



Address to the 131st Annual Meeting

Steven M. Friedman, Chairman of the Board of Trustees

May 23, 2013

At our annual meetings I think that it is always worthwhile to reiterate basic principles before reviewing the nearly complete year and discussing plans for the coming year. Our mission statement – rewritten this year – states:

Park Avenue Synagogue seeks to inspire, educate, and support our membership towards living passion-filled Jewish lives. Through spirited prayer, study, observance and acts of kindness we aspire to foster deep connections with each other, our Torah, our God, the people and State of Israel and our broader humanity. In practicing a Judaism filled with love, literacy, reverence, compassion, and joy, we strive to make our ancient tradition compelling and welcoming to contemporary Jewry and to serve as a light unto our fellow Jews and the nations.

To the extent that we had a particular focus this year, it was to continue to fulfill this mission and to provide our membership with the finest clergy, educators and administrators we could find, in order to meet the spiritual, intellectual, and life cycle needs of all of our members and be the center of their Jewish lives. Our objective has consistently been to create multiple points of contact for our members. We also began to look at future needs for staff, space and programming as our community is growing and members of all ages are participating in our programs at increasingly higher rates. While we have not finalized plans to meet future staffing and space needs, committees are in place to do just that over the coming year. It is critical that the lay leadership join with our professional team of talented, energetic and inspired Jewish leaders to work together to build this community's future.

Our sanctuary experience continues to be inspiring, both intellectually and spiritually, as our rabbis and cantors have led us in prayer and thought which speaks to our souls and our minds. Thank you, Rabbi Cosgrove, for the countless initiatives underway and for the intellect, warmth, sense of humor that you have brought to this community. Whether creating a moment of memory for youngsters connecting to our faith, inspiring us with extraordinary sermons, calming those in need of spiritual guidance and healing, teaching us to count the Omer through uniform numbers of sports figures, coaching empty nesters to reach their kids with two simple words each Friday or leading us in trips to Israel or other Jewish communities and connecting to leading figures in the Jewish world, we are so blessed to have you and your dear wife and lovely children in our community. Thank you for who you are, for what you have done, and for what you will do in the future leading this community. I will cherish our friendship and these special years we have shared until my last breath. While *Newsweek* may not have put you first on their list, in our minds and hearts there is Cosgrove and there is everyone else. To us you are Number One. Thank you, Rabbi Rein, for all of your efforts on so

many levels and congratulations on your important initiative, “The Caring Network” which has the Board’s full support.

To Cantor Schwartz and Cantor Kidron: Your talents are so vast. Whether singing alone or together, you touch everyone, whether in prayer, at a concert or at a life cycle event. No one, member or guest, ever looks at a watch when you lead us in prayer. In fact people are disappointed when we don’t chant the full musaf amidah. Imagine that, Jews wanting shul to last longer! When we say Cantor Schwartz will lead PAS as the center of Jewish music in North America, we mean it and will support it. The world of Jewish music is taking notice of our cantor, whether he is inviting many talented cantors to sing in prayer or in concert, performing at Jerusalem Theater with The Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra or chanting *El Maleh Rahamim* at Yad Vashem on Yom HaShoah. Cantor Kidron, we wish you *mazal tov* on your upcoming marriage and success as you move on in your career.

Our schools continue to develop. With Rabbi Zuckerman’s and Rabbi Rudin’s leadership in curriculum and in selecting outstanding teachers, the Congregational School is no longer “where fun comes to die.” Enrollment increased from 250 to 380 over the past two years, with exciting new curriculum initiatives planned for the immediate future. Shabbat HaKavod was inspirational as we celebrated our young learners and staff in a full sanctuary. The challenges that we face in making supplementary Jewish education meaningful are surmountable and we will begin to re-imagine the High School experience next year. Thank you, Rabbi Zuckerman and Rabbi Rudin, for your accomplishments. Our Early Childhood Center remains fully enrolled and we are so grateful that our beloved director, Carol Hendin, has made a remarkable recovery from her illness two years ago. With all of the style and grace of someone leaving at the top of her game, Carol announced that she will retire on June 30, 2014. She will be hard to replace. I would like to acknowledge Matt Check for his inspiring work with young families. His success has forced us to find space outside of these walls to meet the response to our programming initiatives. Finally, a shout-out for Aliza Cantor and her work both at the ECC and in making summer camp a sought-after destination for youngsters in Manhattan.

We continued our expansion of lifelong learning opportunities with two yearlong programs, The Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning and *Context*. We attracted world class speakers for our Friday night Shabbat Dinner Series, the annual Shabbaton, and the second year of The Park Avenue Synagogue Lecture Series, with the theme “The Shifting Landscape of American Jewry.” Speakers for that series, underwritten by an anonymous donor, included Ari Kelman and Jack Wertheimer; David Cygielman and Wayne Firestone; David Ellenson and J.J. Schacter; John Ruskay and Jeffrey Soloman; Deborah Lipstadt; and all the Conservative Rabbis of the East Side: Rachel Ain, Scott Bolton, Ephraim Pelcovits, and of course, Rabbi Cosgrove.

Our Friday Shabbat Dinner Series and other guests included David Harris, Yehuda Avner, Rabbi Harold Kushner, Cantor Angela Buchdahl, David Moss and Letty Cotton Pogrebin & Abigail Pogrebin. The speakers were world class and our community responded in numbers and with warm welcomes to all of them.

The Shabbaton, entitled “Religion in America: Trends and How they Affect the Jewish Community,” featured Dr. Robert Putnam and Dr. Jonathan Sarna and included a performance by the Check Brothers Band. It was sold out, with tickets listed on Stub Hub. (Just kidding!) Major League Baseball player Adam Greenberg visited PAS on a Shabbat morning and gave us a glimpse of his emotional and physical trip back to the batter’s box after being beamed on his first major league at bat. There were few dry eyes in the sanctuary.

Thank you to Liz Offenbach and all of the volunteers who made these events happen.

Music has a prominent role in our community, from concerts to Young Family Havdalah services to our Purim Spiel, which attracted both a record roster of “spielers” and a record multigenerational audience celebrating the festival as a community. Concerts included a Hanukkah concert in December and a Three Tenors Concert before Pesah. Our Annual Musicale earlier this month inaugurated a relationship with Park Avenue Christian Church, which we hope will continue. Visiting cantors and musicians this year included Josh Breitzer (Brooklyn), Natasha Hirschhorn (Upper West Side), Professor Robert Elias (Arizona), Angela Buchdahl (Upper East Side), Joey Weisenberg (Brooklyn), Gideon Zelermyer (Montreal), Stephen Glass (Montreal), Chaim David Berson (Upper West Side), Daniel Mutlu (Texas) and Bruce Ruben (Upper East Side).

The year was filled with community events which reached all demographics and fostered friendships as well as meeting educational goals. Among them were the new members reception, the annual young couples Latke/Vodka party, the book launch of for the Rabbinical Assembly’s *The Observant Life*, Shabbat services and dinners for families with young children, and the community trip to Israel with UJA-Federation of New York, celebrating Israel’s 65th anniversary as an independent state. The Women’s Network had a full first year with an opening event at the Museum of the City of New York, a filled-to-capacity champagne and bingo night and the women’s seder, held just a few days before Pesah, to name just a few events. The Men’s Group was equal to its task of creating community with lectures, sports events, movies and the annual World Wide Wrap, among other events. Community service and social justice initiatives were expressed in many ways, giving congregants of all ages opportunities to serve the needy of the Jewish community and the wider community. Events and activities included Vicki K. Wimpfheimer Mitzvah Day, Mitzvah of the Month, Project Ezra, and our High School food pantry. We look forward to more programming in the pursuit of social justice in the future. On a somber note, the service in commemoration of Yom HaShoah, imagined by Menachem Rosensaft and Cantor Kidron, was a moving moment with intergenerational participation ensuring that we will never forget.

The Gala was the social and financial highlight of the season, celebrating our extraordinary leaders Rabbi Elliot and Debbie Cosgrove, and supported by a dinner committee led by Carol and Gershon Kekst. The night was magical for all in attendance as we danced together and far exceeded our financial goals for contributions to our community. Not to forget, the ECC annual gala was equally spectacular, as is the entire generation of younger PAS members.

As important as any initiatives, our connection to the Jewish world, Israel, and people of other faiths is critical in these challenging times. Two Board committees did remarkable work to deepen our ties to benefit PAS and JTS and UJA. Rabbi Cosgrove's stirring sermon on his trip with UJA to Ethiopia demonstrated UJA's vital work. Chancellor Arnold Eisen visited us in the spring for Shabbat and we heard why JTS is such a precious resource. Last night we hosted the Cantors Assembly annual meeting at which Cantor Nancy Abramson was inducted as its president, the first woman to hold that office. Our connections with both UJA and JTS are steadfast.

Our connections with and support for a safe, secure, democratic and Jewish Israel are simply unshakeable. In addition to the continued Israel education and speakers who ensure that conversations about Israel happen in our building, we scheduled three congregational trips this year – in December for Bnei Mitzvah families, next month for Families with Young Children, and last month, for Yom HaAtzma'ut commemorating Israel's 65th anniversary. My highlight moments from that trip, in addition to being with our PAS community, were standing on Ammunition Hill on Yom HaZikaron as we heard the piercing siren calling everyone to remember together those who made the ultimate sacrifice and seeing family members joining with friends at the cemetery on Mt Herzl. Having my picture taken with Ms. Israel was not bad either! I am proud that PAS was the only synagogue in the entire NY area to send a full bus on the trip: 30 out of the entire mission of 200. As Rabbi Cosgrove has said, if you want to support Israel, buy a ticket. And we do. Lots of them. Please join us as a community on Sunday, June 2, as we march with fellow supporters of Israel in the Celebrate Israel Parade.

We continue to reach out to Jews of all denominations as we believe in a shared culture, history and sense of peoplehood. We accomplished this through visiting speakers, cantors and learning sessions with other synagogues. The highlight moment was on Shavuot when we hosted a Tikkun Leil Shavuot in partnership with Central Synagogue. At the end of the evening's learning sessions, the two congregations exchanged a Torah scroll from now through Simchat Torah. It was a beautiful gesture of enduring friendship and a tangible symbol that we all study the same Torah. We salute Rabbi Rein's yearlong series of dialogues with Father Ugo Nacciarone from our neighbor St. Ignatius Loyola, with plans to expand the conversation with the Imam from the 96th street Mosque next year to connect the three Abrahamic faiths. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, we held a joint concert with Park Avenue Christian Church.

Inside our building the air conditioning project is done, we are actively pursuing an assessment of the utilization of our current physical space and working with outside professionals to explore alternatives to meet the needs of the growing community. We are continually attentive to security and have periodic reports from security experts. Technology development is also a major initiative to enhance our members' experience on our web site, to enable online learning, and to bring us state of the art capabilities, whether in programming, accounting, scheduling, or any other aspect of synagogue life. I thank Beryl for his initiatives in these areas.

As Art Penn will explain, our synagogue remains financially strong and vital. We continue to rely on the generosity of our membership in order to prosper over the foreseeable future, especially in view of the capital requirements to maintain our facilities and to offer world class clergy and programming to all. I thank Art for the tireless energy he devotes to this institution and wish him all of my support in his new role. I hope you all received the *Todah Rabbah* brochure, designed in-house, which was a beautiful thank you to everyone who helped us to accomplish our dreams.

I want to sincerely thank **all** of the volunteers whose work makes this community so vibrant. The effort, enthusiasm, and care that so many of you bring into this building is remarkable. From the dedicated volunteers of the Arms to the Advisory Council to the Officers and Board, your work, spirit and enthusiasm inspires the clergy, educators and programming staff, the administrative staff, and me to all do our best. Thank you all. Last Simhat Torah we honored Nadine Habousha Cohen and Mark Fraier for their dedicated service to the PAS community. We look forward to honoring Darcy Dalton and Howard Rubin next fall.

We have marked the passing of far too many members of our community over the past year, but in the spirit of the continuity of Jewish life, we have also celebrated many births and weddings. This year's Bnei Mitzvah were memorable and inspiring each Shabbat. Each young adult demonstrated serious learning and dedication to our community, culture, and faith. For the not-so-young adults, we celebrated with 11 women who fulfilled the dream of an Adult Bat Mitzvah, reading from the Torah and showing their commitment to Judaism. I wrote to them that I was so pleased that PAS enabled each of them to celebrate this moment with their families and community. I hoped that the occasion would be an important moment to cherish and connect even more with PAS, our faith, people, culture and Israel.

I welcome, with all of my affection and support, the new leadership to the Board, Advisory Council, and Arms. I'd also like to express my deepest appreciation to those whose terms as Officers, Board members and Advisory Council members, respectively, expire this year. The Officers leaving are Marcia Colvin, Rachael First, Brian Lustbader, Marlene Muskin and Howard Rubin. Also leaving the Board are Michael Fruchtman, Judith Poss, Willa Rosenberg and Marcia Stone. Retiring from the Advisory Council is Jodi Krieger. We hope you stay engaged with synagogue life. I invite each of you up here to accept a token of our appreciation for your efforts. The new Board and Advisory Council members about to be inducted have big shoes to fill.

I extend my sincerest appreciation to the clergy – Rabbi Cosgrove, Rabbi Rein, Cantor Schwartz and Cantor Kidron – for all of their inspiring work; to the lead educators – Rabbi Neil Zuckerman, Rabbi Eve Rudin, Liz Offenbach, Carol Hendin, Matt Check, and Marga Hirsch and their colleagues – for fulfilling all of our members' desires to learn. I also thank Beryl Chernov; Jonathan Schlesinger and the staff of the financial office; Craig Demarest, Sam Rosenberg, Lawrence Conley, Mark Fraier, Abe Lebovic, John Davis and his staff; and all of the main office staff and administrative assistants throughout the building for all of their efforts this year in making this synagogue come alive each and every day.

I want to thank all of you here tonight for all of the good wishes and support you have given this year and every year to all of us – the clergy, the administrative staff, the educational staff, to your Officers, Board and to me personally. I assure you all that everyone takes and has taken his or her role with absolute determination to make this synagogue a shining institution in the Jewish world. I also thank again all of the volunteers among you who make this community so vital, working together with spirit, joy, and purpose. I believe we are meeting and will continue to meet the challenges of our era and fulfill all of your dreams for this wonderful community.

We are on our way to leading Conservative Judaism, but cannot stop here. In addition to continuing to fulfill our mission and improve upon all that we do – worship, life cycle events, programming, education and support of Israel – we must begin to look at creating meaningful connections to young adults who do not have children. We must look at our aging facilities and see what can be done to enhance the experience of every person who enters the building for whatever purpose. While change of personnel is inevitable, I hope that our exceptional staff will stay with us well into the future.

My Kol Nidre address was intended to be my farewell address, as I had the chance to speak to all of our members and their families. That evening, citing the farewell addresses of some of our US presidents, I expressed my optimism for this community's future and encouraged my successors to build on what has preceded them. I remain optimistic. I am confident that Park Avenue Synagogue will continue to meet the needs of its members, while sharing a sense of humanity with people of all faiths and backgrounds. I remain proud of how everyone feels about Park Avenue Synagogue. I again thank everyone for the commitment each member demonstrates for this holy place.

In my library at home I have a picture of two of our children and me following the most recent Giants Super Bowl win. The title above the three of us hugging is "Family, God, and Big Blue." That sums up what is really important to me. By God I mean our faith, our peoplehood, our culture, our history, and our pride in Israel. Where else to express those values than serving this community which I love? As I did on Kol Nidre night, I thank you again for allowing me to serve you for these five extraordinary years in what I have called "my role of a lifetime."

The greatest thing I take away from these extraordinary five years is the relationships and friendships that we have created. On this subject, Rabbi Cosgrove has written, "friendship is a religious value, and we have to elevate it, honor it, seek it, cultivate it, defend it, and share it as we would our most treasured possessions and that loving your neighbor and being loved by your neighbor is the act that makes life worth living." So here's to enduring friendships. Thank you, friends. *Todah, Haverim.*

I would like to begin a tradition tonight for whenever there is a transition of officer groups, based on our custom when we conclude reading a book of the Torah. I ask you

to stand now and repeat after me what I will say in Hebrew. In English, what we are about to chant is “Be strong, be strong and may we be strengthened”.

So now, loud and proud:

Hazak hazak v'nit·hazek!

We will continue with remarks from Rabbi Cosgrove; presentation of the budget; the nominations and inductions of Officers, Trustees, Advisory Council members, and Heads of Arms. At the conclusion of the formal part of the meeting, we will entertain questions.

I wish everyone a relaxing summer. And over the summer, please come to minyan, send emails or visit those who are ill, make shiva calls and stay in touch with all of us when you can.

Thank you.