

Kol Nidre Address Written for a Synagogue President

It is my honor to address you tonight as the new president of Temple XXX XXX. I am very pleased that our synagogue community is so very strong and vibrant. I am also grateful for the extensive efforts of Rabbi XXX, Cantor XXX, Rabbi XXX and Rabbi XXX, our entire professional staff, and our High Holidays Committee members to ensure that our religious services on these Days of Awe are so inspiring! Thank you all very, very much!

I am the grandchild of Eastern European and Ukrainian Jews who immigrated to the United States in the early 1900s. I wanted to know more about my family's heritage, so I traveled to my grandparents' hometowns in Poland and the Ukraine five years ago. That is why I was intrigued by a recent movie about the life of the great Yiddish writer, Sholom Aleichem. It's a documentary called "Laughing Through the Darkness." Some of you may have seen it. The movie is named for his humorous tales of Jewish life that made people laugh despite the dark days of the 19th century Russian pogroms, the vicious, state-sponsored attacks on Jews.

Although we live in a world that is so different from the "world of our fathers," in some ways, it is not so different at all. Sholom Aleichem's life had its highs and lows, great achievements and incredible disappointments. He grew up poor after his father lost his fortune in a failed business venture. He married into money, but lost most of it investing in the stock market. His stories were well received—his tales about Tevya the Milkman came to life many years after his death in the hit Broadway musical, "Fiddler on the Roof"— but his first few plays for the Yiddish theatre on New York City's Lower East Side didn't go over too well. Growing up in the Ukraine, he saw his fellow Jews tolerated one day and persecuted the next.

What I learned from Sholom Aleichem's life story is also what I learned from the world and stories of my own grandparents. Life and circumstances can change quickly. Jews are accepted here in America, yet there still is anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment around the world. As Jewish history and the Holocaust have taught us, the world is capable of turning its back on us when others try to destroy us. We must keep our Jewish institutions and our people strong!

Maybe it is because of my family's deep roots in Eastern Europe, I feel very strongly about the importance of Jewish continuity. Maybe that is why Sholom Aleichem's story resonates with me. When my wife Amy and I visited Poland and the former Soviet Union to see our ancestors' hometowns, we saw how these once vibrant Jewish communities have been decimated. And we realize that Jewish life wherever we may live today is worth cultivating and celebrating!

It may also explain why I got involved in this synagogue and ultimately accepted the responsibility of serving as president. Sholom Aleichem realized that it was very important to document Jewish life in his own day—to tell stories that instill pride and Jewish identity. His writings more than a century ago inspired the Jewish community to per-se-vere so that there would be a Jewish tomorrow. I am inspired by what he accomplished and I've come to this conclusion: It is not enough to respect the past and hope for the future. Our Jewish future will be built by what we do today.

I hope you'll join me in making a commitment to our own Jewish community right here in XXX at Temple XXX XXX. This is a wonderful, caring, congregation where we strive to experience the richness and beauty of Judaism — through worship, education and culture. It's important that we enjoy our heritage, and that we pass a love of Judaism on to our children. The synagogue is the best place in which to do this. It is the primary Jewish institution outside of a Jewish home. Through involvement in synagogue life, we enrich our Jewish experience. We develop relationships with members of our congregation and we are better people as a result. Here at Temple XXX XXX, we have a warm and caring holy community in which to celebrate our lifecycle events — B'nai Mitzvahs, weddings, baby naming ceremonies, to mention a few —and to offer us spiritual and emotional support when we need it.

Temple XXX XXX is the community through which we and other like-minded families can fulfill our spiritual and religious potential. Together we have built a leading synagogue on the North Shore and one of the most admired synagogues in the country. We have created a synagogue that offers lifelong learning and social interaction, deep spiritual inspiration, and comfort in times of crisis. We have schools, classes, programming and organizations for members at every stage of life.

Together we have made some difficult economic decisions over the past few years – but these decisions are now beginning to reap positive results. We built a beautiful new Early Childhood Center that was made possible through a successful fund raising campaign. It replaced our old school building that was in disrepair and could not attract new families.

It was a bold decision – but now, under the direction of XXX XXX, we have seen our enrollment double in the last two years. We now offer extended day care, and our program for two-year-olds is filled to overflowing — we are adding classes to accommodate the demand. As temple member Barry Rubenstein said to me at a recent meeting, “our two-year-olds are our endowment.” And I could not agree with him more. Here at Temple XXX XXX, we invest in building a bright Jewish future, and Barry is correct, our children are our future.

This is why we embarked a number of years ago on a dramatic re-thinking of the way we educate our young people. We engaged a Director of Life Long Learning, XXX XXX, and we reorganized our Religious School under the guidance of XXX XXX. It has become a model school that so many others seek to emulate. Our programs are growing, and our summer day camp under the direction of XXX XXX is a vital part of the enrichment we offer our children and those of the greater Jewish community.

But we refuse to rest on our laurels. This past year we began an initiative that is near and dear to me — our Hazak Program, our new adult cultural program, that has met with enormous success in its first few events. Aimed at our empty-nesters and more mature members — Hazak demonstrates that Jewish learning is a life-long enterprise and our relationship with the shul needs to continue well after our children are no longer the center of our involvement.

And we have done all of this during difficult financial times. We are fortunate to have a dedicated membership that is the envy of most other synagogues. We have made hard financial decisions – reducing our staff and cutting our budget in non-essential ways —even as we remain committed to expanding our services to you, our members. Heartfelt thanks goes to our Executive Director, XXX XXX, and to both the office and maintenance staffs for prudent and efficient management.

I am pleased to announce that because of the efforts of our members and staff and the support of our Congressman Gary Ackerman, we were awarded a \$75,000 security grant from the Homeland Security Act that will enable us to invest in improving the security infrastructure of our buildings and grounds. So you see, whenever we can apply for funds from outside sources, we do so.

This grant will help us, but we still have an aging building that demands attention. Let me describe our major capital expenses. We have almost completed Phase 2 of our five-phase roof-replacement multi-year project. Phase 2 will cost \$130,000.

Necessary restroom renovations in the XXX Center and religious school sections of our building will run \$75,000. We also need to replace the carpeting in the religious school corridor, renovate the youth lounge and update our sanctuary lighting.

The Roslyn Road entrance's brick retaining walls, stairs and handicapped-accessible ramp are crumbling and all need work. The repairs will cost more than \$45,000 to complete.

We trust that your generous response to our Kol Nidre Appeal will enable us to undertake these necessary repairs, renovations and improvements and help us close the gap in our 2011-2012 budget. We're aware that the economic crisis still impacts our community, and we hope and pray that the New Year brings stability and prosperity to everyone.

But all of you must be aware that economic conditions have made it more expensive to operate our shul. We're counting on our membership for the generous and critical support necessary to sustain all the good that we do. We have not increased our dues for the last three years. But we've had to respond to the need in our congregation by giving more scholarships and dues reductions to members than ever before.

Yet we want and need to do more — like the new Hazak Program of social and cultural activities for our empty nesters and mature members. If you would like to sponsor a program, please fold down the \$500 tab on your ticket, or fold down the \$10,000 tab to endow the entire program, and ensure its continuation in the coming year.

We have families who want their children to attend our Religious School and Hebrew High School but can't afford to send them. We want to provide scholarships to deserving students who want to learn with us. If you would like to underwrite a student, please fold down the \$1,000 tab or a multiple of \$1,000 for each student you would like to sponsor.

The phasing of the roof replacements and the other capital needs I mentioned to maintain the investment in our infrastructure — our buildings and grounds — will cost us more than \$250,000.

If you would like to help underwrite these capital expenses, please fold down a \$5,000 or \$10,000 tab on your card.

So very much needs to be done to keep our shul strong! That is why on this most holy of nights, I stand before you with a plea for your generosity so that we may maintain our beloved synagogue – and educational complex-- and continue to offer vibrant programs and services here at Temple Beth Sholom.

It's a synagogue in the Conservative tradition that means so much to our community, and a place that has shaped the lives of so many of our youth. Let me share some of the thoughts of our Machon Beth Sholom students —our Hebrew High School students — on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary celebration last June. Here's what they wrote in our Temple bulletin:

From Arielle Gordon: "TBS makes me proud to be a Conservative Jew. I have learned so much about being a Jew in the year 2011."

From Ilana Silverman: "Temple Beth Sholom has been home to a close-knit congregation for generations, and I am so grateful to have grown up in this loving, encouraging, and supportive community."

From Ethan Levine: "My family has been a part of TBS for 3 generations and we loved it since the moment we joined."

From Hillary Hofer: TBS has played a large part in my life. It is really a second home for me. I love helping out and going to TBS for all occasions!

From Shoshana May: *Mazel Tov on 60 years! May all of our congregants be eternally blessed with peace, health and prosperity.*

I think you'll agree that these are real tributes to our synagogue. Coming from our youth, they have real impact! Please help us continue to make a difference in the lives of the people we touch. Just as Sholom Aleichem wrote the stories of the Jews of his time, with your support, we can ensure that the current chapter of Jewish life here at Temple XXX XXX is positive and fulfilling. I ask you to give as generously as possible to our Kol Nidre Appeal. Our ushers will come around to collect your cards. Each and every contribution is very important. Thank you and L'Shanah Tovah Tikatevu to you and your family.

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