



Temple of Aaron

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Speech from President Yom Kippur 5771 (September 18, 2010)

Good Yontif. I am honored to stand before you as your Temple of Aaron President to present what has become the annual rite of passage for every President, the Yom Kippur appeal. Again, we will ask you to make a thoughtful decision about supporting the Temple of Aaron with a special donation to this appeal.

Usually about this time, sitting in my own seat, I have already folded down the category reflecting the level of gift my family will make this year. I listen to the President's speech but as a business man I have reviewed my giving plans for the year, and I know what was allocated for this appeal. Standing up here clearly outside of my comfort zone, I haven't had a chance to complete my envelope. I ask that before you complete your gift please take a moment as I share a few thoughts about the holidays our Synagogue and congregation.

Each year during the High Holydays, the Cantor recites the Hineni prayer. In this prayer our Cantor, with deep humility, speaks for all of us when he says "Hineni; Here I am" or in some translations "Here I stand." Specifically, the Cantor is asking God to accept this prayer on all of our behalf. Throughout our history Hineni is a term we as Jews often use to say "Here I am." I have observed over the past several years that the Temple of Aaron, is a community who has collectively responded with many instances of "Hineni." I have seen it in our actions as volunteers, donors, teachers, lay leaders, as Clergy and staff; I have seen it in our children and their parents. Stepping up, being present and taking a stand. We are making positive changes in our Temple of Aaron community, exciting changes enabling our members to be more active and more involved. Together we are responsible for our strength today and as we move into the future.

Here are specific examples of what I mean. Often I am accused of making car comparisons; the car, after all is an analogy that works for me, and it helps me explain myself more clearly. This building is like the frame and body of our TofA vehicle, it needs to be cleaned and cared for properly or small dents will rust and show signs of wear and tear that do not reflect the overall quality of the machine. This past year we have re-decorated the Bride's room, with the support of several families, many who celebrated the marriage of their children here during the year. With the help of Sisterhood the gift shop has been updated, the Men's Club has purchased a new Sukkah that will be built for the holiday. These changes make us feel good about our home. Many ideas for updating and refreshing our building are being considered over the next year, keeping in mind that when we look in the glove box or trunk, we never know what we will find in need of repair or replacement, and that would take priority.

Our Clergy Rabbi Shavit-Lonstein, Cantor Kowitz and Rabbi Cytron; our Executive Director Ken Agranoff; Ritual Director Larry Eisentstadt; The Youth Department currently led by Joshua Fineblum and Robby Erlich; teachers; custodians; kitchen; and office staff constitute everything under the hood, including the engine. This is what makes us run smoothly. Attention needs to be given to our professional staff, if there is a funny humming sound coming from anything under the hood, we need to take care of it. Regular oil changes are imperative; we cannot neglect what is under the hood.

Lay leaders, past presidents, executive committee, board of directors and general committee members, Men's Club, Sisterhood, those who volunteer and work during services, and USY; we are the steering wheel. We work to keep things moving in the right direction. Sometimes the GPS is off and we find ourselves headed into a construction zone of twists, turns and

Alan Shavit Lonstein
Rabbi

Barry Cytron
Rabbi

Bernard S. Raskas
Rabbi Laureate

Mitchell Kowitz
Cantor
Composer in Residence

unpleasant bumpy roads. With some re-routing and careful attention, soon we are back on smoother pavement headed in the proper direction. All past Presidents and volunteers have faced these challenges, their thoughtful work over our 100 year history has helped keep us traveling in generally the right direction. We plan to examine and review the work done since the completion of our Strategic Plan. What has been successful? What still needs to be accomplished? What re-direction is necessary?

You the congregants are the wheels that make us go. Why the wheels and not the fuel tank, although fuel tank would be an easy analogy for the appeal. What we hope to do as your leadership is rotate the tires. Get you involved in ways that help you set direction for our future. While today I ask an appeal for financial assistance to help us expand valuable elements of our programs and services beyond regular synagogue operations. I also ask, as I did in my annual High Holiday letter, for you to get involved and participate in whatever way that will help you become connected and feel fulfilled as a member here.

The work of our Centennial Committee reflects this type of involvement, another "Hineni." Dedication of many members who chose this time to involve themselves and help celebrate our 100 years with many special events. Now we look forward to replacing the Time Capsule on 10/10/10 at of course 10:10 AM. Here we will capture for the next several generations, our moment in time, just as the congregation did for us over 50 years ago when they dedicated this building in St. Paul.

There are many people responsible for our successes this past year. If there is anyone I inadvertently left out, please know we also extend our thanks to you.

Finally, I ask you to join me today by responding, "Hineni", through a special gift of support for our annual Yom Kippur appeal. We stand on the shoulders of generations of Temple of Aaron congregants who responded many times over the years with "Hineni," "Here I am," when asked for financial as well as volunteer support. Your annual gift allows for the 5771 mile tune-up, rotating the tires and a smooth running engine in the year to come.

I want to conclude with a quote from Rabbi Raskas, Alav HaShalom, whose extraordinary contributions to our synagogue and community have shaped so much of our history.

"As the day wears on, Jews will gather in synagogues for prayer and contemplation. We face a new day and New Year. We are ready to accept what they have to offer. We have hope because of the light of love, understanding, mercy and truth. May the new year bring you more years to your life and more life to your years."

L'shana Tovah Tikatevu. May you and your loved ones be inscribed in the book of life.

Michael Saxon
Temple of Aaron President