

Good evening—Erev Tov. My name is Judy Hellerstein. Among the many hats I wear are these: I am the co-chair of the Budget Committee, I am a member of the Board here at OKC, and my family has belonged to Ohr Kodesh for 23 years.

When Rise Ain asked me two weeks ago if I would be willing to speak to you this evening, she said to me, “I think you gave the Kol Nidre Appeal before....but would you consider doing it again.” She was right. I have done this before. Seven years ago. And I agreed to do it again.

Two days after that conversation, on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah, I admit that I was regretting my decision. That day, we read Parashat Netzavim, where the People of Israel is promised a return to God and to the Land of Israel. And I began thinking about the fact that this reconciliation with God, this national process of Teshuva, is written beautifully and poetically in Hebrew. It is done with the use of different forms of the word “shuv” —to turn or to return—appearing in some form or another seven times in very close succession. I thought about these seven different forms of “shuv”, to return, and about the fact that it had been seven years since I stood here and gave the Kol Nidre Appeal on Yom Kippur, and it seemed somehow fitting that I return to give it again seven years later. And so here I am.

Rise and I had joked that hardly anyone would remember that I had given the Kol Nidre Appeal before, and pretty much no one would remember what I had said. But I remember: I gave a

fairly traditional Kol Nidre Appeal. I had some preliminary remarks, and then I listed wonderful shul successes and activities from the previous year, and wonderful things we had planned for the year ahead. I then outlined some challenges that we were facing to fund those wonderful activities. Challenges that could partly be met by the Kol Nidre Appeal.

Look back a year, look forward a year. That was a reasonable model for my Kol Nidre Appeal seven years ago. But in thinking about this year, I quickly realized that it isn't a good model for what I wanted to say this evening.

Different than seven years ago, OKC is very much at an inflection point right now. There are multiple reasons for this. We will soon be embarking on a search for a new rabbi, only the third rabbi in our over 70 years. The demographics of the congregation have been changing rapidly, with many younger member households and fewer senior members in our ranks. And, while our membership has stabilized in number, it is below where it was 7 years ago, and far below where it was 23 years ago.

And so it seems to me that for tonight, looking back only one year does not give enough perspective for where we have been, and looking forward only one year does not represent the right time frame for us to be thinking ahead.

Don't get me wrong: None of this takes away from the fact that we accomplished many wonderful things in the past year, and that the past year brought us some significant challenges. And

it does not take away from the fact that we have wonderful things planned for the year to come, and also that we face some known and as yet unknown challenges. Indeed, Seth Yoskowitz, in part of his terrific Presidential Address to us on Rosh Hashanah, did a masterful job of describing much of this. Seth has promised me that he will try to make available to the congregation his whole address. I hope that even if you heard him give it last week, you will go ahead and read it when it is available.

But given where we are, we as a community need to be engaged in longer range thinking, looking backward in time a ways to understand where OKC has been, and thinking about where we are going years into the future. And happily, that is what we are doing as a community, as we stand together at this inflection point in our shul's history. Toward that end, I want to highlight two important initiatives taking place.

First, over the past year, the congregation has been participating in Envision OKC, where members of the community have had many different opportunities to interact with each other in formal and informal settings, in person and online. We have been tasked with the goal of consciously and deliberately identifying who we are, naming our strengths, recognizing our opportunities, and visualizing our hopes for our shared future. Looking back to where we have been, and looking forward to where we want to be.

Participation in Envision OKC has been terrific, and we all will be hearing more over the next few months about what has been learned from it. I am fortunate to have been given a quick preview. There is not universal agreement among our members, of course, but it won't surprise you to hear of two shared themes that I picked out as having emerged in identifying who we are and what makes our community special: The first is the strength and seriousness of Jewish practice and learning at OKC—where our practice is traditional AND egalitarian, and, where we evolve and change with deliberate processes involving serious learning and engagement with texts. The second theme that has emerged is the shared importance *of* and commitment *to* community, where we provide support to meet the needs of congregants over the entire life cycle, and as members' needs evolve.

I found it interesting that both of these emerging themes from Envision OKC involve continuity over time and an appreciation for a long horizon.

The second initiative is one that Seth foreshadowed when he spoke last week, and it is one that is just getting off the ground. While it was not started because of Envision OKC, the need for it was actually also echoed in the views of many participants in Envision OKC. It is an initiative around Development and Fundraising.

In general, the bottom line is that we are no longer consistently able to support the activities of the synagogue with the

revenue we raise each year through our traditional sources. There are multiple reasons for this. Let me list three: First, while our membership is smaller than it was previously, the demographic shift toward younger members has increased our need for more programming, more staff, and more resources. Second, more generally, we have increased, enhanced, and professionalized all of our programming, and especially about Israel. And third, very unfortunately, we have new security costs that have to be funded, most likely permanently.

This general issue has sparked an ongoing conversation over the past few years about development and fundraising. And over the past few years, there **have** been concerted efforts to create a broader and more sustainable base for fundraising, especially via Giving Circles. And these efforts **have** been successful.

But there has remained the need for a more comprehensive and coordinated Development plan. And so, this year, for the first time (at least to my knowledge) a Development and Fundraising Committee has been constituted, its members being volunteers from congregation who have expertise in development. The committee will be creating a long-range plan for fundraising for the congregation, one that will be more proactive, more deliberate, and better coordinated. And hopefully it will be successful in building a stronger financial foundation for Ohr Kodesh's future. You will continue to hear more soon about this initiative, and how it is being tailored to

meet who we are as a congregation and who our members are as individuals.

Meanwhile, amidst all this thinking about longer horizons, I also have to turn to the practical aspect of the Kol Nidre Appeal. We are relying on donations from Giving Circles and the Kol Nidre Appeal this year to fund about 7% of our overall annual revenue. If we exceed our projected fundraising from Giving Circles and the Kol Nidre Appeal and raise closer to 9% of our annual revenue, we will erase the projected budget deficit which was approved by the congregation in this year's projected budget.

We have a goal of 100% participation from members in Giving Circles or the Kol Nidre Appeal, at whatever level is feasible and individually meaningful to you. So for those of you who have already given this year, I thank you for your generosity to Ohr Kodesh. For those who have not yet given this year, I hope you will join with those who have, and I thank you in advance for doing so.

Standing up here and giving the Kol Nidre Appeal is hard for me, and I am sure that I won't be giving it in seven years. In the best of worlds, we won't need to have a Kol Nidre Appeal then at all. But if we do, I wonder if the person giving the Appeal will find it interesting and exciting to take a somewhat longer look back at where the shul has been over the previous seven or so years. And hopefully it will be even more interesting and exciting for that person to look forward.

Thank you for your commitment to our community. G'mar
Chatimah Tovah.