

Shabbat Shalom

Shanah Tovah

Before I officially begin I would like to follow up with a few notes from last year's speech.

The first belongs to my now 6 year old daughter Ariel. Last year, as I was called up to by the Rabbi to give the President's address, Ariel turns to my wife Jennifer and asks her quite in all sincerity, what happened to Obama?

The second belongs to my mother. I had forwarded a copy of my talk to my parents last year. And, my mother, after attending services at their shul in Long Island, informed me that the President of their synagogue used the exact same parable as I did. Google is quite amazing!

So, to keep the tradition alive I will borrow the opening joke from the Rabbi at Dix Hills Jewish Center in Long Island.

It was early one morning when there was a knock on the door to the room. The woman's voice said, "wake up. Wake up."

There was no response.

Another knock and another plea "wake up, wake up."

The voice from inside the room called out, "I don't want to wake up. I don't want to go to synagogue today."

The woman, "you have to go to Temple."

"Give me two reasons!" the voice from inside the room demanded.

OK said the woman:

"1. You are 50 years old and 2. You are the Rabbi."

Now the disclaimer, that this does not at all refer to any of our esteemed and wonderful clergy at KI but rather is a very nice segue into the moral memory that I would like to share with you today. Rabbi Hamilton asked if I would like to diverge somewhat from the typical President's address and rather speak and recount a moral memory. A suggestion that I gladly accepted.

I grew up in the small to mid size town of Danbury Connecticut. In the early 1980s it was not a very vibrant or large Jewish community. I attended elementary school classes in the public school in the Danbury school system and was if my memory serves me correctly, one of only two Jewish children in my class. In the spring of 2nd grade the assignment was to create Easter cards for our families. With all the rebelliousness of a 7 year old I refused. I did not know much at the time, but knew that spending time creating a card for my family to celebrate a Holiday in

which I did not participate was inherently wrong. I can't recall the details, but to make a long story short, I ended up in the Principal's office. Since, my parents are here celebrating Yom Kippur with us, they can attest that I was not altogether familiar with the Principal's office. So the ignominy of the event followed by the meeting with the Principal had a very powerful affect on me. Although I could not have known at the time, the incident and its ramifications would have a meaningful and lasting impact on my life.

Around that same time, it would come Saturday morning for shul, or Sunday for Sunday school and I could have been the voice in that room. In fact, I recall one episode of literally running around the house and yard to avoid capture by my parents and be taken to Sunday school.

Things changed the Fall following my adventure to the Principal's office. I entered 3rd grade in a very small Jewish Day School. I would continue learning in Jewish Day Schools through the end of High School.

As I think back now on how something that happened in 2nd grade could have so central a role in who I have become 30 years later, it is quite clear. At the time I was shy, lacked self confidence and clearly lacked a strong sense of Jewish Identity.

While I am still shy, Jewish learning and particularly a strong Jewish identity have helped to guide my decisions, values, and actions, every day, every week, and every year. The strength and comfort that I feel from simply being at KI on either a Shabbat morning, a Holiday, or for a social event is tangible. As Rabbi Hamilton has often said, Community, Kehillah, is the heart and lifeblood of our synagogue and synagogue experience and the power of our community is immense.

As we look forward to a very important year in KI's long and glorious history, a year in which decisions will be taken that will shape the direction of our community for decades to come, I would urge that we place the twin values of Judaism and Jewish Identity at the forefront of each discussion.

The additions of Rabbis Kippley Ogmann and Silverman, along with the leadership of Rabbi Hamilton, have strengthened KI's ability to instill in our membership, across the entire life spectrum, a Judaism that is based in lifelong learning, love of Torah and solidarity with Israel. We anticipate exciting and enriching programming for the whole community.

It is vital to instill and to foster a strong sense of Jewish Identity especially in our children. If you are here on a Shabbat morning you will see the future. You will see the future in the faces of the 100 children who participate in Nitzanim, mini-minyan, or junior congregation and then rush the bimah for lollipops after services. The nursery school, the religious school, Shabbat and holiday services, social programming are all aimed to turn the opening joke on its head. To have the child knock on the parents door and ask if they are ready to go to KI.

G'mar V'hatimah Tovah.