



PARK AVENUE SYNAGOGUE

UJA@PAS Address from Natalie Barth

Yom Kippur 5782 / September 16, 2021

Good Yontif! It is really great to see everyone here – [whether you are here or online!]

I am not sure if you've noticed, but typically, PAS Bnei Mitzvah students give their dvar Torahs and then add a few thank yous at the end. However, before I get to the ask of the hour, I want to take a play from my kids' Bnei Mitzvah playbook – on their own volition, they welcomed and thanked everyone first before they got into their messages of Torah. So, as I start my fourth and final year as President and ninth year as an Officer of this amazing synagogue, I want to start with gratitude.

First, I want to thank my family, who has been on this PAS leadership journey with me. Brett, Brian, and Benjamin have been exceptionally supportive (and tolerant) as I attend meetings or take calls at all times of the day or night, dealing with whatever issues arise. They learned quickly that Friday afternoons turned out to be the busiest time ever – I think all clergy and staff empty their inboxes in advance of Shabbat. They learned that you say thank you when someone complains even if what the person is asking for already exists or was emailed out multiple times by the PAS Office. They learned that the rabbis and cantors are on call 24/7 and they don't just call on a random Sunday night to say hello – there is typically real synagogue business to do. And they learned that if you want to make a difference in the PAS teen program, don't ask your mother – get involved and do it yourself, and you are both doing that in your own way.

[And to my parents who are here – who have held numerous Jewish leadership posts than I can recount – thank you. In the spirit of the holiday

and in reference to Rabbi Cosgrove's erev Rosh Hashanah sermon, apples don't fall far.]

The rabbis on Rosh Hashanah and Marc last night also shared gratitude, but I want to take a moment to express appreciation to the PAS team – not just those you see and hear on the bimah (we all agree the clergy are truly wonderful!), but the team of administrators, AV, security and facilities personnel, musicians, educators, ushers, and lay leaders behind the scenes who have been meeting weekly for the past eight months (every Wednesday morning!) to plan, re-plan, and pivot to prepare for this High Holiday and fall programming season.

And I want to thank all of you – our members and friends – who have continued to support Park Avenue Synagogue and have allowed us to remain vibrant and relevant amidst the curveballs and challenges that have come our way. It continues to be a humbling honor and privilege to serve this *kehillah kedoshah* – this sacred community.

So, here we are – on the holiest day of the year – a day when we are taking a deep look inside ourselves and our relationships with each other and with God. We said on Rosh Hashanah and again today, the *U-Netaneh Tokef* prayer (p. 315 and 316) – it's a central prayer in our liturgy declaring the sacred power of the day, and at the end of this weighty passage, we say together (and the cantor chants beautifully):

“U-teshuva, u-tefillah, u-tzedakah ma-avirin et ro-a ha-g'zerah.”
Teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah have the power to transform the harshness of our destiny. The power to transform the harshness of our destiny.

Teshuvah (Repentance) – that's something we each must seek on our own.

Tefillah (Prayer) – well, we are all here [or online] achieving that together.

So that brings us to *tzedakah* (charity) ... rooted in the Hebrew word *tzedek*, meaning righteous or justice.

For over one hundred years, UJA-Federation of New York has been caring for Jews and New Yorkers of all backgrounds; responding to crises near and

far; and helping to shape the Jewish future in New York, Israel, and around the world.

The prior CEO of UJA memorably said 20 years ago this week, UJA was able to help on September 11 because we were there helping on September 10. How true those words are again and again – with UJA providing relief from hurricanes past and present, providing mental and physical safety following rockets in Israel, and of course, responding to the COVID pandemic has been no different. UJA has the infrastructure in place through their network of over 100 nonprofit agencies and has relationships with government at all levels and with philanthropic and community leaders across New York. Which means when crises hit us all at once, UJA can respond on multiple fronts at the same time.

And right now, UJA is focused on **four key fronts**:

- **One, COVID recovery.** Since the beginning of COVID, UJA has responded with over \$67 million in emergency funds to meet urgent and ongoing needs due to the pandemic. UJA has supported the community's needs in real time by working with their human service agencies, day schools, JCCs, and synagogues to provide mental health support, food, financial and technological aid, resources for Holocaust survivors, funding for domestic violence survivors, and burial assistance – just to name a few.
- **Two, Confronting antisemitism and anti-Zionism.** We've watched with horror at the uptick in verbal and physical attacks on Jews in New York, across the U.S., and around the world. The 11-day conflict in May that saw 4,000 rockets fired from Gaza into Israel was a harrowing wake-up call. That's why we need to stand stronger than ever to fight antisemitism, grapple with waning support for Israel, and help keep Jewish institutions secure. UJA is investing in education about antisemitism, building bridges with other groups to stand up against hate, and ensuring that our Community Security Initiative has the resources to keep the 2,000 Jewish institutions in our area safe.

- When Israel is under attack, UJA's ongoing support means that UJA's partners on the ground can jump into action. That's why key priority number three for UJA is **strengthening a vibrant Israel**. UJA is funding trauma counseling, emergency assistance for victims of terror, supporting new immigrants and vulnerable populations and opening an arts and cultural center in Jerusalem to showcase the multi-cultural artists of today's modern Israel. UJA is strengthening programs that forge lasting connections between Israelis of all backgrounds, including Jews and Arab-Israelis, knowing that the future of Israel depends on peaceful coexistence.
- **And four**, UJA is prioritizing **Jewish engagement** and investing in places that engage, inspire, and connect Jews in all our diversity and at every age. From Jewish community centers, synagogues, and Hillels on college campuses to up-and-coming neighborhood programs to beautifully renovated Jewish summer camps, UJA is embracing and enhancing creative and meaningful Jewish life.

So many of you give to UJA by volunteering, giving generously, and serving as lay leaders. Thank you. We are so grateful for your participation. Robin Kaplan and Rochelle Ludwig, thank you for your leadership of our UJA@PAS Committee – you and your families are wonderful role models as longtime supporters and leaders of both PAS and UJA.

I always say that my Kol Nidrei donation to PAS goes to help the Jews in here ... and that my donation to UJA goes to help the Jews out there – in New York, Israel, and beyond; those Jews and others that cannot help themselves. I invite you to join my family in supporting both.

Look out for an email from PAS in the coming weeks with the link to donate to the UJA appeal or go on the UJA website after the holiday. In addition, you can join our UJA@PAS and Tikkun Olam Committees by volunteering at Met Council, one of UJA's 100 social service agencies, on three different dates this fall starting October 27 – information is on the Tikkun Olam section of our website.

Alternatively, you can contact Robin, Rochelle, fellow PAS Officer Nan Rubin, current UJA President Amy Bressman, PAS staff member extraordinaire Mara Bernstein, or me. Any of us can help you make your donation or sign you up to volunteer.

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Teshuva, tefillah, *and* tzedakah have the power to transform the harshness of our destiny.

Thank you and *gmar hatimah tovah* – may we all be inscribed in the book of life.