



HIGH HOLY DAY SERMONS

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Table of Contents

- "Personal Strength: Am I Strong Enough",*
Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D. pg. 3-10
- "Jewish Unity",*
Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D. pg. 11-18
- "Staying Strong: American Anti-Semitism Today",*
Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D. pg. 19-26
- "Hazak, Hazak V'Nithazaik: Keeping Our Synagogue Strong",*
Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D. pg. 27-34
- "Staying Strong in the Shadow",*
Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D. pg. 35-36

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"Personal Strength: Am I Strong Enough?"

Erev Rosh HaShanah ~ 2017

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

Every time we complete reading a book of the Torah, there is a wonderful custom in the synagogue for the congregation to proclaim: "Hazak, Hazak v'nithazaik," which means "Be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another."

"Hazak, Hazak v'nithazaik, Be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another." In the year ahead, 5778, I am hoping that these words will serve as KI's motto. They embody where we have been as a congregation, where we are today and where, hopefully, we will be in the future. There can be no question that historically KI was a strong congregation, the leading Reform synagogue in Philadelphia and a powerful house in the Reform movement.

Today, too, KI is a strong congregation, unsurpassed in its programming, art, music, youth education, preschool and use of technology, to share its vital message of peace, justice and compassion for all.

"Hazak, Hazak v'nithazaik, Be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another." So, too, we resolve to remain strong for the future, for the rising generation and beyond. We must continue to strengthen one another. Throughout these High Holy Days my plan is to share with you some of my reflections on strength: personal strength, congregational strength, communal strength and thoughts on what can make the Jewish people strong today. "Hazak, Hazak v'nithazaik," which means, "Be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another."

What is strength? If you check the dictionary, you will see that strength, being strong, has many meanings and many applications: being able to lift 250 pounds means you are strong. The power to resist an outside attack means being strong. To make a compelling argument in court, means you have a strong and well-articulated point of view. If a color is deep and rich and not pale, you can say it is strong. If an army has great firepower, it is strong. If a company is strong and showing solid profits, it is strong. Everyone wants a strong market and a strong dollar. A bridge is strong if it can

support a huge amount of traffic. A community or a country can be strong or weak. A synagogue can be strong or weak. A feeling can be strong, even overwhelming or faint or ambivalent. Indeed, there are many types and expressions of strength.

There are many famous sayings about strength:

Thomas Paine said “the real man smiles in trouble, gathers strength from distress, and grows brave by reflection.”

Marcus Aurelius taught, “you have power over your mind, not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.”

Confucius wisely observed that “the strength of a nation derives from the integrity of the home.”

Ernest Hemingway, known for his admiration of strength, wrote “the world breaks everyone and afterward, some are strong at the broken places.”

Cynically in his reverse image world, George Orwell wrote that “war is peace, freedom is slavery and ignorance is strength” from which one might conclude, with reversed meanings, that strength and knowledge go hand in hand.

Even more biting, Nietzsche, who maintained “that which does not kill us, makes us stronger.”

To a certain extent, I think it is correct to say that the whole world stands on strength. A lion without strength will starve. A machine without sufficient strength, will fail. An NFL lineman without enough strength, will be trampled. A woman in business without inner strength, will be crushed by a male dominant culture in the work place. The world needs strength to function but not so much strength that it smashes everything in its way. The world needs genuine strength but, by contrast, the false romantization of strength can lead to a Nazi state or a North Korea or an Iranian theocracy.

We need strength and we admire strength. Maybe that’s why we created superheroes with abnormal strength, strength distorted bodies, capacity to fly without normal aerodynamics, deflect electronic rays and conquer evil with their hands and magic swords and shields.

Many of the greatest movies of all time are about strength, movies about war, movies about death defying love, movies about moral courage in the face of great evil. All across the board from Hacksaw Ridge to Saving Private Ryan to Dunkirk to Hidden Figures and Loving, a 2016 Film, are all cinematic tributes to that inner strength called courage.

Courage is a tricky business. Courage is not recklessness or foolishness. Courage means recognizing one's fear and rationally overcoming those fears for a higher purpose. All the great philosophers of antiquity from Aristotle and Plato to Cicero speculated on the nature of courage. The great medieval scholar, Thomas Aquinas, wrote about courage. In the Chinese Dao tradition there are aphorisms about courage. The English philosopher Hobbes wrote about courage. Nietzsche for better or worse, wrote about the "will to power" as central to human existence and survival and perhaps one of the greatest theological works of the 20th century, Paul Tillich's *The Courage to Be* defines courage as "the self-affirmation of one's being in spite of the threat of non-being. According to Tillich, the fear of death, moral inadequacy and meaninglessness, posit the central anxieties we all face. It takes deep, personal courage just to exist as human beings.

What about strength and courage in the Jewish tradition? *Hazak* means strength in Hebrew as does *Ometz*. There is also the word *Ohz* as in "*adonai ohn la-amo yee-tain,*" *the Lord will give strength to his people,*" a line recited at the end of the grace after eating or *Birkat HaMazon*. The word *bitachon* means confidence. *Bitachon Ahtzme* means self confidence. *Koach* means physical power.

Most of the Bible's teachings about strength are tied to personal faith. In Deuteronomy 31:6 we are encouraged "to be strong and of good courage, fear not nor be afraid [of your enemies], for the Lord your God will go with you."

The prophet Isaiah said "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not be afraid."

Of course, we all know the words of the 23rd Psalm, "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me."

Viewed in context, the familiar Biblical story of Passover is actually about the relative strength of God. God, the Torah teaches, needs to gain the confidence of the Hebrew slaves. God has to prove God's superiority both over Pharaoh as in the ten plagues and then over nature itself, as in the splitting of the sea. In the mind of other ancient near ancient people, Yam, the god of the sea, was fierce and independent. The God of Israel, the Torah assures us, is stronger still. Interestingly, the word "hurricane" originates in a native language of the Caribbean people and stems from the name of the god of the storms and chaos. We certainly have seen how powerful that god, so to speak, is ... in recent times.

Our holiday of Hanukkah also offers multiple views of strength in the Jewish tradition. In one familiar song, we proclaim that "in every age a hero or sage will come to our aid." More recently, is a song based on the prophet Zechariah which asserts "not by might and not by power but by spirit alone" as a spiritualized understanding of strength.

In line with Tillich's "courage to be," a popular Hasidic song teaches "the whole world is a very narrow bridge and the main thing is not to be afraid." In the Talmud, we can listen to the teacher Ben Zoma who offers a psychological understanding of strength. "Who is strong," the ancient rabbi asks, "one who can control his inclinations as it is said in the book of Proverbs: 'better one who is slow to anger, than one with might.'"

Modern Zionism revolutionized the Jewish world by challenging the Jewish people to restore its place among the nations both through the power of the spirit and the power of the sword. As one early Zionist poet taught: "cease to be among the martyrs, learn to be among the heroes." Self-reliance, many Zionist theorists taught, is the key to modern Jewish survival, just as faith in God preserved our people in an early age.

But the type of strength I want to talk about tonight, at the beginning of the New Year, is a different kind of strength. Over the holidays, we will explore other applications of the idea of strength. Tonight, however, I want to begin with personal strength, strength of person, moral strength, strength of character, strength to do the

right thing, strength in the face of personal adversity, illness, family conflict, unbearable personal loss, failure, pain, abandonment and betrayal.

Many years ago, while serving Temple Concord in Binghamton, NY, it occurred to me, when, one morning, while driving to work, that despite the fact I was serving a relatively small community, I experienced life from birth to death and everything in between on a regular, almost weekly basis. Intervention in the most important moments in life is something congregational clergy do, as part of their calling. Happy, sad, tragic, victorious, anxious, catastrophic, joyful and overwhelming, are almost daily fare in what I do. The same and more, at least more from a quantitative point of view, are true for me here at KI for 16 years. A few years ago, I even asked a psychologist to work with me and my staff to better process the huge, range of emotions and situations we experience, so we can do our work better and better manage how all of these experiences impact us as people. Pastoral work is never easy, always important, always impactful.

I have come to a kind of realization that at the core of much this experience, this shared experience, is the issue of personal strength. Very often, we are called upon to be strong, and to help others summon their personal strength, exactly at those moments in life when we are least confident that we are strong enough to meet our challenges.

Problems with our kids, family disputes, the breakup of a promising relationships, a broken marriage, betrayal by a friend or rejection by a school, are all hard times and unrequested tests of character.

Life is filled with unfair challenges, unforced errors, so to speak. The death of the unborn and the very young, car and motorcycle accidents, murder, suicide, fast moving murderous diseases are all impossible moments in life.

So, too, the loss of a loved one, even under the best of circumstances, is so final, so intractable, and so permanent, that we are shook, challenged and wounded to our very core. And then, what does it mean to live alone after 40, 50 or even 60 years of marriage?

These are just some of the times and challenges which test us, wound us and force us to dig deeper than we thought possible.

“Hazak, Hazak v’nithazaik. Be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another.” What is it that makes us strong, even when we think we don’t have the strength to carry on?

What is it that makes us strong? Ask yourself, where does my inner strength come from? What makes me strong? What keeps me strong?

Perhaps the first source of strength we can call upon are our oldest and deepest relationships. Parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles and cousins are our earliest social constellations. Early in life, friends become an important part of our world as well. Little things like learning how to climb a tree are tests of courage we face outside of our homes. Later, school friends give us strength, sometimes tested by bullies or mean spirited cliques.

We join teams as kids to learn skills, to learn to cooperate and to take shared risks, to become strong together. Some of us serve in the military, where courage and strength are formerly demanded of us.

Spousal relations can be tremendous sources of strength. As we grow and share life together, our soul mates can provide us new strength and purpose. Becoming a parent gives a unique and profound reason to strengthen ourselves and to find inner courage to protect or advance our children’s interests. Many parents will do things for their children, they would never have done for themselves. Being parents can make us stronger than we ever imagined we could have been as single adults.

Our work demands not only skills and knowledge, but strength and courage as well. When to take risks, when to advocate, when to keep silence? These are all questions we need to consider in our vocations on a regular basis.

As we grow older, we join all types of organizations, and affiliate with institutions, in order to further common causes and interests. They also have social dimensions which help define who we are as individuals. Being part of an organization, can make us stronger as individuals.

Involvement in politics demands civic courage. There is a time to speak and a time to keep silent, our ancient teachers explained. Sometimes we do so for our

communities or for our nation, sometimes for the whole world. Sometimes citizenship demands that we be strong and resolute, sometimes flexible and accommodating.

What about Judaism and synagogue life? To what extent do they help me be a strong person? I have probably conducted 1,500 funerals in my career. I am amazed by the power of the Pslams, of El Maleh Rachamim and especially of the Kaddish to help bring “balm to Gilead.” At the worst possible moment in life, looking down into an earthen grave, unable to see the sky above, frozen by grief.

The sure, familiar, rhythmic words of Kaddish and affirmation, seem to give most some respite from the pain of the moment. Feeling the earth in our hands, some how marks the beginning of the next cycle. Lighting the shiva candle at home, reminds us that there is still light in the darkness. Sitting with family and friends allows us to form eternal narratives about finite lives, which loomed larger than life for us. Judaism has tremendous power, if we allow into our lives.

Judaism cannot exist in a vacuum. Like any great structure, it needs a sure foundation. Judaism is built on the pillars of self, family, tradition and synagogue. Each pillar helps support us. Each pillar is necessary and mandated and trustworthy. I have spent most of my life inside the synagogue, the last 16 in this synagogue, almost as much time as I spent in my parent’s home. More than I spent in upstate New York.

KI has become more than a building in my life. It has come to define me. Its history and traditions inspire me. It has music and art that reflect the core of my being.

Most of all, it has people who ask me to help them to be strong. They are reciprocal relationships. Some many people here have been strong, fair and wise for me, when I needed their support.

Perhaps the ultimate question about strength is whether or not strength has a transcendent source. It is a big question. For some people it is easy: “my help comes from God, Maker of heaven and earth.” Others have more philosophical answers. Others believe we are on this earth alone and that each person has to be the source of their own strength. On Kol Nidrei, we will go deeper into the question of faith and personal strength. For now, none of us should ever have to rely on an inadequate or

poorly constructed idea of God for personal strength. For now, none of us should feel we are all alone in sharing the burdens of existence. We are here for each other.

On this Rosh HaShanah 5778, I need to ask a very basic question as I go forward into a new year. What makes me strong? It is one of the great questions of human existence. In the end, I make me strong but I need help. I can't be strong alone. I need my family close to me. I need my friends. I need my congregation. I need my heritage. I need my community. I need my country and its magnificent ideals and I need my God to be strong. And I need to be strong for all of them, for they can only be as strong as I help them to be strong.

Tonight and throughout this holiday period, I hear my tradition calling to me: "Hazak, Hazak v'nithazaik." "Be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another."

On this Rosh HaShanah let us resolve to try to be strong as individuals, to help one another, to be a strong community of faith and to move forward into the new year with hope and with renewed confidence.

Amen. Shana Tova!

"Jewish Unity"

Rosh HaShanah Morning - 2017/5778

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

My theme for the High Holy Days, 5778, is “strength.” Last night, I talked about “what makes me strong as an individual?” Today, I want to talk about strength derived from Jewish unity, or lack thereof. On Kol Nidrei, my theme will be “Faith and Strength” and finally, on Yom Kippur morning, we will explore the topic, “what makes a synagogue strong.”

My choice of the theme of strength comes from a wonderful synagogue custom enacted five times every year with the completion of the reading of each book of the Torah. When we finish reading Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy we proclaim, “Hazak, Hazak v’nithazaik,” which means “Be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another.” The Hebrew word “Hazak” is an imperative. It means “Be strong!” The Hebrew word “v’nithazaik” is a reflexive verb and means, “let us strengthen one another.” “Hazak, Hazak v’Nithazaik” -- “Be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another.”

On noon on March 2, 2017, earlier this year, Liz and I went into town to participate in a rally against hate. Here in Philadelphia, as in other places around the country, Jewish cemeteries had just been vandalized and the police suspected that hate crimes and not just vandalism was involved. In my opinion, the situation was clouded by the fact that a number of local Jewish cemeteries are in terrible condition and that some stones had fallen over because of neglect and lack of proper maintenance, a situation documented multiple times over the years by the local print media. Still, it seemed, foul play was involved this time and the community, led by Federation went into action. A crowd of 5 to 6,000 gathered in front of Independence Hall. A number of Jewish organizations and schools brought signs and banners. Non-Jewish groups and individuals were also present, self-identified and supportive. It was an impressive display of unity by and with the Jewish community. A crime had brought us together,

and the simmering differences in the local Jewish community were bridged, at least for the moment.

My first experience of such communal solidarity took place in May, 1967. At the time, we didn't know it, but it was about a month before the fateful Six Day War. Egypt and Syria had combined politically and militarily and were poised to strike Israel. Their goal was the total destruction of the Jewish State. My home Jewish community in Baltimore, like other Jewish communities, mobilized. The anxiety was palpable and growing.

I remember going to the Pikesville Armory with my mother. At the time, it was the largest crowd of people I had ever seen, other than at a Baltimore Colts home game, may they rest in peace.

Across the front of the Armory was a huge banner which said "Never Again" and under it was a massive reproduction of the tragic scene from the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943 with a little frightened boy holding his hands up in the air as a Nazi soldier with a rifle looked on. Everyone in that photograph looked terribly afraid, and eerily aware, that a terrible fate awaited them. "Never Again" we repeated over and over again. The crowd eventually broke up but the anxiety didn't. It was until the war started and it became clear Israel was headed to victory that the fear broke and quickly turned into jubilation. It was one of the proudest Jewish moments of the 20th century. Israel survived. Jerusalem was reunited. The Sinai and the Golan were ours. The Arabs were vanquished.

At that moment and for decades, no one fully understand the deeper implications of the moment. What would Israel do with the Sinai, with the Golan, with the Gaza Strip? How would the international community accept Israeli control of all of Jerusalem? What were Israeli defense needs in the West Bank and in the Jordan Valley? Which sectors would be annexed and which areas would go under military control? What would happen to all the Arabs, Israel now controlled? Who among them could vote in Israel? Who were stateless? Who were Jordanian? In June, 1967, only the feel of victory was in the air, and the Jewish people was an internationally united community of destiny!

That was fifty years ago, and that sense of elation and unity would last but not for long. The 73 war came along. Then an increase in Arab terrorism. Then wars in Lebanon and Gaza. Israel made peace with "Egypt and Jordan" but not with itself. The low point came with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin on March 28, 1996 by a fellow Jew and not by an Arab terrorist. Moreover, a whole series of developments including the decision by the Reform movement to accept patrilineal descent and uncertainty about the Jewishness of Russian immigrants to Israel, led to the "Who is a Jew" crises which threatened to tear the whole Jewish world apart. As the 20th century drew to a close, the old UJA slogan "We Are One" seemed more aspirational than real.

The question of Jewish unity is both ideological and historiographical. Some Jewish ideologies emphasize a broad, inclusive approach to Jewish life. Others draw narrow boundaries around Jewish peoplehood. Some ideologies of Jewish life believe we should cooperate with one another despite our differences; other say that only certain types of Jews are real and other are *hutz lamachene*, literally "outside the camp" of Jewish life. The same is true of historians. Some believe the general Jewish experience is essentially a single story; others argue that the idea of a Jewish consensus has also been more of a myth, than a sociological or historical reality.

Jews and Judaism are not unique in this regard. Is American history mostly the story of a unified nation with a solid core of shared values, or is it a story of regional, racial and economic conflict? Does America have a single "manifest destiny" or are we the boiling cauldron of Jeffersonians and Jacksonians, slave holders and abolitionists, isolationists and democratizers of the world, integrationists or segregationists, a rural nation or an urban nation, states rights advocates or Washington-o-centric, big business or big labor, pro-life or pro-choice. The list goes on, the question of the centrality of either consensus or conflict, remains.

Viewed broadly, Jewish tradition understands itself internally as a consensus tradition. We began as a single family which expanded into a family of tribes. We left Egypt together, and together stood at Sinai. For centuries we were bound together as a community of destiny and purpose. And, for all of its terrible consequences, the long history of anti-semitism bound us together, sometimes in the most awful of ways.

However, if we think of Jewish history more critically and think of in empirical and not mythic terms, a very different narrative emerges. Our ancestors probably belonged to disparate tribes who struggled to find common cause. The first Jewish kingdom split into a northern and southern set of monarchies who were not always fond of one another. Prophets railed against Biblical Israel and its waywardness and rarely praised the Jews for their lifestyle. The real Hanukkah was as much a civil war as it was a war of independence. Judaism 2,000 years ago, like today, was made up different feuding groups. A large percentage of the Jewish community of the 8th Century, rebelled against the rabbis in the Mesopotamia of late antiquity and formed their own Karite community. The Hasidim were bitterly denounced by the Yeshiva based Mitnagdim in the 8th Century, a split which still affects the ultra Orthodox community. Zionism was fiercely rejected by anti-Zionists, secular Jews clashed with religious Jews and. Sephardim resented Ashkenazic power in the new state of Israel. In this light, the Jewish experience becomes more a tale of discord than harmony of inner conflict, not inner unity.

Remember the scene from Fiddler: it was a horse, it was a mule? The only force able to resolve that split in Anatevka, were the Czarist police and rioting Cossacks.

In my opinion, Jewish history, all history, is a mix of consensus and conflict. Indeed, I would suggest that Jewish history, ancient and contemporary, is broadly a story of consensus internally riddled with conflict. Today, sadly, it is no different.

Although we gather every year on Rosh HaShanah to reaffirm our covenant with our ancestors, the contemporary Jewish world and one another, I think we have to admit that there issues which not only unite us, but also divide us, especially the relationship of the Reform Jewish community with Israel. It is not a happy moment. As much as most of us support Israel, we know beyond concern for the defense of the Jewish state and our desire to share its modern culture, we have problems. Indeed, we have very deep problems.

For Reform Jews, during the last year, the first issue which worried us most, is the situation at the Western Wall. The Western Wall or Kotel is a surviving remnant of the Second Temple, reconfigured and enlarged by Herod the Great and his family

beginning in the year 19 BCE. Following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70, Jewish access to Jerusalem and the Wall became problematic. Special permission was given on occasion to go to the wall, largely blocked by the so-called Moroccan Slums, especially on the Ninth of Av. The crying sounds of the prayers of that holiday led to the name “Wailing Wall.” Numerous attempts were made by rabbis and Jewish businessmen to buy the wall from Muslim leaders. None succeeded. It was only under the British after WWI, that Jews secured the right to worship at the wall, a right quickly challenged by the Muslim authorities. From 1919-1948, access to the wall was regularly contested, until Old Jerusalem fell into Jordanian hands. It was only in 1967 that the Wall was liberated by the Israeli Army.

The fight over the wall then shifted from Jews versus Arabs, to Jews versus other Jews. As early as 1968, the Reform movement attempted to run services at the wall with men and women standing together. Despite the Reform movement’s rejection of praying for the rebuilding of the Temple, there was still a strong feeling that progressive Jewish services should be permitted at the wall as a symbol of Jewish unity and Israeli democracy. It also reflected a broader desire to keep Jerusalem united under Israeli control. Then in 1988, twenty years later, Neshot HaKotel, the Women of the Wall or WOW formed, and quickly gained Reform support. Respecting gender segregation at the Wall, only Women prayed in the women’s section. But when WOW began reading Torah and wearing prayer shawls and tefillin, the ultra orthodox pushed back. In 2003, Israel’s Supreme Court sided with the Orthodox but the struggle did not end.

While public opinion in Israel split almost evenly over the Wall, the non-Orthodox movements in the Diaspora, especially the United States, made continued common with WOW. Victory seemed close at hand in January, 2016 when the Israeli Cabinet announced that a new section of the Wall, south of the Kotel Plaza, would be developed for egalitarian worship. Progressive Jews claimed victory. But the traditional community went to work to undermine the deal. At the beginning of this summer, the Netanyahu Government announced the deal had been suspended. Protests were loud but ineffective. Tensions remain high and Reform Jews, the world over who followed these developments and cheered for the Women of Wall, were roundly

defeated.

To date, fears of an Israel-Diaspora rift have not fully materialized, although calls have been made to limit travel to Israel, boycott El Al and refocus liberal Jewish support of Israel to specific causes which promote pluralism in Israel. Others maintain that the defeat of Reform over the wall signifies either the decline of its political importance in Israel or a calculated move by the Netanyahu government to realign itself with the right wing of the American Zionist movement and the Orthodox. However, you look at it, it is not a happy outcome for Reform Judaism, although it is clear that the struggle for egalitarian rights at the Wall will continue.

A second issue developed just a month ago in the wake of the “Unite the Right” Nazi-KKK rally in Charlottesville, VA in mid-August, 2017 over the fate of that city’s Robert E. Lee memorial. The sight of hundreds of American Nazis marching through the night in an American city with Tikki Torches disgusted American Jews and others, devoted to inclusion and racial harmony in this country. The failure of the American President to unequivocally condemn White Supremacy threw gas on the political fire, which is still smoldering in much of this country. For many, it was an unforgivable offensive to give sanction to hatred and bigotry and fail to work to stem the rising tide of hate crimes in this county.

Then, the unthinkable happened. To the surprise of many American and Israeli Jews, the Prime Minister of Israel was both slow to condemn the “Unite the Right Rally” and when he did so, was less than forceful. Others on the Israeli right, went as far to say that the right, was not a real danger to American Jews. Prime Minister Netanyahu’s son, Yair, then posted Nazi-style cartoons on Facebook in an attempt to denounce his father’s enemies. American Nazis leapt to his defense, including David Duke, declaring the young Netanyahu a Nazi hero. The whole episode was maddening and deeply disturbing. It further complicated internal Jewish politics for Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist Jews.

The third issue creating “degrees of separation” between Progressive Jews and Netanyahu, is the west bank and the Jewish settlements there. The question of the west bank is one of the most difficult, complex and emotional issues facing Israel, the Middle

East and the world. On the one hand, are concerns about Israeli national security. Israel is a small country. Across from the city of Netanya, it is only 8 miles wide. Defending its borders and creating even a fraction of strategic depth is no small issue. On the other hand, the civil rights of the Arab inhabitants of the West Bank and the national rights of the Palestinian people are also important to consider. The West Bank, excluding Jerusalem is divided up into three Administrative Zones. Section A is Arab and urban. It was where most the Arabs live in the territory and it is under Palestinian control. Area A makes up 18% of the West Bank. Section B which surrounds the A areas is under mixed control with Israel in charge of its security. Section B accounts for 22% of the West Bank. A and B together have a total of 2.8 million Palestinians but also almost 400,000 Israeli settlers. Section C made up of more remote areas but heavy with natural resources as well as the Jordan Valley, were originally intended, under Oslo II to return to Palestinian control in 1999 but remains under Israel. Area C is the site of the greatest numbers of building demolitions and other conflicts.

The Reform movement, along with the American government and the state of Israel have long supported the idea of a two state solution which means the creation of some kind of Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. The growth of Israeli settlements, widely favored by the Netanyahu government, is leading many to conclude that the window of opportunity for a two state solution is closing.

There are proposals for land swaps inside of Israel proper but no one knows if they are serious. Meanwhile, the tension between Palestinian human rights and Israeli security needs intensifies. For the Reform movement and, probably the majority of Reform Jews, confidence in the Netanyahu government continues to diminish. At the same time, confidence in the government of Mahmood Abbas is minimal or non-existent. Ultimately, the collective wisdom of our movement is that Netanyahu's policy of creeping annexation, does not bode well for the future of a democratic Israel.

Sadly, 5778 does not begin in a good place for Reform Jews and Israel. Betrayal at the wall, angry disappointment over Charlottesville and deepening concern over the political realities of the territories, have put us at odds with the government of the Jewish State. It does not mean that we don't love Israel or support it. *Hazak, Hazak*

v'nithazaik, be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another is complicated business for us and Israel. The burden of unity is on all of us and it is difficult.

Despite rejection, frustration and disappointment, we need both to embrace and challenge Israel. In doing so, we need to make sure our bastions of strength, our Reform synagogues here and in Israel are as strong as possible. If we weaken in any way, the fight for pluralism, democracy and justice inside of Israel will be lost. In that scenario, Israel would lose, we would lose and the Jewish people would lose. We were taught to be a light to the nations by our prophets. That battle continues here in America and in Israel. That battle requires unflinching strength and unity.

Hazak, Hazak v'nithazaik, be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another as we enter a new year. We pray it will be a Shana Tova, a good year and a year of renewed strength. Amen.

"STAYING STRONG: AMERICAN ANTI-SEMITISM TODAY"

Erev Yom Kippur - 2017/5778

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

I grew up in Pikesville, Maryland just outside of Baltimore in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Twenty year earlier, that corner of Baltimore County was still largely a rural area with working farms and small villages. New suburbs, almost entirely Jews moving out of the city quickly enveloped the smaller, non-Jewish community. The ratio of Jews to non-Jews, especially in the schools, was tremendous, perhaps 10 to 1, maybe 15 to 1. In elementary school, so far as I remember, I had no non-Jewish classmates. I didn't meet the so-called locals until junior high school. At first, I went to Sudbrook in old Pikesville, while waiting for the new Jr. HS to open, conveniently located in the middle of the Jewish neighborhood and walking distance to my house.

At Sudbrook, I met non-Jews for the first time in my life. In fact, I even had a Mormon friend with corn blond hair. Kevin Jensen accidentally broke my nose by heading me in a soccer game but we stayed friends anyway. He even taught me about Postum and other non-caffeinated drinks.

But there was another set of kids who were not so friendly. They were rural. We called them hicks, a class based substitute word for goyim. They dressed tough and kept their distance from the better to do, Jewish kids. My first encounter with anti-Semitism came from within this group.

I remember two incidents. The first was penny pitching. They used to flick pennies at us. I didn't understand it at first. We were supposed to dive to the ground to retrieve the small change but didn't know enough about anti-Semitism to do so. The other incident was worse. I got off the bus one sunny day and another student jumped in front of me and punched me, hard, in the stomach. In a mean spirited whisper, he said "Jew" and disappeared into the swirling crowd of students. He never bothered me again. We never had a class together.

There are other, random stories to report. Nothing noteworthy. No pogroms. No expulsions. In Cincinnati, Liz and I encountered sales help in a Sears who used the expression “Jewing down.” Our kids also had a few experiences when we lived in Binghamton from other kids and school officials alike. No Cossacks or Nazis. Just enough to drive home the reality that we were members of a small, religious minority that had a long history of rejection and oppression.

Although anti-Semitism has existed since Abraham and Sarah, the term itself is modern. It was coined in the middle of the 19th century reflecting the then new racialized meaning of hatred toward Jews and Judaism but quickly expanded to all forms of animus against us and our tradition. Technically, there are several different types of anti-Semitism: simple inter-ethnic tension, religious anti-Judaism which has existed from ancient times and continued through Christian and Islamic anti-Semitism, racial anti-Semitism including Nazism and now, political anti-Semitism or the kind of anti-Zionism which seeks the annihilation of the Jewish state.

Compared to almost any other country in the world, anti-Semitism in America has been relatively light and rarely lethal. On the other hand, anti-Semitism has been a constant factor in American history, sometimes strong and threatening, sometimes at low tide, but there nevertheless. Unfortunately and incontrovertibly, we are now witnessing a measurable uptick in domestic anti-Semitism and it is critical for all of us to be informed about and to be prepared to counter it through education, legal efforts and legislation.

Jewish life in the New World began as a function of vicious anti-Semitism in Spain and Portugal. Seeking to flee the flames of the Inquisitions, Marranos were the first Jews to move to the western hemisphere. They settled in distant corners of the Iberian Empire, and as far north as New Mexico to live out their secret lives in safety. Dutch, then English colonies were the first to accept practicing Jews in their colonies but not without discrimination. The embittered governor of New Amsterdam, Peter Stuyvesant, unsuccessfully tried to block the permanent settlement of Jews in his jurisdiction. Rhode Island, one of the more inclusive colonies, denied naturalization to Aaron Lopez, its most illustrious Jewish resident in the days prior to the American

Revolution. The majority of colonies did not allow Jews to hold public office and the fight to drop religious oaths of office continued throughout the 19th century in the original 13 states. Perhaps the most dramatic display of American anti-Semitism took place during the Civil War when Jews, as a class, were temporarily expelled from the southern states by the United States Army. Had Lincoln not reversed that 1862 order, the civil status of Jews in this country would have been deeply damaged.

A turning point in the history of American anti-Semitism came in June 1877 when Joseph Seligman, a leading Jewish businessman and his family, were denied a hotel room at an upscale resort in Saratoga Springs, NY. A nationwide boycott of the hotel's parent company followed, leading to it going bankrupt. The incident was symptomatic of the sharp upturn of American anti-Semitism during the Gilded Age leading to thousands of restrictive covenants against Jews, their ability to do business, belong to organizations and live in neighborhoods of their choice. On August 15, 1915 a mob lynched Leo Frank in Georgia. Less known, but still real, was the street violence even in pre WWI Philadelphia against Jews, particularly in South Philadelphia. Following WWI, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia again rapidly increased in the United States and the KKK reached the apex of its power and popularity. In 1924 the Congress of the United States all but closed America to Jewish immigration. While Jews were not the only group to suffer because of the Johnson Acts, the consequences of the restrictive legislation for European Jews during the 1930s and World War II was catastrophic. Individuals like Henry Ford and Father Charles Coughlin railed against Jews through various medias.

Anti-Semitism in the United States did not begin to wane until after World War II. Numerous factors figured in the change. Over 500,000 Jews served in the American military during the war. Bravery and mere social contact played an essential role in the shift in American culture toward inclusion. Jews also were becoming more Americanized as they entered into their second and third generations and moved away from their immigrant culture. The new suburbs played a role in the Americanization process, as did upward economic mobility aided by the GI Bill and education. The establishment of Israel also gave American Jews a lift as an increasingly respected

minority as did the conspicuous rise of Jewish artists and entertainers in popular American culture. But most of all, it was the civil rights movement which challenged the deepest structures and practices of anti-Semitism in America as part of its drive to break Jim Crowism in this country. Widely ambivalent about their own relations to African-Americans, American Jews nevertheless supported the drive toward social inclusivity in the United States.

One by one, previously closed industries began opening up to American Jews. New neighborhoods were increasingly more diverse than old urban neighborhoods, at least with respect to groups whose ancestors came to America from Europe. By the early 1960s, the first statistical evidence of mixed marriage in a century, was detected by demographers of the Jewish community, signaling a new kind of social acceptance in this country. Remarkably, within 50 years, mixed marriage would become statistically normal in the American Jewish community and tens of millions of Americans now found themselves with Jewish relatives. The results were outstanding. Shops in towns in Northern Idaho without any Jewish residents began carrying Rosh Hashanah and Hanukkah greeting cards. Jews had become part of main street America.

Of course, there were still pockets of resistance. In the 50s, anti-black racists resisting the Civil Rights movement were also anti-Semitic. Synagogues, along with black churches, were bombed in the 1960s. A small neo-Nazi movement appeared.

With the breakup of the Civil Rights and the rise of a protest movement against the Vietnam War, a new anti-Semitism began to appear on the margins of American society. Black Nationalists, Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam and parts of the American left saw American Jews and their support of Israel as part of American and European colonialism. Tension between the Jewish and African-American communities soared, received considerable media attention but at the same time, both groups largely remained inside the National Democratic Party. Anti-Semitic comments by President Nixon, Charles Colson and Patrick Buchanan, among others, generally reinforced American Jewry's traditional distrust of the political right.

Remarkably, at the same time, in the final quarter of the 20th century, Jews and Judaism were increasingly accepted in a broad spectrum of areas of American society

from hospital boards to museums to the administration of Ivy League schools. Israel, following the 1967 war, forged a special relationship with the American government and military and organizations like AIPAC were increasingly able to span both sides of the aisle in the halls of congress.

Hate in America began to spike again after the 2000 census predicted that white Americans would no longer be the majority group in this country after 2040 as a result of increased Hispanic immigration, in particular. The number of hate groups in 1999 was estimated at 457. By 2005, that number doubled and peaked in 2011 at 1018 according the Southern Poverty Law Center. The rise of Internet activity after that, scrambled the number of groups, which again is over 900.

The ADL began tracking anti-Semitic incidents in the United States in 1979 and claims that number peaked in 2006 at 1,154. An increase of 1/3 was reported by ADL in 2016 with the biggest jump in November and December, 2016. So far in 2017, the rate is up 87% over the year before. Millennials, born during the low point in American anti-Semitism are now witnessing its greatest resurgence since WWII. How it affects them is still largely unknown.

At the same time Jews are among the most respected groups in the United States according to a Pew poll form earlier this year. More than half of Americans are concerned about the wellbeing of Jews in this new environment. and believe that anti-Semitism has increased since the 2016 elections. 80% believe that the government should sponsor "anti"-anti-Semitism programs.

What are the new sources of anti-Semitism in America today? Extreme elements on the American left bear some responsibility. Witness the exclusion of Jewish lesbians from a gay march in Chicago earlier this summer. However, figuring out exactly who is on the far left in the United States is difficult. There is no central organization or ideology other than a loosely defined anti-fascism, anti-racism, anti-globalist core which is broadly anti-globalist and anti-capitalist. There may be as many as 200 so-called Antifa groups many of which are either communist or anarchistic or both.

However, many conservative and libertarian groups agree that the far right is more dangerous than the far left in the United States. According to a recent 25-

year [study](#) by the Cato Institute, nationalist and right-wing terrorists have killed about 10 times as many people since 1992 as left-wing terrorists, which may or may not include those who identify with Antifa, the total number of casualties coming to about 400.

Information about anti-Semitism and the American Muslim community is often contradictory. On the one hand, Jewish and Muslim groups, including the local and national American Jewish Committee have forged impressive alliances in the last few years. Here at KI, we have been exchanging programs with a Turkish Muslim group, Peace Islands, for over five years. The Reform movement, especially in connection with the Los Angeles campus of the Hebrew Union College has been working closely with Muslim religious leaders for a similar amount of time.

Distinguishing between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism is no easy feat. Some American Muslims insist there is a difference. The same is true on the so-called alt-right which displays considerable anti-Semitic tendencies while at the same time often favors Israel in the war against Islamist terrorism. Trying to figure the landscape of American hate today is like doing a 1000 puzzle in which all the pieces are different colors. It is no easy task.

For most American Jews today, the biggest concerns about anti-Semitism are the outright and random violence against Jewish property, organizations and persons. In Europe, by contrast, the Muslim threat to Jews is seen as a greater than the threat from the traditional right wing, although those worries are growing as well.

By far the greatest concern in the country has recently focused on groups responsible for the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia this past August. The local person who started the ball rolling was Jason Keller who was joined by Nathan Damigo, from "Identity Europa", Richard Spencer a major national leader of the Alt Right and David Duke from the KKK. The Daily Stormer, the League of the South and several militias all joined in. At the height of the demonstration, there were approximately 500 white supremacists and 1,000 counter demonstrators. With Virginia’s right to carry law in place, the presence of a large number of automatic weapons was clearly evident and although shots were fired, only 3 died, 1 woman,

Heather Heyer by vehicular assault and 2 policemen operating a helicopter. A large interfaith protest preceded the actual demonstration and counter-demonstration.

The shock of seeing "tiki torch" carrying white supremacists and Nazi demonstrators in Charlottesville was further compounded by the President of the United States who made equivocal statements about the failed Unite the Right rally. Many in the Jewish community felt that the President's remark helped normalize racism and anti-Semitism in this country. Others pointed out the contradiction in his defense of protests involving the American flag at NFL games and his lack of clear-cut condemnation of Nazi flags, KKK symbols and other open displays of extreme racism. In the wake of Charlottesville, the American Jewish community seems more unnerved than in any time in the recent past and donations to the ADL are coming in at 1000% the normal rate.

In my opinion, the fear in the Jewish community is NOT so much that vast majority of their American neighbors have become anti-Semitic over night or that a deeper dormant anti-Semitism in America has awoken from its slumbers. Rather the real, rationally derived concern is that dangerous, fringe elements are being legitimized as true players in our essential national discussions. The fear is real. Less than 3% of Germans supported Hitler before the crash of 1929. In 1932, that support spiked to 40% and went it fell dramatically the following year, the Nazis staged a coup and seized power in Berlin in 1933.

The long global history of anti-Semitism has taught Jews to take any uptick in its popularity seriously, especially any sustained effort to legitimize it as a responsible basis for political action or governance. That anxiety has been, for better or worse, triggered in the minds of the majority of American Jews. We are not wrong to be concerned. Supporting the ADL, strengthening Jewish life, especially our synagogue, working with non-Jewish friends and vigilance are all the order of the day.

However, deep down, I personally do not believe the United States is about to go over the edge and that anti-Semitism here will resemble Germany in 1932 or Russia in 1832 or Spain in 1432. We do have a problem but we have other internal problems too.

You know the list: lack of Jewish education, declining rates of synagogue affiliation, generational continuity, adequate funding and so on. I also believe we will be OK.

For centuries, we have said the following in the synagogue as we complete each book of the Torah: *Hazak, Hazak, V'tnithazaik, be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another!* We were strong before when it seemed our strength was inadequate. We will be strong again today because we must and we will be strong again in the future because our work is not done.

As we enter into this New Year, let us consider the threats against let us take stock of our selves and let us resolve to move forward with renewed strength.

Amen

Shana Tova.

HAZAK, HAZAK V'NITHAZAIK:
KEEPING OUR SYNAGOGUE STRONG

Yom Kippur Morning ~ 2017-5778

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

My theme for these High Holy Days has been *HAZAK, HAZAK V'NITHAZAIK, be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another!* The phrase comes from a wonderful synagogue custom. Each time we complete reading a Book of the Torah – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers or Deuteronomy – we say *HAZAK, HAZAK V'NITHAZAIK, be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another!* It's a joyous moment of victory, continuity and accomplishment, both communal and personal.

The phrase - *HAZAK, HAZAK V'NITHAZAIK, be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another!* - can obviously also stand on its own, independent of its origins. In fact, it would work for any organization or cause. A school could use it. A bank could use it. A sports team could use it. Its great line which summarizes just about everything we do collectively as people and as a community. That is why we are using it this year as the KI motto. *HAZAK, HAZAK V'NITHAZAIK, be strong, be strong and let us strengthen one another!*

The specific origin of the *HAZAK* grows out of the Jewish tradition and the world of the synagogue as the home of Torah, its study and practice. I have spent most of my life in the synagogue, first as a small child and a member of a synagogue based family, then as a college and rabbinic school student and since ordination in four pulpits: Middletown, OH, Endicott, NY, Binghamton, NY and here at KI. It has been an extraordinary run. The synagogue is not only my professional habitat but it is a cause I truly believe in.

No one knows when and where the synagogue came into being. One theory is that it started in Jerusalem and was a “small sanctuary” in the courts of the ancient

Temple of Solomon. A second tradition places it in Babylonia in the sixth century BCE. “By the water of Babylon, “ a grief struck people lamented, “we sat down and wept.” A third hypothesis says that the synagogue began in Hellenistic Egypt and a fourth theory suggests it was not until the first century, in Roman Palestine, that we had synagogues.

Whatever the origin of the synagogue, it quickly emerged, after the year 100 CE, as the central institution of Jewish religious life. Over the centuries, most synagogues have been relatively small places, cradles of Jewish life. Ecclesiastical law both under medieval Christianity and Islam required that synagogues be modest and located in the back alleys of Jewish neighborhoods. First in Holland, and then in other emancipated lands, synagogues became grand structures proudly proclaiming the place of Jews in modern society and role of Judaism in shaping Western civilization.

The synagogue is truly the sanctuary of Israel. It has also been my personal sanctuary for my entire life. Along with the family, it is the foundation of Jewish life in this country and most of the world. There are all types of Jewish institutions and organizations but only one is indispensable and that is the synagogue. I am sure all of you have memories of synagogues from your past. Here are some of mine:

As a little boy, I loved my home synagogue. It was a lot like KI: big, Reform and busy. I had a wonderful teacher in second grade who suggested I might think about becoming a rabbi. At the time, I wanted to be an architect but she planted a seed that later grew. I had good rabbis. The senior rabbi was Abraham Shaw, a contemporary of Rabbi Korn here at KI. Typical of that generation, he had a godlike voice and seemed infinitely wise to me. One of his assistants, Martin Weiner, was the rabbi of my adolescence. He spoke well, too, but was more haimish and made me feel comfortable at Temple Oheb Shalom. I had a wonderful youth group advisor, too and a couple of good synagogue friends.

At one point before graduating High School, I had a dream that I was exploring the blackened, wet ruins of a synagogue which had been destroyed in a massive fire. In my dream, I was looking for prayer books, tallitot and Torah scrolls that were still useable. Curiously, there were no people in my dream. It may have been a kind of

“calling dream” for me because, thereafter, I decided my professional goal was to be a rabbi.

Many years later following ordination and working on a PhD thesis, I found myself here in Philadelphia in the charred ruins of the old Dropsie College Library at York and N. Broad. On November 9, 1981, the 43rd anniversary of Kristallnacht, and early in my second year of graduate school, a fire destroyed one of the oldest collections of Jewish books and manuscripts in the world including the materials I needed for my own research. There I was, literally in my own dream, crawling under displaced burnt beams at Dropsie and wiping water off of sacred books I had determined to study.

As a rabbinic student I served two small communities, first Harlingen, Texas and then Richmond, IN. The two towns together had about a 100 Jewish families. They had enough people, each for only one Jewish institution and that was the synagogue. Without their synagogues, they would have had no real sense of community, no place to gather, no place to teach their kids and no place to celebrate the holidays. What they did have was a lot of spirit, a true sense of community and purpose and a great deal of pride that they could represent Judaism to their fellow citizens. I, too, was proud to be part of their lives. Forty years later, I am still in touch with several of my Hebrew Hoosiers.

Preparing myself for a life of sacred study and service was my dream and I was fortunate enough to see it become my reality. I haven't seen everything but I have seen a lot. My first Bar Mitzvah student from Indiana, died in a fire during his freshman year at college. On my first day on the job in my pulpit in Middletown, OH a six year old was killed in a bizarre frat accident. It was like a scene out of Milton Steinberg's classic novel, *As A Driven Leaf*.

In Endicott, NY, a Reconstructionist synagogue, Beth El, was ready to close and had to make a decision to hire me as a part time rabbi (I was fulltime at SUNY) or shut down. They stayed open and the synagogue flourished for the four years I was there. It was my dream, again, playing itself out.

By 1990, I was ready for a full size synagogue. First, Temple Concord in Binghamton and then eleven years later, here at KI. Temple Concord was a wonderful

congregation which had a modern sanctuary and an old ginger bread mansion to house its school. There, I created the Hanukkah House Museum, still going strong, a licensed Elder Hostel program, and wrote a history of the local Jewish community called “Beyond the Catskills.” The title came from an undergrad who exclaimed about Jewish life in upstate NY that “I didn’t know Jews lived beyond the Catskills.”

Life in Binghamton was good. It was a good place to raise a big family. The synagogue which grew from 175 to 300 families on my beat, felt like a big a family, too. I wasn’t really looking to move when the Director of Rabbinic Placement called me. KI was looking for a new rabbi. It was being served by an interim and needed to move on.

Everyone in the world of Reform Judaism knows about KI. It’s a flagship congregation. It was the spiritual home of Rabbi David Einhorn during the Civil War. Einhorn was the first major theologian and liturgist of Reform Judaism in America. He brought the music of Reform Judaism to this country and he was a raging Abolitionist in a time when most American Jews, largely Central European immigrants, were unwilling to risk public political opinions.

More recently, KI was the home of Rabbi Korn, my personal role model rabbi-scholar, and Rabbi Maslin who was the President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis during my early years as an ordained rabbi. I even came here to KI to hear Rabbi Maslin to speak in this sanctuary to about a 1000 rabbis in the late 1990s, never imagining I would end up in his pulpit.

This is now the beginning of my 16th year at KI. At the time of my arrival, I did not fully realize it but it was my job to help transition KI from the 20th to the 21st century. KI is rich in history and its own customs and cultures. It needed to stay true to itself as a flagship synagogue and to move into new, uncharted waters.

So much has changed: an Israeli flag on the Bimah, a shin over the ark, a lower Bimah, retractable screens in the sanctuary, live streaming of services, new prayer books, a collaborative of three religious schools headed by our education director, a new playscape for the Preschool, a Conservative congregation living in our Rothschild Auditorium, one less rabbi and a second cantor serving as our choirmaster, Cantor Amy’s experimental worship, chairs in the Chapel, value banners in the lobby, a Torah

scroll handwritten by our own congregation, an incredible expanded Adult Education program, a professional music arts program bringing rising young stars here several times a year, outreach programs to "seniors and the elderly" on and off site and a social action program which includes working with an elementary school in Logan and providing free hot meals here at KI on a monthly basis including vegetables grown in our own garden. Never in my wildest dreams did ever imagine this level of activity and engagement. And, I have only mentioned some of the newest features of this synagogue and none of the older, established traditions.

However, the realist in me also knows that not everyone in the Jewish community shares my views of synagogue life. For sure, it doesn't take much to turn people off to synagogue life. There can be a lot of politics in a synagogue. Sometimes, congregants are not welcoming, sometimes down right cold. Some rabbis aren't very good either and, repeatedly, offer long boring sermons at long boring services. Then there are those terrible Hebrew school teachers. I had one. It was my second year of mid-week Hebrew. He screamed for two hours every Monday and Wednesday afternoon and walked around his room with a yardstick he would smack on a desk when we misbehaved or didn't do our assignments, which was often. Thankfully, he never hit us.

In college, I was fired from my first job as a Sunday school teacher. My roommate and I were in charge of leading music at the closing assembly every week. None of the kids would sing the usual Hebrew songs. So we decided to open the program with "Feeling Groovy" by Simon and Garfunkel. Everybody sang but when the rabbi heard it, he wanted to know who was responsible for bringing that garbage into his Temple. We were canned and then rescued by the PTA.

I really didn't mind the old reform prayer book as a kid. The Union Prayer Book was kind of Shakespearian but it was mercifully short. As teenagers we tried writing our own services but really didn't know enough to do that correctly. So we read from Khahil Gibran, a Lebanese poet and sang the music of the Civil rights movement and called it Jewish. At my Confirmation in 1970, our closing song was "The Great Mandala" by Peter, Paul and Mary. At lunch, a family member angrily accused me of being a pacifist while our country was at war.

The new prayer book introduced in the late 1970s was massive. At the time, I was already in rabbinic school and was assigned to lead services in a nursing home in Cincinnati. Most of the residents there were in wheel chairs. I handed out the prayer book and started services. Within five minutes, I heard a steady thump, thump, thump in the room. The patients were dropping their books: too heavy to hold, print too small to read. Sometimes rabbis miscalculate.

I guess the official Jewish world began to figure out we had a synagogue problem in America in the mid 70s. They started creating synagogue alternatives. Coffee houses were big for twentysomething. Nature retreats were another alternative. The Chavurah movement moved services from the sanctuary to the living room. Brotherhoods tried cigar and whiskey nights for middle age and older gentlemen. One day, all day adult study programs from the UK, challenged more conventional synagogue based adult education. Anything was better than actually coming to synagogue. Today, many Jewish Foundations have decided they would fund anything but synagogues. In some corners, the crisis in the American synagogue became a "war on the synagogue."

Surveys of Jewish life began to report that an increasing number of young Jewish adults began demonstrating that they were ethnically Jewish but had no religion. They became known as the "nones Jews." Questions about the basis of Jewish identity showed that the Holocaust, not Judaism, was the foundation of Jewish life for the rising generation although they didn't go to Holocaust programs, services or museums.

"Birthright Israel" was originally designed to transform young Jews by sending them to Israel for free during their college years. The program clearly worked. Young people were feeling more Jewish but Birthright did not lead many back to the synagogue.

Summer camps were effective identity builders too and literally reversed the standing pattern in American Jewish life making summer the most, not the least, Jewish time of year. Shabbat every week at camp, great! Shabbat once in a blue moon at home, maybe, but only if the music sounded like camp.

Interestingly, a Jewish-Buddhist movement began, known as Ju-Bu-ism. Before JuBu/s, almost no one liked silent prayer in the synagogue. The Silent Prayer was a chance to check your watch, ask if anybody knew the score in the Phillies game, return to the conversation you were having before you got to Temple. But with the Jewish mindfulness, movement, silent prayer became serious business. I remember learning to count to 50 before signaling the organist to end the silent prayer: long enough for some to mediate, short enough not to frustrate the rest of the congregation. But something positive was starting to happen.

Maybe, just maybe, a path or paths back to the synagogue could be found. Maybe, just maybe, the synagogue itself could adapt to the new digital world of selfie photos, cell phones, endless apps and pop music on demand. Maybe being part of a real community had some benefits. Maybe meeting kids from different schools could be socially valuable. Maybe creating an environment in which non-Jewish partners and spouses would feel, not only welcome, but enfranchised, would be appealing. Maybe a synagogue that communicated digitally would be more accessible. Maybe real community service projects which helped real people, would create a sense of sacred purpose in life. Maybe just maybe, we could hold on to the best of the past and simultaneously embrace new, unprecedented expressions of the Jewish spirit. Maybe, just maybe, there is a place and a reason for a synagogue in the 21st century in the life of modern Jewish people.

There are so many obstacles to overcome in synagogue life today. In the Talmud, there is a teaching that without wheat, there is no Torah. In other words, we need to resolve the challenge of synagogue financing. Some people are satisfied to have rent-a-rabbis to teach their children, marry them and officiate at family funerals. Others just have too many bad memories to cross the threshold of a synagogue and others can't find a synagogue which respects their belief system or lack of a belief system.

In many ways, synagogue life in our time is like the burned out synagogue of the dream of my youth. It is a ruin for too many Jews today, But in it are also the seeds of its rejuvenation: if we try hard, are creative enough and are open enough.

The synagogue has served the Jewish community well for at least 2,000 years. It has adapted, grown, shrunk and repositioned itself many times in history. Microchips and wireless communication are not the greatest challenges it has ever faced. In fact, they are part of the answer.

KI is an old synagogue, boldly entering the 21st century. It is determined to succeed because it knows it has a vital role to play in the lives of its people. We have always been strong as a congregation. We are strong as a congregation today and will continue to strive to meet the Jewish and religious needs of our members for a long time to come.

HAZAK, HAZAK V'NITHAZAIK, be strong, be strong and let us continue to strengthen one another! That is our motto. That is our promise. That is our future.

May we all be inscribed and sealed for a good year in a strong, renewed KI.

G'mar Tov and a happy new year!

Amen

"Staying Strong in the Shadow"

Yom Kippur / Yizkor ~ 2017- 5777

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.

We are all familiar with the words of the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd." It is the most familiar of all the 150 Psalms. Only 56 words long in the original Hebrew, it has a natural, soothing flow in English, especially older English translations and somehow helps us transition from fear to faith, from anxiety to hope, from uncertainty to inner peace. Recited in funeral home chapels, graveside and houses of worship of all types and styles, it is a familiar and comforting text.

Somehow, the 23rd Psalm's ancient pastoral images of a young King David wandering the fields of Judea, surviving repeated life threatening events -- one after another, and ultimately dreaming of a time of restfulness "in the house of the Lord" in Jerusalem," helps calm the stirred up spirits, even of modern, contemporary people like us.

Basically the 23rd Psalm portrays how spiritual strength, like a rod and staff, helps support us and even guide us in our most sorrowful of times.

Looking at a casket of a loved one or staring down into an earthen grave or simply closing our eyes at a funeral and feeling the torn-ness of our hearts, all seems overwhelming to us. How am I ever going to get through this moment? How am I ever going to endure words, which too often, no matter how well intentioned or spoken, fail to bring comfort? How am I going to continue without my loved one? How am I even going to get through the funeral rites? These are real and sometimes, bitter questions.

And then come the familiar words of the 23rd Psalm, like an old friend, or a well worn pillow or a familiar soft blanket. Tenderly, it allows us some repose, some peace, some safety, in the unknown and bitter world of mourning. These words, "they comfort me.....even when I walk in the valley of death," cast light even in the deepest darkness of primal loss and pain.

I regularly tell mourners there is no magic in our ritual or other secret cures to the pain of mourning. But then I think of the 23rd Psalm and *El Male* and Kaddish, and

I remember that tradition does have some curative power: sometimes temporary, sometimes longer. Often these words give us strength when we have no strength. Often they help us stand, when our legs can no longer support us. Often they hold us, even when the gravity of the loss of the moment, overwhelms us.

Where does strength come from in the shadow of the valley of loss? Strength comes from the love of those who know and love us most. Strength comes from the deep inner recesses of ourselves, strength we do not always know we have. Strength comes from tradition and its paved paths through grief and joy alike. For some of us, strength comes from a transcendent source, from music and art, from poetry, from the sky and trees, flowing stream and crashing wave. For some of us, strength comes from an unknown transcendent source further away from us than the end of the universe but still close enough to our hearts to help us. For some of us, strength comes from God, Maker of Heaven and earth and consoler of the broken hearted.

Staying strong in times of loss is not an easy matter. Sometimes, its all too much and we simply have to wait for another day, a different time to begin to repair ourselves. Meanwhile, there are loving friends and family, sacred memories and sacred texts to help us limp until we become strong enough in the broken places of our lives.

Today, this service, is one of those times dedicated to remember, to cry, to test old wounds and to look for new sources of strength. *Hazak, Hazak v'nithazaik*, when we are ready, let us try to be strong and then try again and then remember to help others be strong, who like ourselves, are bowed with sorrow and reduced by tears. "May goodness and mercy pursue you until you find peace in the sanctuaries of your hearts and homes, for a length of days." Amen.