

Good evening, Shana Tova and Shabbat Shalom. I am honoured to be addressing you tonight as Chair of the Executive of the Shaar Shalom. I have big shoes to fill this evening since this is the first in many, many years that Mark Rosen is not inspiring us from the bima on Kol Nidre. And I just want to say, Thanks, Mark, no pressure.

This being my first Kol Nidre address I decided it might be helpful to do a little research. What I found was interesting and had a consistent theme. The theme was simply....YOU...your Judaism, your involvement, your desires for your own commitment. I am inviting you to venture with me to look at what we might want from our Jewish experience while recognizing that each of us might want and need something different.

A few years ago I was visiting my parents' synagogue in Asheville, North Carolina. It happened to be a special Shabbat service honouring an 83-year-old member who was having his second Bar Mitzvah. When the Bar Mitzvah "boy" gave his Dvar Torah he spoke passionately about his life as a Jew. He spoke about how his ideals and beliefs had changed since his first Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13, and he spoke of something very important he wanted to share with his fellow Congregants....Over his life, he realized that it was up to him to figure out what he wanted from his Judaism, what was important to him and what he needed from his synagogue community. He encouraged the congregation to dig deep inside and to begin to understand their own needs and motivations, what they could contribute and how each of them could be fulfilled....and then he said, "Now go and get it!"

This message really resonated with me, because I realized that by growing up in a large synagogue in Houston, Texas, I never had to look very far for what I wanted or needed from synagogue life, it was always just there for the taking. Growing up with parents who were the Presidents of the Sisterhood and Brotherhood, involved in planning community events, active in Tikun Olam and immersed in tzedakah, there was no shortage of examples of engagement. It wasn't until I moved away and joined my own synagogue first in Calgary and then here in Halifax, that I began to realize I needed to find my own meaning for my involvement in my synagogue and my Judaism. What did I need to do to connect with my community to enhance my life?

For many years I sat on the sidelines, often feeling like an outsider, but truly wanting to engage and just not knowing where I could contribute or what would create a deeper meaning for me.

Slowly I started to make connections, first with people and then with my community....this community. I volunteered a little, I helped plan an event, I served on the Board...well, I say I served...but really I sat on the Board and just listened, and learned and tried to figure out what I had to offer.

But all the while my commitment in my heart was growing, I started to care more about my Shaar community, I started to realize what I wanted from my Jewish life here in Halifax. I wanted to be a part of a place where I felt me and my family

belonged. I wanted to attend services and be able to greet fellow congregants with a hug and a warm greeting because we were familiar. I wanted to be able to get involved and feel I was making a real difference. I wanted to be part of the community.

On Rosh Hashanah, Naomi Rosenfeld spoke about the challenges of living in a smaller Jewish community. But she also spoke about the rewards, the inner strength, the determination, the vibrancy that can come from a smaller community.... like our Shaar community.

The Shaar has been lovingly supported and sustained by generations before us, by individuals in this room, by people who are no longer with us. L'dor Vador - from generation to generation - it is our responsibility to continue to grow and thrive

and engage new and current members to sustain the future generations. It is the people in this room, in this sacred space, who make the Shaar what it is and what it can and will be.

In the Pirke Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers, Rabbi Tarfon said, "It is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world, but you are not free to desist from it either." We may be on a smaller scale but this certainly applies to us as well.

A year ago we were blessed to welcome Rabbi Weiss and Rabbi Rank to the Shaar, and since then we have seen the calendar fill up with educational programs and religious opportunities for study, the Nakh and Nosh series, the start of a Tikkun Olam committee, the reinstating of the Library Committee, to name just a few. We are surrounded by

meaningful opportunities to be fulfilled spiritually and religiously.

And it made me wonder....What if we provided the same opportunities for social engagement?

What if we were the driving force behind an Engagement Team, members of our own community who use creativity, ideas, passion and our own experiences and expertise to connect members with members?

An Engagement Team uses creativity to bring people together, it provides meaningful, warm community projects that don't take a huge amount of effort but create a feeling of connectivity and belonging. There are so many facets of synagogue life that are available to us - whether we are looking for a spiritual environment (by attending services), a learning environment (by

participating in one of many educational programs), a sense of belonging, Tikkun Olam, governance or openmindedness, we get to set the agenda.

Engaging in life at the Shaar doesn't need to be about serving on the Board or on the Executive. These are NOT the only ways to be a part of the bigger picture, the picture of an engaged and strong community. Being involved in the overall sustainability and financial growth of this congregation are important but there is so much more that will keep our synagogue vibrant, thriving and alive.

I want you to imagine just a few ideas for projects that could bring us together, engaged and excited about what we are doing. Imagine creating dynamic opportunity by starting small -

Maybe we start by bringing the Breakfast Club back, sharing our professional expertise, or maybe you share your green thumb and help build a sustainable garden that we can all benefit from.

Perhaps we can have a special kiddush for our new members once a year, or perhaps organize a cleanup crew for the neighborhood?

Now...let's STOP Imagining....and Let's just do it. There is nothing stopping us from getting started.

Let me shift gears to something equally important, the tradition of the Kol Nidre Appeal. Every person in this sacred place gives life and breath to the Shaar and tonight it is my chance to remind as many of you as possible...that We sustain The

Shaar's excellence because we need it, we demand it and we contribute to it.

As Jews, we don't pray alone. We don't atone in our homes. Instead, we come together, side by side in these seats. We stand and sit in unison. We celebrate and cry. We listen to the solemn melody of the Kol Nidre and look deep inside ourselves. The synagogue anchors our Jewish community and it has always been a sacred obligation and privilege for Jewish communities to support their synagogues.

We can feel proud of our Shaar, our building, our space, our people AND our community.

Our tradition states, "Kol Yisrael arevim zeh lazeh" – "Every Jew is responsible for one another." Working together each of us can make a difference, no matter the size of the contribution.

You have a card in your seat. I ask you to reaffirm your support of the Shaar and its traditions. Let's find new ways to make the Shaar meaningful to every single one of us. Please give generously. The Shaar is worth it.

Thank you and Shana Tova.