

--Mel Simon, President, Emanuel Synagogue

Gmar Hatima tova.

Come ----Gather Round People---- Wherever You Roam--- And Admit
That the Waters Around You Have Grown.

Those words were written by Bob Dylan in 1963. This year in 2020
they gave me comfort knowing that we have faced dark times before.

As the President of your Board of Trustees it is my duty, my honor, to
charge you this evening with the task of supporting our 101 year old
sacred community that we lovingly call the Emanuel Synagogue. If you
accept this task, I promise that you will be rewarded. If you give to your
synagogue and support her, she will be there for you, a strong
foundation when the winds of changes shift.

We are in uncertain times but we must never lose hope. Last year on Kol Nidre I came before you as your newly elected President. Wide eyed and hopeful of all that we could do together. I was younger than now, a little naive, I remember well. I hemmed and I hawed-- hesitant to ask for your support. And yet you responded. With all of your generosity you sustained us and for that I am ever thankful.

This year I stand before you again. My perspective on my task a little changed. With more wrinkles upon my brow and less hair upon my head, I am no longer a reluctant solicitor. I am here to talk to you about promises. When I accepted the Presidency I made a promise. Tonight I fulfill that promise. I need your support.

But before I go there, let me first tell you that your Emanuel family supports you and cares about you. We are strong. We are connected.

We hope you and your families are well but if you are not or are in need of a hand or someone to talk to or you need a ride call me or email me or Rabbi Small if you need anything at all.

Let me also tell you about a group of committed and effective leaders who generously support our synagogue and give of their time. Tonight many of the readers you will hear from were chosen because of their roles as chairs of our standing committees. They are an amazing team.

Finance Committee Chair, Mickey Libbin and a very honorable mention to Amy Dembo who after a decade of chairing the Finance Committee continues in a supporting role, Audit Committee, Lisa Behan, Adult Education Committee, Tammy Kraushaar, House, Howard Smith, Membership and Marketing, Fred Spaeth, Chesed, Ken Malley, Ritual, Don Miller and Charlotte Bower, Board of Education, Deb Zuckerman and Lisa Sadinsky, Endowment, Naomi Kleinman and Nominating Committee, Jeff Cohen, and B'yadeynu, Janet Wallans and Risa Davidson and Cemetery, Meyer Frankel. Please join me in thanking them.

Now to my pledge, my promise.

We need your support. How can you help? Let me count the ways.

You can volunteer to run a program or you can Zoom Host a minyan, or you can write a check, you can plan a celebration, or you can serve on a committee or you can write a check, or you can chair a capital campaign or be a producer of an Emanuel Theater production, and you can write a check. There are literally 100's of ways to support your synagogue.

Call me or our amazing Executive Director Kobi Benita if you need or have ideas. Thank you Kobi for your hard work and the innovations you have brought to our synagogue.

In March as we celebrated Purim, the pandemic touched down in the Jewish community of New Rochelle. Rabbi Small, and I met to assess our options and develop a plan. We realized that closing our doors was inevitable and that we needed to act quickly. We convened the professional and lay leadership to plan for a synagogue without walls.

In attendance were representatives of our school community, Barbara Fink our Director of Youth and Family Learning, and Deb Goldberg and Lisa Sadinsky co-chairs of the Board of Education, ritual committee

chairs, Don Miller and Charlotte Bower, vice president Ken Simon and chairman of the Board Elysa Graber-Lipperman. We consulted with health care professionals including Drs. Jen Madden Cohen and Michael Krinsky. Over five days in March we literally reimaged and assembled a synagogue in the cloud. A synagogue for the age of Corona.

In those moments we committed to continue services three times a day, to devise a bnai mitzvah ritual with meaning and joy and to stay connected to each other. Thank you Rabbi Small, Rabbi Lazowski, Hazzan Moshe Pinchover, Rabbi Lefkowitz, and rabbinic intern Jessica Dell'Era. To teach our children, thank you Barbara Fink and teachers, Debbie Mehlman, Gilana Levavi, Jennifer Molinari, Ruth Cion, Robin Rosenthal, Sarah Baden, Erik Martin, Nancy Fichman, Carolyn Topol, Beth Polebaum, Fern Cohen, Cantor Cohn, Rabbi Small, Alan Berkowitz, Jessica Dell'Era, and office Administrator, Gail Mackey.

To engage our congregants, thank you Josh Cohen. To close our building but entrust its care and cleanliness to an amazing custodial crew

thank you Joseph Ward, Juan Zavala and Wes Nelson. And as our staff transitioned to home office they continued to serve our congregation.

Tank you Lisa Lenkiewicz, Lisa Taylor Kathy Hart and Wendy Greco.

Thanks to Rabbi David Small who developed a home based ritual,

Our bnai mitzvah families were able to welcome family and guests from around the world and the entire Congregation into their living rooms as their children were called to the bimah in a sanctuary in their home. The joy and nachas this brought to the children, their parents and grandparents was palpable. This was truly one of the Emanuel miracles born out of the pandemic. Our synagogue continued to thrive as a lay professional partnership. Our committees functioned. We offered adult programming and family services. A Task Force chaired by Ken Simon and Peter Graber-Lipperman was formed to guide us safely as we slowly return to a connected community in person. We persevered.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said the ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience but where he stands at a time of challenge and controversy. We have been challenged.

In March my father-in-law fell ill and though he was a healthy 90 year old, he succumbed to Covid-19 alone in a Westchester hospital. Not only was HE alone but his daughters and grandchildren including my own three daughters could not be together. We attended his funeral in Farmingdale, Long Island by cell phone and face time. My daughters and I gathered in my back yard as he was laid to rest. We read our own memories of this remarkable son, husband, father, grandfather, veteran, yeshiva bocher, and this mensch. As I heard the sounds of a shovel piercing the earth and then the earth dropping down upon the wooden casket, I took my own shovel that he had given me and plunged it into the ground among the flowers planted by his daughter Carrie, my own dear departed wife and declared that I would honor his memory by staying strong and true to the values he taught us-- to support and love

our families and our people. That shovel still stands in my garden today as I stand before you tonight committed to those values.

Tonight our Hazzan Moshe Pinchover chants Kol Nidre. Moshe, thank you, you lift up our voices and connect us to the almighty. Kol Nidre. It is not a prayer but a legal formula. It begins with a list, not of sins, but of commitments; oaths, pledges and promises to God. It continues with another list. May they be undone, repealed cancelled, voided, annulled and regarded as neither valid nor binding. My friends take heed, we ask not to annul our commitments to each other. When we ask to annul our commitments to god we affirm our connection and commitment to each other.

The Kol Nidre concludes by thanking God for granting us life, for sustaining us, and for bringing us to this moment, our rewards.

Gmar Hatima tova. May you be inscribed in the Book of Life. These words we say to each other each year on Yom Kippur too often recited

by rote, our lives so often on remote, have new meaning this year. Don't you agree? To Health, To Life, L'chaim, are all more fragile, while our hopes are all more fervent. The shared pain, isolation, and uncertainty we have all endured together has asked much of us but our shared experience connects us all. As we emerge from this hour of darkness remember friends our strength, remember our character and remember how they connect us. Cherish our Emanuel Synagogue. Support her with all your might with all your soul and with all your heart so that she is there not only for you but for all of us and not only for today but for tomorrow and beyond.

That shall be our reward.

Thank you. May the hours ahead offer us reflection and peace.

Gmar hatima tova.

