

## 2017 Kol Nidrei Remarks

Shabbat Shalom - and Welcome everyone- it's so wonderful to see you all.

“**Light tomorrow with today**”, a quote by the Victorian poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. These words resonate strongly for me as I think about what I want to accomplish over these next 3 years - building upon our successes today for a brighter and more secure future tomorrow. I am excited and looking forward to bringing a strong sense of commitment, passion and energy to the Presidency. And, I would like to thank **you** – our members – for your confidence, trust and enthusiasm. From day one, the outpouring of support has been remarkable and so heartwarming.

Before continuing, I would like to pause for just a moment and ask you to look around. I want you all to **see** what I see and **feel** what I feel. While you may not remember any of my words today, I hope you will remember these feelings - of love, a sense of belonging and incredible pride. During these days of Awe, I am reminded of how thankful I am for TCS. We are a vibrant and diverse congregation. We worship in an exquisite space on magnificent grounds. We are surrounded by loving family and friends and we are blessed by our amazing children. These are the people and the relationships that give our lives real texture and meaning. So, let us pause, acknowledge and be grateful for this **holy moment**.

### Brief Plan and Priorities

As I begin my presidency, one of my top priorities is to get to know each of you, to understand your wants and needs and to support and engage you – *one congregant at a time*. Our thriving congregation began with only 25 families and today exceeds over 750+. However, our success should not be measured by membership numbers alone but rather by the lives we touch.

Over the next year, we will be working hard to develop a long term sustainable strategic plan. We will evaluate where we are today, establish a clear vision for our future, and begin implementing a responsible and realistic plan. We will answer key questions about membership size, dues, staffing, programming and capital resource needs. Ultimately, our goals are to make our synagogue relevant, affordable and ensure our long term financial stability. This is not easy and will take time. However, I am excited to be working with an incredible group of professionals and volunteers who not only bring a diverse skill set but also creativity and enthusiasm. There is definitely a “buzz” in the air and positive energy around synagogue life and I invite you to get involved - be a part of the excitement and help create our roadmap for the future.

With the remainder of my remarks, I want to do three things: 1) share a little bit about me; 2) speak about community and friendship; and 3) discuss building a future together.

### About Me

I first joined TCS 18 years ago immediately upon moving to Sands Point. At the time, I had 3 young children under 5 and knew very few people in the area. I grew up in Roslyn and only came to Port W for Yamaguchi and the train station. Nevertheless, when my husband Erik and I decided to move to the suburbs from the city we were looking for an easy commute, good school district and diverse community. Finding the right synagogue, a place to help raise our children with strong Jewish values was also a top priority. We found that here.

I come from a very close nit family and am the middle child of 3 daughters. My father was a man with a larger than life personality, who lit up a room when he entered and who taught me to live every day to the fullest. My mother was a stay at home mom and the most incredible role model who continues to teach me and my children each day the importance of family, community and helping others-

In terms of faith, I was raised in a traditional reform Jewish household. We celebrated all the major Jewish holidays and I have such fond memories of helping my mother and Nana in the kitchen, preparing holiday recipes that we still make today. While my parents never forced religion on any of us, Judaism was always an important part of my identity. Shortly after my bat mitzvah, my parents stopped belonging to our shul. I remember feeling sad, especially during the high holy days when I had to buy a guest ticket to a neighboring congregation where I had no affiliation. Nevertheless, I didn't question their decision and knew one day I would join a synagogue with my own family. Little did I realize how truly significant a decision that would be.

1995 was a major turning point in my life. We were living in the city, I was doing well in my career, and was recently blessed with our first born, David. And then, on Feb 8<sup>th</sup> my world was rocked when my father suffered a massive heart attack and suddenly died at the age of 52. I was devastated, confused and very angry. How could G-d let this happen? His death made no sense. I couldn't understand and had no one to turn to. I needed spiritual guidance but had no synagogue and no clergy. I remember calling Gutterman's and having to "rent" a rabbi – a virtual stranger – to officiate at his funeral. How was that honoring my father? It literally made me sick. From that day forward, I promised myself that I would not only join a synagogue but I would establish deep and meaningful relationships with my synagogue family and clergy – both of which I have done here, at TCS.

Fast forward to the year 2000 when we first moved to town and joined the synagogue. Like many of you, I made most of my closest friends – as did my children – right here at TCS. From our earliest ECC days I became involved and haven't stop since. Over the years, we were actively engaged members– attending preschool, religious school, making baskets and sandwiches for those in need during holidays, celebrating B'nai mitzvahs, sharing high holy days, seeking spiritual guidance during times of death and sickness, and the list goes on. Becoming the President is not only a great honor and privilege but also a way to give back and hopefully help inspire the next generation of leaders.

### **Community and Friendship**

Over the years, many have asked me, "What makes Community Synagogue so special"? For me the answer is quite simple: It's all about the **people**.

We may come from different socio-economic backgrounds, be in different stages of life and may not always share the same political views, nevertheless, we are united in our faith, Judaic values and sense of community. Upon walking into our synagogue I hope you feel comfortable and "at home." There is a familiarity with the people and sense of intimacy regardless of how much time may have passed. And while some may be "regulars" and others may visit only during the high holy days, we share history and are deeply connected.

We recognize that being a member is both a choice and a significant expense and we are incredibly grateful for your commitment. As you think about why are you here, I would like you to consider the TCS as a *close friend* and what traits make the relationship so special.

1. **A close friend is dependable and loyal**

- someone who is always there – at any time and on any day – *TCS is such a friend*;
- someone who is on the top of your list to share a special simcha and among the very first calls when there is a death – *TCS is such a friend*;
- someone you know you can always turn to, feel comfortable with and pick up where you left off – *TCS is such a friend*; and

2. **A close friend is honest and trustworthy**

- someone you can share your deepest secrets with - without feeling judged, and without worrying about breaching confidence – *TCS is such a friend*;
- someone you can turn to when you feel helpless and life seems out of control, especially when you need to appear strong for the rest of the world – *TCS is such a friend*; and
- someone who has seen us at our best and perhaps at our worst and loves us just the same – *TCS is such a friend*.

3. **And finally, a close friend is 100% committed** to the relationship, and loves and supports us unconditionally – *TCS is such a friend*.

Over the years TCS has been a “close friend” and has been there for each us in different ways. I am reminded of the remarkable words from the wise young Christopher Robin to his favorite pal, Winnie the Pooh, “Even if we are apart, I will always be with you.”

### **Building a Future Together**

This year we are celebrating our 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We recognize our many blessings, including consistent growth, a diverse membership, a thriving youth program and an extraordinary clergy team. As a synagogue built on the theme of “community,” we honor all those before us who have helped get us here today. Over the last 65 years we have consistently responded to our growing needs while planning for our future generations.

- when the original building needed updating and could no longer house our growing membership, we expanded;
- when our youth enrollment exploded, we built a state of the art new ECC and updated our RS classrooms;
- when many members sought a more intimate worship space, we renovated the Beit T’filah;
- when our youth, adult and senior programming expanded, we built additional meeting spaces in the MPR;
- and when our holy sanctuary needed updating, we refurbished it.

While we all seek comfort in our beautiful facility and are enjoying these improvements, approximately one-third of our members – or 250 families – are relatively “new”, having joined over last 10 years, and did not participate in the prior capital campaigns that funded these additions. I believe it is time for all

of us to contemplate our legacy and ensure the strength and sustainability of our synagogue and community for generations to come.

1.) This year, a key priority is to once again build for the future and we will be asking for everyone's help to Retire our Mortgage. Now some may be saying, I didn't even know we had a mortgage and why is it so important to pay off? As background, we took out a mortgage over 10 years ago to help pay for our facility expansion and upgrades including ECC, RS, MPR and Beit Tafillah. And, while we believe it was absolutely the right decision- as proven by our sold out ECC enrollment and over 500 RS/POWTY students - the mortgage has created an ongoing strain on our operating budget prohibiting us from accomplishing more meaningful goals such as making our synagogue more affordable and building our endowment. In the coming months, you will hear about the various ways you can help support our effort to retire the mortgage through donations, naming opportunities, attending the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary gala and more. And, I am thrilled to announce that an extraordinarily generous congregant family has agreed to match dollar for dollar any amount we raise to retire the mortgage. With everyone's help, I am confident we can retire the mortgage in the coming year and continue our tradition of building for the future. (more details coming soon.) As the Talmud says, *"As my ancestors planted for me, so do I plant for my children."*

2.) The second way you can help us build a more secure future is to let us know how we are doing. I mentioned we will be working on a long term strategic plan starting with understanding where we are today, including an assessment of our strengths and weaknesses. Toward this end, we have partnered with UJA and The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University to administer an online quantitative survey that will measure our effectiveness across various areas of congregational life. It is called "the Thriving synagogue learning tool" and there are more details about this tool on your seats. The survey will open on Oct 16<sup>th</sup> and we ask each of you to and take the time to tell us what you think- if you feel connected, and especially if you don't.

3) Lastly, in keeping with tradition during the President's Yom Kippur remarks, I respectfully request your participation in our annual Kol Nidrei appeal - in whatever amount you are able. We are seeking 100% participation and every dollar makes a difference. For those of you who may not realize, our CTG dollars cover approximately 50% of our expenses. As such, we rely heavily on your Kol Nidrei pledges to help fund the shortfall, especially in years with unforeseen maintenance costs like the electrical issues we just encountered. I understand that many of you may feel like "all we do is ask for money" and believe me, it's not easy asking and we wouldn't if it wasn't necessary. But, I can assure you that the BOT and our professional staff are working diligently to run our facility more efficiently, while also engaging the broader membership for their support.

In closing, as we consider our synagogue a close friend - who is always there for us; I ask you to be here for TCS. Make a donation, take the survey, serve on a committee, attend the gala- be a part of the excitement and help secure our future for generations to come.

On behalf of the BOT, the clergy, and the Katz family we thank you all for joining us and contributing to our *kehilah kedosha* – our sacred community. And a special thank you to the 10 families who made very generous donations enabling us to offer complimentary tickets for our guests and non-members during these holidays. If you are a guest or non-member, please consider making a donation to our KN appeal, or even better becoming a member ☺. Finally, I wish you all Shabbat Shalom and Gmar Tov. Thank you.