

The Year of "How"

Kol Nidre Address (5770/2009)

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One of my passions is reading newspapers. It developed when my sixth grade teacher decreed that her class would subscribe to, read, and discuss the New York Times everyday. Having a budding interest in journalism, in college, I learned how to write a good lead, the first paragraph, of a news story: The lead should succinctly answer the 5 W's and the H: Who, What, Where, When and Why ... and How?

I remember thinking that the H - the HOW some event happened -- never seemed quite as important as all of the W questions. But this past year -- the H -- the HOW -- became the most important question on my mind. Maybe yours also. It also became the overriding question for the leadership team of the Emanuel.

HOW do we deal individually ... and collectively ... with the turbulent global markets and deep recession that began just about one year ago tonight. HOW would it affect each of us and The Emanuel and HOW long might it last?

Remember the U'Netaneh Tokef prayer from Rosh Hashanah which asked: *How many shall pass away and how many shall be born?:*

This past year we could have also asked :

HOW many shall lose their job? HOW many shall have difficulty getting by? HOW many shall have trouble paying a college tuition bill? HOW low shall our IRAs and 401ks fall? HOW many shall see their debts rise? HOW shall we rebound from this setback?

As the Emanuel community:

HOW shall we care for those in need? HOW shall we support our neighbors? HOW shall we comfort those suffering a temporary set back ? HOW shall the Emanuel maintain its good work in uncertain times? HOW shall we raise funds to do all that we do? HOW shall we adjust if this cycle lasts for a while?

Yes, I have a new-found appreciation for the importance of HOW. As author and management consultant Dov Seidman writes -- ***in today's hyper-connected world, HOW we connect with each other and HOW we behave will be the determining factor for those who live successful lives and run superior organizations.*** He argues, and I agree, HOW we do WHAT we do, is more important than WHAT we do. This means getting the HOW "right" by acting **with integrity, passion, humility, and truthfulness, ideals that build and enhance admirable reputations like that of the Emanuel Synagogue.**

So, FIRST I want to tell you HOW the Emanuel leadership tried to get the HOW right this past year with Kavod and Derek Eretz, regardless of outside economic forces that we could not predict, nor control ...and HOW these challenges were met with calm resolve.

The primary directive was clear: We will not willingly see members leave the Emanuel family due to an inability to pay dues. We raised our sensitivities to the needs of our members. We tried to reach out when necessary to convey this message. We provided compassion and dues relief through our confidential dues and assessments committee. We did the best we could. However, if you or someone you know do not believe we lived up to our ideals, please let me or Rabbi Small know after the holidays.

Our clergy, including Rabbi Small and Rabbi Lazowski, provided confidential spiritual counseling. Lay leaders and Rabbi Small began the Emanuel Network to find ways to help those in need to find appropriate professionals who might be resource. We offered our newest members affordable ways to join our community.

In recognition of tough times for some, we did not raise dues this year. At the same time, we continued our voluntary fundraising efforts. This was prudent and essential because our dues, even in good times, cover only about 60% of our expenses. We knew this would put more pressure on us to seek voluntary giving.

And, accordingly, we have offered different opportunities to show HOW you can support the Emanuel during these challenging times. The HOW questions that I would like you to consider are: Are you willing and able to help us get the HOW right when it comes to supporting the values of this institution? HOW will you respond?

When uncertainty reigned earlier this year, we asked you to make a voluntary Emergency Budget Contribution of \$400 and those who were able, stepped up and we are grateful to those who did or still might. You should know that your generosity helped to keep us on the right track in getting the HOW right.

We have planned a wonderful celebration on Sunday evening, October 25 in honor of Cantor Cohn. With a number of his fellow Cantors participating and two of Emanuel's native sons, Cantor Michael Zoosman and jazz percussionist Richie Barshay, it will be an entertaining evening to honor the Cantor and a great fundraiser for the Emanuel. Please respond asap to the invitation you have already received. HOW can you not attend this special event?

And we solicited for our Annual Giving/Kol Nidre campaign -- If you have already made your pledge, in whatever amount, we thank you for your generosity and HOW you responded. Now I would like to address those of you who have not yet made a pledge.

A few of you have privately shared with me reasons why you may not make a voluntary gift to the Emanuel this year, even though you are able to. On this night, I hope you reconsider and that you not withhold your pledge. Rather than search for a reason not to give, I ask that you remember that the purpose of this campaign is to support the

Emanuel as an institution, and its good work as spiritual home and source of education and comfort for 90 years.

I understand that we offer many opportunities to give. And we are extremely fortunate , and eternally grateful that some members give at every opportunity and whenever asked. But we recognize not everyone can do so. Please find at least one way to give voluntarily. It all begins with Kol Nidre. Give something, \$36, only \$3 month --the cost of one latte at Starbucks – is a start. But do something.

Perhaps before tonight making a pledge was not on your mind, or maybe you put the envelope aside, or decided to simply ignore it. A few weeks ago we read in Parsha Ki Tetzei the commandment: “If you see your fellow’s ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it; you must help him raise it” (22:4).

Granted, there aren’t oxen traveling the streets of West Hartford...But the message is clear. We all have an obligation to NOT be indifferent. You must help your neighbor. You must support your local Jewish institutions, starting with the Emanuel.

Elie Weisel who has fought a life-long battle against indifference, teaches

The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference.”

If you able to, please do not be indifferent to our request. Especially not now. And, above all else, during the course of the upcoming year do not be indifferent to our call to connect to your Emanuel community by attending the daily Minyan and helping us comfort those in a period of mourning or observing the Yahrzeit of loved one. If you answer this call and you contribute voluntarily you will be helping us get the HOW right.

I am reminded of the story of two gents who were performing masonry work on the exterior of a building, when someone asked what were they doing. The first one quickly responds "laying bricks." But the second one smiles and answers "I am building a cathedral." So I will end with a final HOW question for each of you: HOW do you see yourself when it comes to supporting the values of the Emanuel -- as a layer of bricks, or as a builder of a great institution?

L'Shana tovah!

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