

## Kol Nidre 5780

Art Federman, President Kol Nidre Talk

In his sermon on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Glickman spoke of anti-semitism, the threat it poses, and the necessity of countering it through positive acts of pro-Semitism. He said that even though we at Congregation Beth Shalom are investing more of our scarce resources in cameras, guards, and other protections, we need to do more, to live our Judaism in a positive, fearless way. I'm not going to repeat what he said about that, because I'm sure we all remember it word for word. But I'll remind you that he referred to a teaching by the Rabbi in the Warsaw Ghetto, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, known as the Aish Kodesh. The Aish Kodesh had lived in a time and place where Jews were prohibited from practicing our religion openly. The Aish said that he looked forward to the day when "our worship, and that of our children, will be in the open, aloud and heartfelt." In the days before I heard our Rabbi's sermon on Rosh Hashanah, I had read a new book by Bari Weiss, which is called simply "How to Fight Anti-Semitism". Unfortunately, as it has been so many times in our history, anti-semitism is a hot topic. In writing of the many tragedies inflicted on our ancestors over more than three thousand years, Weiss writes that nevertheless, "our tradition was always renewed by people who made the choice in the face of tragedy that theirs would not be the end of the Jewish story, but the catalyst for writing a new chapter. She continues that the only way to oppose anti-semitism is to live and fight "for our ideas, for our ancestors, for our families, and for the generations that will come after us." And, in the challenging times in which we live, she continues, "our best strategy is to build, without shame, a Judaism and a Jewish people that are not only safe and resilient but also humane, joyful and life-affirming, a Judaism capable of lighting a fire in every Jewish soul."

One of the privileges of being your president is that I have had the excuse to look in on the life of this Congregation. And I've been amazed at all the activity that takes place in our community on a daily basis. My grandchildren live elsewhere, so I hadn't paid much attention to all that we offer our youth. But I can now say that if you spend time here on a Sunday morning when religious school is in session, or on a Shabbat morning when there is Tot Shabbat and Kids Club, you've seen our young people learning to live as Jews, and experiencing the joy of Shabbat. And, not just young people. If you have participated in the services with musical instruments—Tefillateinu—that we re-introduced this past year, and which we plan to hold even more of this coming year, you know that this congregation offers its members different ways to find meaning in Shabbat. And, whether you choose to attend our traditional service in this room (hopefully in our new sanctuary very soon), Tefillateinu, or the library minyan, the volunteer Kiddush Corps will likely be providing lunch afterwards.

If you have attended any Sisterhood events—and yes, I've done that, too—you've seen a group of women dedicated to learning, to fellowship, and to supporting the work of our synagogue. If you have been with us for Erev Purim, you have been able to celebrate our freedom to live as Jews with families from throughout this community, and to have a drink or two while you do. If you've been here for Erev Simchat Torah, you've been able to celebrate and dance with the Torah, and to have a drink or two while you do.

What about education for members of all ages? Enrollment in Polsky Religious School is up this year by more than 10%. People recognize that our Hebrew School education is second to none in this city. Our Rose Family Early Childhood Education Center continues to thrive, as Miss Judy celebrates having been inspiring our youngest supporters for 25 years. The Rabbi, the Hazzan, and others offer a variety of Adult Learning programs, including

Talmud Jam, Melton classes, the Sarah Peltzman series and an expanded Elul Institute.

There's a lot more that goes on within the walls of this building, and a lot more that takes place outside these walls. Our Lechem volunteers continue to serve food once a month. This year, Diane and I and a number of Beth Shalom members began participating in a reading program for children who live at Phoenix House, a low-income housing project. And, of course, our minyan holds services twice daily at Village Shalom during the week, and in this building on Shabbat as well as Sunday morning. If you come to morning minyan on Wednesday morning, you can stay for bagels and coffee; if you come on Monday and Thursday mornings you can stay for snacks and schnapps, and on Sunday morning you can stay for breakfast with the Hazzan and the PRS kids.

You don't have to be President of the shul—and retired—to know all the ways in which Congregation Beth Shalom brings people together. And you don't have to listen to me give you an even longer list of all that is going on in this congregation, because I could go on and on. All you need to do is go to our website (after the Shofar blows tomorrow evening), which has been completely rebuilt through the tireless efforts of Miles Ross, our treasurer, and others. If you see Miles, please thank him. And please thank our other hard-working officers, Jason Krakow, Dr. Ann Karty, Victor Wishna, Harold Kaseff, our immediate past president, Richard Simon, and our other board members. And, of course, please thank Rabbi Glickman for his thoughtful leadership and teaching, and Hazzan ben Yehuda for her inspiring leadership in services, as well as in PRS. Both our clergy are role models in mensch-la-kite for all of us. And please thank Bernie Fried, Stef Williams, and the entire staff for all they do for us day in and day out.

There's one theme which unites all these activities. And that is that this congregation, this building, is a second home for our Jewish lives, a place we come to make and strengthen relationships with others in a heimish way. Think about the people you know, and know better, because of Beth Shalom, whether it's the people you are breaking the fast with in a few hours, the people you go to movies or play cards with, the people you go to services with, the people who you call on when it's time to celebrate or mourn together. And think about the friendships your children and grandchildren have made, or the life partners they have found, in religious school or youth group or boy scouts, all because this synagogue, this building or the one on 95th Street, brought them together. I've heard Rabbi Glickman say again and again to our staff that, as much as anything else, we are dedicated to fostering and strengthening Jewish relationships. Everything that happens within these walls is intended to connect us to others, to people who will become part of our Jewish lives not just within these walls, but in other parts of our lives as well. In doing so, we are developing a Judaism that is humane, joyful, and life affirming.

We are creating a Judaism that is joyful and life-affirming, and at the same time we are working to build a Jewish home that we can be proud of, and pay for. The Great Synagogue of Warsaw was described as "one of the grandest buildings constructed in Poland in the 19th century." When the ghetto was liquidated, and the Aish Kodesh was removed to a work camp and then murdered, the final act was to blow up the Great Synagogue, as a symbolic gesture of victory. In the words of the general who pushed the detonator button, the explosion was "an unforgettable tribute to our triumph over the Jews." That's, of course, one of many synagogues that were so destroyed. On my desk for almost 30 years I have kept a collection of charred bricks from the synagogue in my mother's home town of Bendzin. She watched that synagogue go up in flames one Shabbat, in 1942; years later, I picked the bricks off the ground where the synagogue had once stood. When

my parents arrived in Kansas City, they found synagogue buildings that were inspiring, and which brought together a community of Jews of all ages. When I was growing up, I had no idea how much time and effort went into building those synagogues. Having watched the efforts of Rabbi Glickman, Gina Kaiser, Ron Coppaken, and so many others involved in our building fund these past few months, I can now begin to appreciate the love and care that goes into these projects.

In his remarks on Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Glickman said that if the anti-semites will destroy, then the pro-semites must build. The sanctuary designed by Scott Cohen is one that truly could help us light a fire in the souls of our children, and of us. In the past year, as I've attended events here, be they a b'nei mitzvah on Shabbat morning, Sisterhood Shabbat, pre-school Shabbat on Friday mornings, Sunday school services, Kabbalat Shabbat, baby namings, aufrufs, or other life cycle events, I've tried to imagine those events taking place in the space that we are planning to build. Perhaps you've done the same. Even though I'm not a very visual person, I can do so because I've experienced life cycle events for family and friends in shuls that I know in my heart made the experience more meaningful and memorable. Just as Shabbat candles or Chanukah Menorahs create memories and connections to those we celebrate with, the space in which we celebrate together can enrich those memories and connections. Last year, when I stood before you, I discussed the contribution of \$1.5 million we had received from the estate of Hannah Mae Krumholz. What I said last year was that we needed to either raise sufficient funds to build a sanctuary, or send Mrs. Krumholz' funds back to her estate for her other heirs. In the months since, I have been gratified at the response to our fundraising efforts. And so, this coming year, with your help, we will break ground for a new sanctuary here at Beth Shalom. In recent months, a number of our members have been working hard on the quiet phase of our campaign, and I am pleased to report that we have now received cash and confirmed pledges totaling right at \$9.0 million, which is

60% of our goal, with other gifts pending. Contributions have come from approximately thirty families, to whom I'm most grateful. Their contributions, and those that follow, will be used to not only construct our new sanctuary, but also to build the endowment we need to cover the yearly costs of operating and maintaining that additional space. We have received contributions and pledges from people who grew up here and feel a deep connection to this congregation. We have received contributions from people, like me, who did not grow up here, but understand that synagogues represent our shared history as Jews, our collective memory, our triumph over tragedy. With the help of each member of this congregation, we can build and endow a sacred space that will help light a fire in the Jewish souls of our children, and ourselves. And in this time, in this country, the building we are planning will shout out that we are here, that we are free to pray together openly, and that we will not live our Judaism in fear. In the next few months, we're going to be asking each of you to help build our new sacred space. As I've discussed, there is a lot of activity in this congregation, every day of the year. This sanctuary will bring new life to everything that goes on now in this building, and I believe will be a catalyst for the next chapter in the long history of this congregation. When you are contacted, please consider our request seriously, please consider what kind of a Jewish home you want for yourself and your family, and please help us make that home possible.

In closing, my hope for this year is that, with your help, we at Congregation Beth Shalom will be able to continue the work of building, without shame, Jewish lives that are not only safe and resilient, but also humane, joyful, and life affirming.

I wish for each of you an easy fast, and a year that is filled with happiness and success for you, and for those you love.