

## Kol Nidre Remarks

Scott Hodes, President of B'nai Israel

September 15, 2021

Shana Tova

It's great to see so many of you here in person tonight. It's been a long 18 months and while we still don't really know what the future holds, it's a testament to our faith and our shul that so many of us are here tonight or watching on the livestream. You are all a vital part of our synagogue.

When Rochelle and I walked into this building 27 years ago, I never imagined I'd be delivering this speech to you tonight. Since that day, we've raised our three kids and found a wonderful, warm and loving community here at B'nai. I have to confess, that when I was a kid growing up in Hamilton, Ohio, I never dreamed I'd be up here speaking or that my town's namesake would be the subject of a Broadway smash. I did dream, however, about playing 2b for the Cincinnati Reds and giving my speech at Cooperstown. While I'm not speaking at the Hall of Fame, I'm so

very lucky and grateful to all of you for giving me this opportunity to serve as your President and speak to you on Kol Nidre.

My family has had so many memorable moments within our B'nai community, many of them in this building. Nursery school, Talmud torah, B'nai Mitzvah lessons, mitzvah days, Brews and Jews, Softball games, Board of Governor meetings, Search committees, Shabbat services and High Holidays - it seemed we were here almost every day for years. We felt the joy of B'nai Mitzvahs and the sadness of saying Kaddish for our mothers in this building. My family and I in particular made and grew friendships with many, many of you. B'nai, for us became our home.

I really don't need to tell you that we all join here for many different reasons. Some want their kids to get a jewish education or to attend nursery school. Others like the ritual of the daily and shabbat services. Many of you like the social aspects of being here with their friends. And some of you only come twice a year. But no matter what the reason, B'nai is here for all of us. And

while you may join for one reason, over time your reasons will likely change. When we joined, we never thought about how B'nai Israel would be a central part of our lives -- we didn't think about losing parents, and simchas were off in the distance. Now, looking back, we know how much B'nai, its clergy and all of you meant to us at those moments, both good and bad, when we needed it.

We don't always realize it, but one thing I've come to appreciate more and more during the past months is how lucky we are at B'nai. We've got extraordinary clergy -- in the past ten days, we've heard the inspiring words of Rabbi Safra and Rabbi Berkowitz. Long time members know that this is the norm, carrying on the tradition of excellence set by Rabbis Schnitzer, Simon and Siegel. Cantors Pearlman and Bolts inspire us in song. Our staff, led by Executive Director Hal Ossman is here for us every day, making sure everything runs smoothly -- especially, to quote the Foo Fighters "in times like these". In fact, Facilities Manager Pepe Strauss and his crew have outdone themselves

this year in light of the ongoing situation with getting the facility prepared every single day for services and nursery school. In the last week, they've made sure that every service inside and outside is set up and in working order, so that all of our congregants can gather in person or virtually.

Times like these lead us to our greatest asset, our members. When we had to shut our doors in March of 2020, we had no idea what confronted us. Soon thereafter, I was asked to chair the reopening task force. It was something we never had to do before (and hopefully never will again). And we discovered, in our community, a number of people with a wide range of expertise. We worked with governmental restrictions and the need to keep people safe -- and while other institutions just shut their doors, we slowly began to reopen. This allowed members to attend services and have in person aliyahs -- over the months, more and more of the congregation were able to attend and participate in live services. We were able to open the nursery school in the Fall of 2020. And now this Fall, we'll have both the Schilit Nursery

School and the Lessans Talmud Torah open in person. Our Shabbat services have been back for awhile - now with no reservation necessary. Starting next week, while the weather holds, we'll hold weekly outdoor kiddushes. Daily in person minyans resumed in July and we've resumed some in person meetings and gatherings. We've been at the forefront of Jewish congregations and other local institutions in doing this - from nothing to where we are today. How did we accomplish this? Because our members, staff, clergy and lay leaders graciously gave of their time, worked on and with the reopening task force, and said "Hineni, I am here". And we all thank them, as we, as a community are much stronger for their service.

Hineni - its our annual campaign and as most of you know, it has been for many years. It bridges the gap for what we receive in dues to cover expenses, allowing the synagogue to operate year in and year out without cutting services, programs and staff. Last year, Steve Rothenberg, who as President, ably led us through the Pandemic, asked you to help us out with the Hineni

campaign because we really didn't know what last year would look like. And you did, as I'm thrilled to report, last year resulted not only in the highest Hineni donations ever but the highest participation rates by our members. When we faced uncertainty you responded.

So I have a very hard act to follow! One of the things I think we've all learned over the past few months is that while virtual allows us to get by, "being in the room where it happens" is truly a much better way to live. And this building is where it happens. We are fortunate to have it, but this House of Worship, this House of Education, this gathering place was built awhile ago - Half of it is over 50 years old, and the other is 20. Leadership and staff have worked hard to keep it up over the years, but the years take a toll -- even when there is a year of lower use. The rain still falls, the wind still blows. The air conditioners hum and the water pipes age. Basically, these costs don't stop -- we've put off some of the maintenance, repairs and replacements recently, but we are doing the responsible thing and addressing them now.

We still have our normal operating costs -- as I said earlier, we are holding kiddushes, and due to covid protocols, they require more staff time and logistical work to make them happen. Further, we didn't let any staff go during covid either. They responded in kind and took care of our needs during the pandemic and when we could open the doors, we were fully staffed and ready for our congregation. Thus, I ask that you respond to the ask of the Hineni campaign, kindly chaired this year by Nancy and Wayne Eig, as you always have. Simply put, it allows us to continue to be the synagogue we desire, no matter what curveballs life throws at us.

But wait, there's more! Because I only get to do this once a year, I'm going to ask you for something else, something as important as asking for financial donations. I am asking you for your time. Not a lot of time (not that a lot of time won't be gratefully accepted!). I'm asking that in this coming year, you do at least one new volunteer activity here at B'nai. What does that mean? Well, as an example, you can sign up to attend daily

minyan, which we hold twice a day. This allows our members and guests to not only pray together but to say kaddish when needed for a loved one. If you are interested, please go to the website after the holiday and sign up to attend a service to be held in the next couple of weeks. As a side observation, it took a pandemic to create this sign up sheet to guarantee a minyan rather than the old way we did it, which was to frantically call, seconds before minyan, those of you who lived within a few minutes of the shul. I think this new way is an improvement! And also thanks to those who got the last minute call and responded!

Minyans may not be your thing? We have a number of committees, we have affiliate organizations like Sisterhood, Men's club, and Hazak. And all of you have special talents, every single one of you. So, I ask that after the holiday look at the committees we have and volunteer. I'm not going to name them all tonight, but they run from A to Z - and include all kinds of activities ranging from helping to run our cemetery, Mitzvah day, advising on rituals here at B'nai, or to performing social action in a number of areas

all year long. They are all listed on our website and all are welcome- if you are interested in any of them, please reach out to me or the various executive board members that are responsible for these committees and volunteer. If you have a special talent and you don't see a committee that is applicable, reach out to one of us and we'll discuss your interests. All of our contact information is on the website.

Joe Namath entitled his biography "I can't wait until tomorrow because I get better looking every day." I've always wanted to say that out loud, but I also think that's an appropriate way to look at B'nai's future. With the continuing involvement of all of us, the future, as B'nai nears its centennial (and you'll hear more about the centennial in the coming months), well, our tomorrows are going to be great. So I ask that we all keep up our dedication during the coming year, be it through Henini, committee work or just showing up for prayer. On behalf of the entire Board of Governors, we wish you an easy fast and Shana tova.

Thank you and good night.