



Kol Nidre Appeal 5779

by Sidney Mathias

Gamar Chatimah Tovah –

Man walks into a doctors office and says:

"Doctor, what's the problem with me?"

When I touch my arm, ouch! It hurts...

When I touch my leg, ouch! it hurts...

When I touch my head, ouch! It hurts...

When I touch my chest, ouch! it really hurts!"

What's wrong with me?

The Doctor replies: I know what's wrong, "Your finger is broken."

Maybe the man in the story was pointing at too many others over the past year and suggesting that they were doing something wrong or not doing enough. Maybe that was the nature of what was "broken" in that story. That said, every time we point a finger at someone – three fingers from our very same hand point right back at us. So maybe that man's broken finger was a reminder... At this time of the year, we must point all fingers at ourselves and remember to be thankful: Thank G-d we are here today. Thank G-d we have been given another year of life. And thank G-d we are being blessed with the opportunity to do even more in the year to come.

Last year, I began my remarks with the following words:

"As I came to the synagogue tonight I looked up to the sky. I also walked around our synagogue building. I am here to report that contrary to rumors we are hearing, the sky is not falling and the synagogue is not falling apart. I say this both physically and figuratively. Our members are holding up the sky and our members are holding up our synagogue. We are collectively keeping our synagogue together as we always have in the past. We are still here."

We are blessed during these holy days to have the leadership of the past and the future. They intertwine for us at CBJ as our past and our future are inseparable. Rabbi Lifshitz and

Hazzan Weisberg have inspired us and led us through decades. They stand with us as we look to the future of CBJ under the leadership of Rabbi Zimbalist & Hazzan Ezring.

And tonight, from that perspective, of the past and our future -- yes – we are still here. Our congregational family is strong, God has blessed us with another year of communal life, and we are enjoying wonderful and meaningful high holiday services.

But at the same time, we are very different and much stronger than before. As a group of volunteers, we embarked on a process to find new clergy. We formed two committees – one to search for a rabbi and another to search for a cantor. We looked carefully at ourselves and what we wanted and needed for our congregation’s future. And today, we are experiencing the joys of our efforts with both Rabbi Zimbalist and Hazzan Ezring joining our congregational family. They have brought us together! They have brought us together to celebrate. They revere our past traditions and with great enthusiasm bring on new traditions. As excited as we are to have our new clergy, we are delighted to see the excitement of Rabbi Zimbalist, Alison, their family, and Cantor Ezring. They hold up the sky whether it’s a rainy night for our ice cream social, or a beautiful evening under the stars for Shabbat. Their enthusiasm mirrors our own, and our enthusiasm is enhanced by theirs.

Rabbi Zimbalist and Hazzan Ezring bring a new vision, a passion for Judaism, new movement towards inclusion, genuine warmth, and love that our congregation needed. The words of our Rabbi are both comforting and inspirational for each of us to find our place within Beth Judea. His smile, his voice of welcome and Torah uplifts us and includes us. Hazzan Ezring's energy and passion bring us together as a community and light our spirituality. And together they are a magical team.

I am so thankful to the search committees and greater congregation for all of your efforts. We have the leadership we have been looking for. What a wonderful congregation we have and will continue to create. Let’s continue to do everything we can to continue integrating Rabbi Zimbalist and Hazzan Ezring into our Beth Judea family and the greater community.

Just a few months ago, we celebrated our 50th Anniversary. It was a wonderful time for all and gave our members an opportunity to meet our new Rabbi, celebrate our past and dream about our future. Our celebration was noted by our larger community with support and good wishes beyond our synagogue. With over 300 attendees and celebratory spirit we marked the years of devotion by our CBJ family. We are thankful for our devoted staff, volunteers, communal support and our members. From serious financial commitments noted by our 50th Anniversary Plaque in our entrance, to the photo booth of “strike a pose”—Our Anniversary Celebration was a great success! Thank you for your participation and support.

We have spent the last year reminding ourselves of what we are and who we want to become in the future. We’ve gained much strength and inspiration from our personal and communal memories. However, memory can be a funny thing. Sometimes the more we remember, the more we desire to “live in the past.” We refer to the past as “the good old days” and could forget about the joys of the present and the potential of success in the future. And certainly, the success in the future does require change and change, in itself, can be scary.

Things right now are very good at Beth Judea. Our challenge is not to let our happiness and satisfaction lead us to complacency. What I mean is that sometimes when things are good, we forget that communal help is still needed and our success hinges on your support.

Each of us has gifts, talents, and interests to contribute to our community.

We have counted on you in the past and will continue to count on you to be part of our future growth and development.

Tonight, as we sit together and honestly assess what gives our lives meaning, I hope we reflect upon why this synagogue and community mean so much to each of us.

Each of us connects with CBJ in a different way. I believe that, for many, CBJ's unwavering commitment to every one of us explains our love for our community. Perhaps you experienced this commitment when the clergy helped you through a tough time; or at the magic moment when your son or daughter understood the true significance of becoming a bar or bat mitzvah; or when we sing the Mi Sheberach for those struggling with illness, and also show thanks by singing the Shehecheyanu.

This evening, as we listened to the haunting melody of Kol Nidre and looked deep inside ourselves, some of us closed our eyes. I wonder in doing so, if we remembered parents or grandparents, spouses, children or grandchildren. Maybe we were drawing upon synagogue memories from our childhood or today. Or maybe we were committing ourselves to find a personal way to make the world a better place. So now tonight, it is my honor and my responsibility to ask you some familiar and rather personal questions: Why are you a member of CBJ? How has the congregation helped you in the past and how do you envision your involvement in the future? There will be times in the year ahead when you will call upon Rabbi Zimbalist, Hazzan Ezring, or any member of our professional staff for help and support and they will be there for you. So now is the time that each and every one of us needs to pledge and give of ourselves in terms of time, energy and financial support. Our congregation depends on you – It depends on all of us.

Well, at first blush, the rationale for asking these questions on Kol Nidre seems pretty obvious. Doing so makes sense. We are all here. Kol Nidre draws a big crowd. But it strikes me that the rationale goes deeper. We ask for your support on a night when our seats are filled because, in every way, this is our synagogue and we are this synagogue. We send our children to learn here, we get married here, we name our babies here, we mourn here, we volunteer here, and we make this congregational family our family.

As Jews, we learn that it is not good to be alone. We don't pray alone. We don't atone in our dens. Instead, we come together. We stand and sit in unison. We celebrate and cry together. We listen and debate together. And, of course, we kibitz and have fun together.

The synagogue anchors every Jewish community and is a forceful symbol that Judaism endures. It has always been a sacred obligation and privilege for Jewish communities to support their synagogues. In our case, that synagogue is Congregation Beth Judea

If our synagogue and community are sacred, if praying together is sacred, then supporting CBJ financially is sacred. We need your participation. We need your help and generosity.

John F. Kennedy once cautioned that, “Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” Standing still has never been an option. All of us deserve credit for supporting – even promoting – change. Our community is going through an historic transition. Personally, I am very optimistic about what’s ahead – I am confident that we will embrace this transition with our new clergy just as we’ve been embracing change for the past 50-plus years. We should all feel incredibly grateful to our prior clergy that we are so well prepared for this moment and for the future.

Let me end with my thanks. I love serving as President of CBJ because I am energized by your passion for this place. Your willingness to dig deep for our synagogue is truly inspiring. I am especially touched by how many of you step up and donate to the Yom Kippur Appeal – you don’t leave that responsibility to others. Your generosity leaves no doubt that, as a congregation, we care about one another, we care about Judaism, and we endorse our sacred obligation to sustain our community. No words can thank you enough for all that you have done.

As we enter 5779, I ask you to reaffirm your support. We must find new ways to make CBJ meaningful to every single one of us. Please give generously, and if possible, give more than last year. Congregation Beth Judea is definitely worth it. You won’t regret it.

As we have done in the past, tonight you have received an envelope with 2 cards inside. It is important to our synagogue that you return both cards with your kind donations of time and funds. There are both essential for our growth. Last year although we had a drop in membership, we still exceeded not only our budgeted amount for the Kol Nidre pledges but exceeded the amount that was pledged in the preceding year. This year we must do the same.

I am so excited that we have 26 new and rejoining members that have joined CBJ. And in the first time that I can remember, we have a number of returning members who have rejoined our congregation.

Please take a moment now and take out your pledge cards, turn down the tabs for a contribution and turn down a tab for giving of your time and pass the cards to our ushers.

On behalf of myself, my wife Rita, and our family, and on behalf of the Board of Directors, our clergy and our professional staff, a happy, healthy and sweet New Year.

May the coming year be filled with sweetness, laughter and joy for all of you and those you love. May we all again continue to hold up the sky and our synagogue. Thank you so much and Gamar Chatimah Tovah.