

Good Morning, *Gut Yontif*, and welcome to Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim's Rosh Hashanah morning service.

For those of you who may not know me, my name is Ben Glass, and I am honored to serve as President of KKBE. In that capacity, I have the privilege of addressing the Congregation at Rosh Hashanah - offering reflections on the year just passed and thoughts about the year ahead. Rosh Hashanah is a time to take stock of where we have succeeded and where we have fallen short. It is also a time to celebrate the milestones we have reached, and to somberly remember our struggles.

To be sure, 5775 was a tough year. We have lost more than our fair share of friends and family in the last 12 months. From the passing of Charlotte Libater just after Rosh Hashanah last year, to the tragic loss of Heidi Kunitz-Levy just last week, we have mourned together as a congregation more often than we'd like. And on June 17th, we were shaken to our very core when evil visited Charleston and a young man driven by hate and racism, took nine lives at Emanuel AME Church.

As the world watched to see if Charleston would erupt in the same sort of protest and violence that followed racial shootings in Ferguson and Baltimore, Charleston showed the world the power of community, the power of grace, and the power of love. And in those days following the tragedy at Mother Emanuel, I could not have been more proud of the role KKBE played in Charleston's response.

Rabbi Alexander cut short her civil rights tour of the South and returned to Charleston with her fellow clergy to take part in an interfaith service honoring the nine souls lost. Rather than hold regular Friday night Shabbat services, we met briefly in our sanctuary and walked as a community to TD Arena, where we joined in prayer with the larger Charleston community. In the days and weeks that followed, I saw the faces and heard the voices of so many of our congregants at various memorials and prayer vigils. We were, quite simply, leaders in the community in giving Jewish voice to the response to this horror.

In addition, our own Gil Shuler was inspired to create an image, patterned after the South Carolina flag, of nine doves, in the form of a palmetto tree, ascending skyward past a crescent moon – an image that became so synonymous with the Emanuel Nine that it can be seen all over Charleston, and is now being worn in Garnet, and Orange, on the helmets of the South Carolina Gamecocks and Clemson Tigers this football season.

As we begin 5776, there are also plenty of milestones to celebrate. We come together today for the third year here at Memminger auditorium – the chorus of thumping seats reminding us every time we rise of the growth in numbers over the last several years that has made this move necessary so we can all worship together at this most sacred time of year. We celebrate 266 years as a Congregation, and 175 years in our current sanctuary. As I travel to URJ leadership conferences and biennials, I am reminded of just how unique we are in that regard, and what a significant role we play in the history of the Reform movement. And in 5776, we will celebrate our first annual

Jewish Food and Heritage Festival, less than a month away, on October 11<sup>th</sup>.

So yes, we are doing a lot right. But where are we falling short of our potential? Unfortunately, I fear it is in an area we consider a strength. Despite our growing numbers, I fear we too often fall short when it comes to membership. Too often, when we think of membership, we think in terms of what we get from our membership at KKBE, and certainly we get a lot. We get a place to enjoy creative, spiritual worship, during the High Holy Days and throughout the year. We get two wonderful Rabbis who provide spiritual guidance and provide Jewish context and meaning to our life cycle events. We get access to a first-rate Religious School and Hebrew instruction for our children . . . engaging educational and social programming for adults . . . and camp opportunities, b'nai mitzvah preparation, and a great youth group that help our youngsters grow into literate, committed, Jewish adults. Most of all, we get a loving community that celebrates our

happy moments with us, and is there to support us when we need it most.

Of course, all of that does not happen by accident. We have talented clergy who give us spiritual guidance and leadership. We have an incredible Executive Director who brings us deep experience with, and connection to, the Reform Movement, and we have committed staff who keep the trains running on time. We also have numerous individuals and families who give freely and frequently of their funds, to financially support our Congregation, many of them generation after generation.

But the community, the community comes from us, and ultimately, it is the source of all the benefits of membership I just described. Because for each benefit we receive, there is someone providing it. And most of those “someones” are congregants, who share their talents and time with the rest of us.

For long-time members, the most obvious example of this is Harold Jacobs, of blessed memory. Harold was the welcoming face and voice of the Congregation for many

years. He was probably the first person you met the first time you came to services, and he was the person who made the effort to catch up with you every time you came to Temple. Harold was such an institution that our Mitzvah Membership program is named for him and his wife Lillian.

By his example, Harold inspired others – both those who knew him and those who didn't. Some would tell you my brother, Scott Glass, inherited a little of Harold's charm, with a broad smile and a ready ear for anyone who visits our Temple. Many of you also know that Helaine Minkus, of blessed memory, in her too brief time with us, was so inspired by stories of Harold that she overcame her own natural shyness to reach out to new members and form some unlikely friendships that no doubt deepened the connection of those individuals to our community.

And there are so many others who have created community by their service. Mordenai Hirsch taught Religious School for decades, teaching hundreds of our children, including Rabbi Bob Siegel, former

Congregational President David Jaffee, and so many more. She was followed by dozens of others who gave up their Sundays to build a nurturing, loving Religious School that served as an entry point to Judaism for generations of KKBE children. Some taught for a year or two, and some taught year after year, not for the money, not for the glory, but because they loved our children, and they wanted to build Jewish community for them.

And many of those children, including our three, went on to learn everything they needed to know to lead our Congregation in worship at their Bar or Bat Mitzvah service from Shula Holtz. Shula gives up not just her Sundays, but often Wednesday evenings during the Summer, and other time needed for that child who requires a little extra work to confidently take the bimah. Any of us who have had children become b'nai mitzvah here know the dedication, the discipline, and the love that Shula brings to creating the next generation of literate Jews.

Speaking of our youth, for years Robin Shuler served as Youth Advisor to our youth group, CHARLEY – helping to create engaging programming, taking our kids to numerous kallah, and sleeping on the floor more times, I’m sure, than she or her back care to remember. Robin also provides us with creative and engaging songleading that most congregations enjoy only when they bring in professional Jewish musicians for Artist in Residence weekends. Robin is our very own, year round, Artist in Residence, and she does this for love of Judaism, for love of music, and for love of this Congregation.

And we can’t talk about music and love of this Congregation without remembering Heidi Kunitz-Levy, who inspired all of us with her crystal clear voice, her beautiful smile, her gentle soul, and her tireless pursuit of musical perfection. Heidi spent hours upon hours helping a group of volunteer vocalists become a cohesive, harmonious unit that provides us with high quality choral music throughout the year, and most meaningfully, during these High Holy Day services. Heidi was taken from us



far too early, but not before giving us a lifetime of beautiful music.

For many of us, community is needed most when a medical emergency takes us or a loved one to the hospital. And how many of us have been looked in on at MUSC by Dr. Ken Chavin, or Dr. Michelle or Eric Rovner, or one of the many other wonderful physicians we are fortunate to have as part of our Congregation. And for years, Judith Green led a dedicated group of volunteers with the Caring Committee, making visits at hospitals and homes, providing meals and transportation, and making sure that none in our Congregation were overlooked. These are the acts of special people inspired by love of community.

Finally, when the ultimate tragedy strikes, and we find ourselves facing the loss of a loved one, so many in our Congregation are at their best. For many years, one of the first calls made was often to Morton Ellison, who was a one man Cemetery Committee, seeing to the maintenance of our cemeteries, assigning plots, and coordinating with

Stuhls to arrange for burial. From there, our Sisterhood leaps into action, providing meals to mourners and guests, and often stocking a freezer for weeks to come. And when a family sits shiva, more often than not, you will find Art Richek leading the shiva service.

All of these congregants, and so many more, provide all of these services that create what we know as community, because they innately understand that being a member of this Congregation is not about what they get – it's about what they can give. The service they provide to others to create this thing we call community **IS** their benefit of membership. By giving, they receive, and through their service they find meaning and a place in our community.

As I sought advice on these remarks, I was reminded that here at KKBE, we historically have not made a High Holy Day appeal from the Bimah. And it was suggested that I not start now. I'm going to ignore that advice . . . but I'm not going to ask you for money. I'm going to ask you for something more precious. I'm going to ask you for

your commitment to community. I'm going to ask you to ask yourself how you can make your membership in KKBE both meaningful to you, and valuable to others. I am going to ask you to be one piece of a group that is so much more than the sum of its parts.

We can't all be Harold Jacobs, but we can all live by his example. We can all find the Harold within us and seek opportunities to serve each other - using whatever skills we have, channeling our passions into concrete action, we can, **ALL OF US**, create the community that defines our Congregation, by viewing membership not just as a status that confers benefits and privileges, but also as a role that creates an obligation to others and to our community.

As we grow, from year to year and generation to generation, may this Congregation always be a place that provides opportunities for service, support, and community. May we all have a place and a purpose, and may we never lose sight of the importance of both, for each **one** of us and for **all** of us.

Thank you, and Shana Tova.