

Rosh Hashanah Remarks
Andrew Altman, KI President
2023

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Shanah Tovah! I'm filled with gratitude and washed with a wave of community to see the seats in this sacred space filled with Congregants, friends, and family, and knowing that there are just as many of you watching online from around the world. Welcome to Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel!

I'm happy for the Rabbi, Cantor, Hazzan, Andrew Senn, the choir - anyone who gets to stand up here and see a sea of friendly faces looking back at them.

This vista fits right in with our theme for the year: ***L'chadeish Et Ha'yashan: Make the old new, and the new sacred.***

As I start my second year as President, I can see tonight so many faces in a new light after a year – or many years – of working, praying, and breaking bread together. These cherished experiences help me see our sacred partnership with renewed respect, warmth, and gratitude, and I'm very much looking forward to future collabs.

Those of you who are new, welcome, we love having you here. Your presence, your choosing to be here, is sacred and presents us with a sacred duty to embrace you and help you feel part of KI tonight on this most sacred of holidays.

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I keep getting ads on FB from companies who make quilts from old t-shirts. The idea is that someone who loves us digs out the dusty duds from a box taking up space, sends them off to somewhere, and they come back transformed into a single unit, something now brand new.

Maybe we celebrate it on a wall, or we lay it over the back of the couch to keep us company as we watch TV, or maybe it's our new blanket offering us warmth and protection overnight.

Either way, it consists of our best memories, treasured stories, meaningful events from our past that maybe we spent with family or a new friend. It now represents not just the Indigo Girls concerts we attended or our alma mater or social causes where we volunteered; it's a new and improved way to bring our past into our present. Maybe it was old and dusty, hidden away, or habitually worn every weekend, but now, combined, it's sacred because it reminds us of who we are and how we can share ourselves with loved ones.

I figure by now you know it's not the quilt that matters tonight and that I'm making an analogy – that we can look at this quilt as our collective KI experience. And so these t-shirts are not the 5K we ran or supported - but rather the Music Arts concerts like Main Line Symphony or upcoming Karen Akers, and the social justice causes we gave our time to support, like immigration or fighting anti-Semitism. Or social action such as our critical Hamotzi dinners that feed the hungry, but which we now know are about much more than the food.

And it's interactive, so you can add a new shirt to it as you grow. Maybe you're looking differently today at your role on a committee you've served for years (or decades - you know who

you are). Or you're looking at new opportunities to serve at KI, creating new sacred partnerships with like-minded fellow Congregants, raising money, chairing events large and small, or eking out moments here and there where you can help out for a minute.

Last year I challenged you to consider what Legacy you would leave here at KI, and you met the challenge by donating your time, your talent, and your treasure.

This year, I'm asking you:

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How will you ***L'chadeish Et Ha'yashan: Make the old new, and the new sacred?***

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This concept encourages us to celebrate our congregational, storied history and decide how to translate that to fit the realities of our lives and KI's life today. Sort of like what we're doing here tonight and for the next ten Days of Awe: considering our past, controlling our today, and creating our future.

How exactly do we do that?

Maybe, connecting seemingly separate things like t-shirts, or people, like our Congregants, together in a renewed fashion elevates us all into a sacred community, like KI. And by worshipping together tonight, and by working together serving our KI community, we provide, just like the quilt, joy, comfort, warmth, security, and safety.

This also sounds like the task we gave our Congregation of the Hebrew year 5800 when they/we open the Time Capsule that we dedicated at the Spring Celebration.

The messages you sent them, which are now securely stored in the Capsule, will be eighteen years old when they read them, and those Congregants will hopefully find ways to make your words sacred, finding renewal and hope from their past, for their today and their future.

So, how will you make the old new and the new sacred?

As for me, I'm committing to focusing on the following actions here at KI:

1. Strengthen and renew our efforts to create a more robust sense of not just welcome but embracing our new members, our guests, and our existing members, including those who might fall outside the cliques we generally fall into. Ensure that they all feel a strong sense of belonging here at KI.
2. Actively battle against the remnants of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and more, all of which have their claws dug deeply within our society, everywhere we go. I read On Repentance and Repair by Danya Ruttenberg with a small affinity group last year and will renew my focus on the topic this year via our One Synagogue One Book initiative.
3. I'm in the midst of creating new teams of people to tackle some of KI's most pressing and stubborn challenges, including turbo-charging our fundraising, restructuring our governance, and sharpening our communications. These new initiatives are sacred undertakings that I aim to focus on this year.

On a personal note: I retired from teaching this past summer, and I intend to rejuvenate my past passions:

1. Secure Americans' right to vote and their access to the voting booth;
2. Write a historical fiction novel for 6th-graders about a challenging relationship between a teacher and a student;
3. Learn how to tell stories with a camera.

So next time someone asks you "What's new?" you can consider for yourself personally and at KI:

1. What am I rejuvenating, renewing in myself?
2. And how am I receiving newness, fresh ways of thinking, or new neighbors or KI members, and what specifically am I doing to frame all that in a sacred way, while honoring my Jewish life and values?

I don't know what your answers will be, but I know I'm very much looking forward to finding out as we work and play together this year.

Shanah Tovah.