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KOL NIDRE REMARKS  
OCTOBER 11, 2016

God bless him, my Dad is in his 96<sup>th</sup> year, a great man always devoted to his family and friends, but more than anything else a man with deep respect for Judaic ethics and religious practices, and of course the growth and perpetuation of the State of Israel. At this advanced stage of his life, he is no longer able to impart the same religious wisdom and guidance to my sisters and me that he and my Mom dedicated themselves to during our formative years.

But as I thought about the message I have for you this kol nidre evening, I realized that for me it starts with my parents. For you see, while I grew up in New York in the 50s and 60s, everyone wasn't Jewish! At least on Long Island, my parents along with other post-war young couples of all faiths and backgrounds were moving from the big city to the newly developed, and at that time more affordable, suburbs to buy homes and raise their young families. As a result, at least in my home town of Uniondale, my elementary, middle and high schools were very diverse; indeed my high school was only 2% Jewish. So my Mom lobbied to get county schools closed on the high holidays and worked hard to keep a traditional kosher home; my sisters and I set the table for Friday night dinner as Dad rushed home from his retail furniture store to lead the blessings, a traditional succah built on our backyard trellis with all the homemade trimmings somehow always came together, and our summers were spent at Camp Ramah in Connecticut. But the central focus of our Jewish life by necessity was more than just our home and summer camp.....it was our synagogue in the next town, Congregation Beth Israel, and its esteemed Rabbi Harry E Schwartz of blessed memory, where my parents found the vehicle with which to blend our secular lives in Uniondale with the Conservative Jewish identity that they were working so hard to instill in us at home. Beth Israel (which last year celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary) became our second home, a house of prayer, of learning, and of community; and over the years we became fully embedded. Dad served a double term as President (oy!); Mom served as President of Sisterhood, and when during high holiday services her magnificent soprano voice crescendoed in the choir during the musaf amidah, you could hear a pin drop. Sunday School, Hebrew School, Hebrew high school, Junior Congregation, Youth activities, life cycle events, community celebrations, we were there. The ball room dancing skills I

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enjoy today I owe to a series of classes that one of our member couples taught at Beth Israel 55 years ago, which as a 14 year old, you can bet I fought tooth and nail against attending. And finally, to support Israel's sustenance, many of you will recall that the appeals were structured events during which each able family head stood up and was counted. In sum, in my parents' generation, Congregation Beth Israel met our family's needs and that of the surrounding Jewish community. It completed us, made us whole. Back then, there was little reason for Conservative synagogues to evolve, but I do recall that in 1962 my sister Jill was the first woman to be bat mitvah'd at Beth Israel – it took place on a Friday nite....but it was a beginning and my parents were absolutely thrilled.

But what of our generation and the next to come? How does Kol Shalom view its role in serving the Jewish Community, how are we going about fulfilling that role, and how do we stack up?

Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, Hebrew Union College's Director of the School of Education, aptly warned of the changing role of synagogues as we entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century: "The unique alliance between family and synagogue has fostered Jewish survival in the past. It is a nurturing relationship. In fact, it has been the ability of the synagogue to remain the cornerstone of the community that has demonstrated the abiding strength of this union." Rabbi Olitzky continued, "Nevertheless, the synagogue is beset by social problems. Today, it functions with the prototype developed in the post-World War II period. Then, there was unprecedented growth. We were in the midst of a baby boom. Our communities were being suburbanized. The paradigm for the synagogue, successful at that time, may now need to be enhanced. It must reflect the complexity of the world which surrounds us. Thus, the synagogue must evolve further in order to usher in the twenty-first century effectively. If it is to survive, the synagogue must continue to grow."

I can honestly report that after nearly 15 years of operation in Montgomery County, Kol Shalom remains the vibrant, innovative, participatory and welcoming synagogue that its founders contemplated and worked tirelessly to create. I say this both as Kol Shalom's current President and as an active member along with my wife Allie for the last 13 years. But let's take a more objective approach. The New York region of Jewish Federation recently completed an analysis of a pilot program to assist 6 selected synagogues in the New York area with a self-assessment survey to determine whether they are thriving. According to

SYNERGY, the group administering this program, a thriving synagogue is one that is vital and alive. It is imbued with a sense of purpose, activity and energy. Members and Staff feel a commitment to and affection for the congregational community, the synagogue and the Jewish life and learning it fosters.

According to SYNERGY, synagogues should strive for “vital energy” that readily attracts, involves, and retains members and participants. Such synagogues are alive with activity. And so it is at Kol Shalom, where growth is on the upswing both in membership and at our thriving Talmud Torah, and 2016-17 programming is in full gear; programs designed to reach all ages and family units; programs involving our own talented congregants as well as jointly sponsored programs with other synagogues in the community. In addition to the extraordinary talent that we are able to tap within our congregation, we are blessed with the most dedicated, informed, and unified team of professionals to manage these programs, led with passion, extraordinary intelligence and humor by our spiritual leader, Rabbi Maltzman. In addition to fulfilling his pastoral responsibilities with warmth and compassion to which most of us in this room can readily attest, Jonathan is fully immersed in Kol Shalom programming, particularly through his leadership of our Life Long Learning initiative, and that for example embrace our post-bar/bat mitzvah students, prepare our second class of adult bar/bat mitzvah students for their big day, and provide a wide range of religious, educational and practical wisdom that benefit our members and the Jewish community at-large. As one recent new member aptly remarked, Rabbi Maltzman “elevates” us.

Deb Finklestein, is well, everything we could ever hope for and more in an Executive Director. She is our go-to resource, our eyes and ears on the community, and rightfully recognized by her peers for her professional leadership skills. Deb’s boundless energy, patience, attention to detail, and common sense insures that our beautiful building can and will continue to host successful programs and that our lay Officers and Board members have the tools necessary to fulfill their responsibilities.

This brings me to the third prong of our amazing trio. Ruth Szykman serves as our dedicated Director of Lifelong Learning, which encompasses administration of our award-winning Talmud Torah and all programs and community engagements, each a key activity center at Kol Shalom. Ruth also works closely on programming with our Seniors group, Chazak, and with our newly-branded

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Womens' Network. Through her coordination of our Lifelong Learning initiative, an inclusive, vibrant community of learners of all ages, Ruth and her member Advisory Group are exploring new areas of knowledge, both traditional and new, through courses, lectures, discussions, activities and special events. The Advisory Group is comprised of a diverse cross-section of our community, and has offered many fresh ideas for consideration. And from the Congregation at large, so many of you have taken it upon yourselves to contact Ruth over the last four months with your program ideas, many of which already are listed in the calendar, or will be reflected in events and programs in the works right now. The 2016-17 Calendar that was included in your high holiday tickets envelope speaks to Ruth's enthusiasm and hard work and the extraordinary dedication and support of our members. I invite you to take a close look at it, find what interests you, and join us.

Though tasked with making sure the details of specific programming needs are met, my almost daily interactions with Jonathan, Deb and Ruth have taught me that they are crystal balling as well. From expanded use of our building and social media to laying the groundwork for new and innovative educational programs, these professionals have the future of Kol Shalom in their sights at all times. One example really excites me. Kol Shalom has always offered the community equal opportunities to participate and find meaning in synagogue life. In the future, we would like to bring inclusion to the classroom as well, that is the full acceptance of all students that will lead to a sense of belonging within the classroom community. To that end, Ruth will be working over the next year with the Matan Institute in New York to create and offer teacher training and curriculum that allows ALL students to learn and thrive. More details to follow.

Another key attribute to a thriving synagogue is that its members have a strong sense of belonging. And here at Kol Shalom, that is an understatement. For our family and the over 270 families that have chosen to join us, Kol Shalom plays a central role in our lives. Whether from Columbia, Clarksburg, DC or across the border in Virginia, we feel a personal responsibility to help it achieve success and are proud to recommend Kol Shalom to a friend. Our members are literally woven into the fabric of our congregation, contributing their time and talents to management, programming, social action, and of course to our religious services where over 100 of our members happily read torah, present a d'var torah or d'var tefilah, or lead all or part of the weekly service. They feel connected to each other, through thick and thin, kvelling for each other's simchas and achievements,

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and supporting them in times of need. As a result, our friendships and relationships extend well beyond the walls of our beautiful building.

So, for those of you out there tonite who have never felt that strongly about a shul, or have lost that lovin' feeling, I invite you to join the over 125 members who regularly participate in our weekly Shabbat morning service, where you will be greeted by those around you with genuine interest, where your children of any age will be welcomed and encouraged to participate in our Gan Shabbat programs, and during the delicious Kiddush following the service you can mingle and find answers to any questions you may have about us, including ways in which you can get involved. In nearly every situation where a new member family joins us, it is the beauty of our service, the inspiring words of our Rabbi, and the warmth of our congregants that made them feel comfortable and at home here. All I can say is....try us; you won't be disappointed.

Beyond membership, even a synagogue with "vital energy" like ours needs continued and increased financial support from its congregation. And while I am pleased to state that Kol Shalom is financially sound, in large part due to the continual scrutiny provided by our Executive Director, Deb Finkelstein, and our Treasurer, JL Levitt, as with most synagogues dues account for only 40-45% of revenues – most of the rest needs to be made up by donations, and our 2016-17 budget is tight.

We have two funds to address these needs.

First, Kol Atid provides the funds we need, in addition to our annual dues, to pay for the shul's day-to-day operations. Our members have historically understood and responded to this important annual need. My thanks to those of you who have already contributed this year. Our Board members and Trustees already have stepped up and we ask ALL members to make a pledge to the best of your ability to help us with this basic fund.

Second, and finally, the Sustainers' Fund was established in early 2013 by Kol Shalom to improve financial stability during our transition years in our new building, until membership dues and other growth areas become sufficient to cover all of our budgeted expenses. We are VERY fortunate that two of our founders and longtime supporters, Ann and Tom Friedman, created a challenge to

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the congregation three years ago, that they would match the rest of the congregation's donations to the Sustainers' Fund up to \$100,000. The congregation has successfully and enthusiastically met this challenge over the last three years. And I am so pleased to announce that the Friedman family has very generously made a FOURTH \$100,000 challenge for the 2016-17 fiscal year if the matching goal is met. The challenge is made with the understanding that Kol Atid contributions will continue to come in at least at the same levels as in the prior year. This year, we need a total of \$285,000 in pledges to the Sustainers' fund to achieve budget, comprised of \$100,000 to match the Friedman family's \$100,000 contribution and challenge, and another \$85,000 to complete this year's campaign. This is a lot, but in a congregation like ours, where most members consider their dues an investment in the synagogue community rather than a fee for service, it is certainly doable and I'm pleased to say well underway.

As Kol Shalom continues to look to the future, I want to close by mentioning that Kol Shalom is embarking this year on an extremely important new program for our congregation that will help us guarantee Kol Shalom's long-term financial viability. It is called "Create a Jewish Legacy" and it asks each of us to consider including Kol Shalom in our estate planning. Synagogues around the country are embarking on this program, with great results. Creating a Jewish Legacy ensures that your passion and your values will continue when you are no longer here, and empowers you to complete the work of your heart. By leaving a legacy, you will help to ensure that the traditions and institutions important to you, such as Kol Shalom, remain vibrant for future generations. One of our founding members, Jo Wodiska, has agreed to be a point of contact to answer any questions you may have and help guide you through the process.

With that, Allie and I extend our warmest wishes for a shanah tova and g'mar chatima tova – may each of you have a healthy, peaceful and fulfilling year. Thank you.