

President's Speech - Yom Kippur 5768

The Gems in our Congregation

I was at the Temple several weeks ago, and saw a friend and her 13 year old daughter here to see the Cantor for Bat Mitzvah lessons. While we were talking, the daughter spotted our most recent Tempo, with a wonderful cover by Tracy Beckerman. It had a large, striking graphic of a school bus and was very cleverly titled "Back to Shul." The girl giggled, looked at her mother and me and said, "I didn't know Jews were funny!"

Well, as we all know - many, many Jews are funny. Unfortunately for me, and actually, for you, I'm not one of them. I kill every joke I tell; my Jewish accent sounds Swedish, and as many of you know, my stories tend to ramble until no one remembers where I started. So, after torturing my family for weeks with a multitude of unfunny funny openings, and after my husband put the kybosh on my idea to ask our very own Jim Cramer to be my opening act, I have been advised to simply start my speech and leave the humor to other, funnier Jews.

Last year, I spoke to you about the larger community of Jews - how we're all related through a shared history, through shared values, through our DNA. And how, as family, we take pride in one another's accomplishments and take care of one another when we're in need.

This year, I want to talk about this congregation. About who our Temple Sinai family is and why we're different. This year, I want to talk about you.

We are a congregation of so many hidden gems. The nobility of spirit, the selflessness which I have witnessed on countless occasions continues to astonish me. I marvel again and again at seeing so many talented, smart, ambitious people who, in the context of our Temple, put aside their egos and personal agendas and come together with one mind and one goal - the betterment of our Jewish family.

I would describe the members of our Temple family with this passage in the Midrash: "They say to fruit-bearing trees, "Why do you not make any noise?" and the trees reply, "Our fruits are sufficient advertisement."

Well, today, I want to make noise. Who wouldn't brag about this family? We've recently started a column in the Tempo called "Members in the News." So many of our members were being celebrated for accomplishments in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, The Ledger, New York Magazine, Newsweek, the Independent Press, NBC, CBS: Our youth group co-president who appeared on Oprah Winfrey as a winner of a national youth essay contest; the past president profiled for his successful leadership of a major financial firm; our member who was featured on the cover of numerous national news magazines; another past president and star banker who became the "face" of his multi-national corporation in full page head shots in all major U.S. papers. You should know this. We are family and, just as you want to know what your children have done, your parents or your siblings, so too should you know what your Temple Sinai family has accomplished. As the Rabbi said last night, we Jews confess

communally. We celebrate communally as well. We're proud of these members, and their successes help to define who we are.

But you should also know about the accomplishments of the soul - the selfless giving - that I see everyday in my role as President of this Temple: the whole-hearted giving of time and energy of our many, many talented and busy members; and the incredible generosity and spirit of all of you - and there are so many - who give to our New Year Appeal and Supplemental Dues program, and who make charitable giving to Temple Sinai a priority in a world where so many organizations and causes compete for our dollars. You understand that Jewish life begins at the synagogue, and without a strong and vibrant synagogue, our Jewish life would slowly - but surely - come to an end.

And so, more than anything else, I want to use my time today to say thank you to:

- the graphic designer and busy parent who, whenever I call with a project - which is often - barks at me to "get over here in an hour and we'll get it done,"
- the guy who, in addition to his smarts and talents, has the kindest and biggest of hearts, regularly driving older members to services and good naturedly showing up, pillow in hand, to spend nights on a blow-up bed when we host Hospitality for the Homeless,
- the City Council president, who spearheads our PR efforts,
- the greatest guy - past board and executive committee member - who I've worked with for years and who always steps up to the plate in every regard, despite his professional life, where, I've only recently discovered, he's considered a "rock star in the financial community,"
- the advertising executive who spent countless hours with us and gave us a standing order to call the minute we need something who turns out to be - while I know we only officially pray to one - dubbed a "God" on Madison Ave.,
- the couple who called our Executive Director and said "we want the Temple to be beautiful for the holidays," and have for the past few years arranged for spectacular plantings,
- the retired dentist who has succeeded in making our Renaissance group into one of the most vibrant and active, and one of the wildest, in the Tempo,
- the couple who, if Jews had saints, would be nominated for their constant good and kind acts. When we approached to solicit them to join the Presidents Leadership Council of large donors to our New Year Appeal, they left us and returned in 2 minutes with a check three times the amount we requested - as they said, "because they could,"
- the highly acclaimed TV music producer and writer who took the kids of our Temple Sinai rock band to his recording studio to cut a CD,

- the partner in a major consulting firm who, when contacted by one of our most active and amazing members regarding the Jewish Vocational Service job fair, arranged to list 800 positions making it the most successful in JVS history,

- the new member who signed up to help with the golf outing the day before her move to a new home. When I told her that we would be fine, please go home and finish packing, she insisted on staying, joking (or perhaps not) that she had to start racking up points to get into heaven,

- the busy, almost ridiculously competent executives who stepped up - without being asked -and said "We'll develop the nursery school for you,"

- to that most rare and - for me - most impressive of all Jews: our Board member who, in addition to his family, professional, civic responsibilities, makes the time to pick up his toolbox - yes, I said toolbox, - and build - not buy - whatever beautiful ornamental or functional item may be needed by our clergy,

- and finally, to our Board and Executive committee members and committee chairs- a fabulous group of busy executives, lawyers, bankers, therapists, educators, writers and parents - who rush home from their demanding positions and focus on the good of our Temple community.

I am in awe of all of you, and of the many others who are so special and who I have not had time to thank publicly today.

So once again, in plain defiance of the Midrash, we have put together a booklet which we've called "the Book of Honor," and which you'll find at your seats, to thank all of you who, over the course of this past year, have made us what we are, and who are helping us to build to an even better future. Read through this booklet, and then turn to your husbands, wives, children, neighbors and friends who are listed and thank them. Thank them for their talents, their generous spirits, their devotion to the concept and reality of a strong Jewish community, and for helping to secure a bright and beautiful Jewish future for our children and our grandchildren.

And I hope that, in this New Year, if you are not listed in this book, when you get your letter asking for your contribution to New Year Appeal, or a phone call asking for your help, that you'll join the rest of this talented and amazing group, and give in whatever way you can.

Shana Tova, and have a very sweet and good New Year.

