fun - on Saturday night, October 18; and for the Mitzvah Fair on Sunday, October 19. This will be a great way not just to welcome her in her new role but to celebrate the vitality of our congregation.

The ushers are coming. Again, punch out your ticket – and please be as generous as you possibly can.

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And most of all, thank you.