

Thank you Rabbi Cohen and Shana Tova to all of you. Tonight, like thousands of Synagogues around the world we mark the beginning of Yom Kippur, by hearing and joining in the chanting of the words of Kol Nidre. We all said the same words (mostly) and chanted the same tune as our ancestors have for hundreds of years.

Another time hallowed tradition, is that the President makes a moving, inspiring, Kol Nidre appeal to raise needed funds for the Synagogue.

One thing I know for sure, we heard Kol Nidre chanted as it has been for years.

On this Kol Nidre however, I would like to ask a question.

Most of you have children who have applied to college over the years. One of the more popular essay questions asked is “Why X?” Why this University. So my question for you tonight, “Amongst the thousands of Synagogues you could have gone to for Kol Nidre tonight, Why Shelter Rock?

There are the simple answers:

- It’s where I belong
- It’s the closest to my house
- It’s where my friends belong
- It’s where I grew up
- Because I WON’T go to the other shul
- Because of the Rabbi
- And the most obvious.... Because of the President!

But I ask you to really search deep and ask yourself, Why Shelter Rock? I really want to know YOUR answer.

To help you in thinking about your response, I thought I would tell you MY answer to why Judy and I chose Shelter Rock. Indulge me for a few minutes while I give you a quick background on my life, mostly my Jewish life.

I was born on Mt. Sinai.... I mean at Mt. Sinai Hospital in NYC, and was raised in New Rochelle New York. I am the youngest of 3 children. My mother was raised in an “Orthodox” home in upstate Walden New York and my father was raised in a Conservative home in the Bronx and Jackson Heights.

When they married, my parents didn’t join a shul. Though their home was Kosher they did **NOT** keep Kosher out of the house. My understanding of what that meant was that they ate “Kosher Style”, but I never asked too many questions.

When it was time for my older sister to attend Hebrew School, they needed to affiliate and joined Beth El Synagogue in New Rochelle. My sister then came home asking too many questions and they decided to stop eating non-kosher out of the house. We still ATE dairy out, as I still do today. (Well not TODAY, it’s Yom Kippur after all!).

My siblings and I all attended afternoon Hebrew School (6 hours a week back then), we went to shul every Shabbat and we were very regular participants in junior and then teen congregation at our shul.

We all went to Camp Ramah and were active in our USY chapter. (The sappy part of my life story is that it was back in USY that I met and fell in love with Judy).

During my childhood, I also spent two summers in Israel on two different programs, one "orthodox", I think it was the cheapest my parents could find, and one with Camp Ramah when I was 16.

So that's the short version of my Jewish childhood.

Off I went to college in Boston, and Judy stayed and went to college here in NY. Separately, we both were looking for just a little more out of our Jewish observance and Jewish life. We both stopped driving on Shabbat, although we didn't discuss it or even let the other know initially.

We got married when we were just 21, lived in Manhattan and then moved to Brooklyn while Judy was in Medical school. There, we did not join a shul, nor did we regularly attend one. We'd visit our parents in New Rochelle often for Shabbat and holidays, and Beth El was still our shul. Every once in a while I ventured to the Young Israel of Avenue K and if Judy wanted to go to shul, we would trek the $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to the East Midwood Jewish Center.

All this time, trying to find our spiritual home. Where would we feel most comfortable? Modern Orthodox.... not really who we were, Traditional Conservative.... we were so young in that shul.

Fast forward, we're now living in Glen Oaks. We have our two oldest children, Josh and Sigal, and again, we don't join a shul. There is a pattern emerging though. We try the Young Israel of New Hyde Park and the Conservative shul, The Bellerose Jewish Center. Neither particularly grabbed us and made us want to get up early on Shabbat morning and attend. It wasn't until Judy's mother passed away, and she wanted to say Kaddish every day, that it became clear, the Bellerose Jewish center was where we would join so that she could feel comfortable and accepted as a woman saying Kaddish.

I hope I didn't bore you with my personal journey, trust me, I left out lots of interesting and fun filled facts along the way, but I wanted to lay the framework for Why Shelter Rock was for us.

Now it is 1990, we have a 5 yr old and a 1 yr old and we are considering buying a house in the suburbs. We don't drive on Shabbat and we want our kids to be part of a shul. We don't want to go to an Orthodox shul because our upbringing and belief system is deeply rooted in the tenets of Conservative Judaism.

We had a secret advantage. The head of United Synagogue happened to belong to our parents' shul in New Rochelle and we knew him quite well. So we asked his advice and he said: "Shelter Rock Jewish Center is the right place for you".

Another advantage was that Judy's sister Debra had already moved and joined here, so we were able to spend Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah with her, and HERE at Shelter Rock 26 years ago next week.

Truth was, that was all we needed, it was the shul we wanted to be a part of. In these 25 years as members, Sarah and Max were born, all four of our children had their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs here and our oldest son Josh will have his Aufruf here in January. It IS our home. But really, WHY? Why Shelter Rock?

There are 3 parts of Shelter Rock that speak to me and echo our mission statement that we wrote two years ago. I quote:

BUILDING JEWISH LIFE THROUGH PRAYER, LEARNING AND TIKKUN OLAM, BASED ON
CONSERVATIVE JEWISH VALUES IN A WARM, VIBRANT, AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

First, Community - What is community? Community for me is friends. Close friends, shul friends and people who I'll see here in shul and greet warmly with an embrace because they're like family. I could see them once a year or every week, but there is a common bond. It's a bond that we can't quite define.

We support each other in times of need, whether it be sickness, or G-d forbid death. When going through a tough time with our kids or our parents, I know I have people here who are supportive of me in those difficult times. And then on the happier side, there are births, b'nei mitzvah, weddings, grandkids, or just sharing some good news with each other. We share meals, we sing, we dance. Our Shelter Rock community is really "Warm and supportive".

Second, Programming - We have programming that we hope reaches across our demographic spectrum. From our Early Childhood Center for Nursery school, to Religious School, Kadima and USY programs for our children. We have great Purim and Simchat Torah celebrations and our Gold Plate dinner. We have a very broad offering of adult education programs, sisterhood and men's club activities. We also have a strong Social Action committee, who are constantly bringing ideas, projects and speakers to Shelter Rock to assist us in the all-important task of Tikkun Olam. We have Bridge, and we even have an amazing (I'm told) Zumba class that meets up to 3 times a week. If you want to have something to do at the shul, you should be able to find it. But...if there's something you're interested in that we don't do.... PLEASE let us know!

And lastly, Religiously - We are a shul that feels strongly about our religious practices and the nature of our service. We daven the "Traditional" davening, repeating the Amidah and not cutting corners. We read the whole Torah portion each week and we observe all of the holidays.

We have minyan every day of the year, both morning and evening, that allows those saying Kaddish for a loved one in their year of mourning or observing Yahrzeit, to feel the embrace of our community.

All of this while gradually, over the years changing who can participate in services to the point that a woman can now participate at all levels of our services equally with men. We're welcoming (at least we believe we are and we try to be) to anyone who comes to our shul.

And we have a Rabbi who is in complete concert with all of these things, which surely enhances what we do. We hold to our standards, while broadening them within Halachic constraints, and in short, we are what I would consider a "True" Conservative Synagogue.

An additional benefit of all of the above is that I believe it is a major reason why we have had such a successful Rabbinic intern program here at Shelter Rock. We have continuously attracted some of the best students that the Jewish Theological Seminary has, and that's not by accident. These rabbinical students know from others about the type of shul we are and they ALL know the reputation that Rabbi Cohen has, and they vie for this opportunity.

That's the short version of WHY Shelter Rock was and still is the choice for me and Judy and our family.

OK.... if you have been snoozing or just not paying close attention, I need you to open your eyes and **FOCUS** as I now get to the Kol Nidre Appeal part of tonight.

Yes, our membership has shrunk in numbers, but I believe that we have grown and become better in defining who we are. I think we indeed embody our ENTIRE mission statement and I am very optimistic about our future.

Our doors are open 365 days a year, although I'm pretty sure there is not one person who can say that they are in the building every one of those days. But nonetheless, we can't be open **ONLY** when someone needs us or wants us. To stay open ALL year round, however, costs a lot of money.

There are the obvious of salaries, electricity, landscaping, building repairs. The unexpected heavy snow season or the surprise maintenance issue. Office supplies, renovations and enhancements to our facility and of course food. (Sorry to bring that up tonight).

But we spend a lot of money on food and we know it is well spent. After all, it's part of being Jewish. Food brings us together in a social manner around Kiddush, a meal, a snack, food at meetings or after speakers, a BBQ or two, all enhance our community, but.... it **DOES** cost money.

We are blessed with an amazing group of volunteers who spend countless hours on behalf of Shelter Rock. You know who you are and I thank each and every one of you for **YOUR** contribution to Shelter Rock.

The good news is that between our financial officers working on keeping our expenses as lean as possible and our fundraising team working overtime on raising money from members, whether it's an extra \$18, \$1,800 or \$18,000, we have been able to keep our deficit very small over the last couple of years. But expenses continue to rise nonetheless, and it's hard to replace our dues when people move to Florida or pass away.

We will soon be announcing a "legacy" program here at Shelter Rock. Whether you are in your 40's or 50's, or 80's or 90's or somewhere in between, we will be asking you to put Shelter Rock in your will. This will secure our shul for years to come

But tonight, I ask of you to help as much as you can for the HERE AND NOW. I won't say "Make Shelter Rock Great again", because I know Shelter Rock IS Great, but we need your help to be able to continue everything we do. You have your Kol Nidre "tickets" with the opportunity to pledge tonight. I hope you will make a stretch gift tonight and turn down the tab to the RIGHT of what you were thinking initially.

My ultimate goal is that every family should participate in our Kol Nidre appeal at some level, there is no set amount, I would be happy even with \$1 extra to show that you want Shelter Rock to be what it is and more.

Finally, back to the beginning, WHY Shelter Rock? I REALLY do want to hear each and every one of your answers. Tomorrow night, after you break the fast, please send me an email to President@srjc.org and tell me WHY Shelter Rock, tell me what **more** we can do for you and we will work hard to satisfy all.

Before I conclude, since the one person I thought it was safe to name without fear of leaving others out tonight was my wife Judy, I want to single her out one more time and thank her for being so supportive of me in this role as President. I could not do it on my own, she sacrifices in many ways, but the biggest is that tomorrow, Yom Kippur day is her birthday. So happy Birthday Judy, I love you.

On behalf of Judy, and my entire family, I wish you a Shana Tova, a Gmar Hatima Tova. May you and your families be sealed in the book of life and may all of your wishes for this new year be fulfilled.