

Kol Nidre Appeal 5774

Larry Kraus

Good shabbos and good yuntuv. My name is Larry Kraus, and I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak with you tonight.

In addition to the prayers and singing, one of the defining features of this long 26 hour day is that we will spend a lot of time together.

For those of you I know, I look forward to reconnecting. For those I don't, I look forward to meeting you. These individual connections make our community stronger and more vibrant.

A couple of months ago I had the honor to read from the Torah, from the portion *Pinchas*. There, at the end of June in the middle of the summer, the aliyah I read was about Yom Kippur. Among other things, it says that on Yom Kippur "you shall present to the lord a burnt offering of pleasing odor..."

And it goes on to describe the specifics: the bull, ram, lambs, flour and libations.

So, what does this description of ancient ritual have to do with us here tonight?

For me, this reading led me to think about the concept of offerings. As Reb Moshe has often taught, what traditionally may be conceived of as "sacrifices" can be recast and reclaimed as "coming closer offerings." These offerings are often referred to as "korbanot." The Hebrew root of the word is karov - translated as closeness.

so, as we begin Yom Kippur, with the luxury of time it presents, I'd like to suggest that we consider "coming closer offerings."

What can each of us do to come closer to ourselves? To make ourselves healthier, happier, more effective, and more balanced? How can we deepen our spiritual practice, and what obstacles are holding us back?

What can we do to come closer to our partners or spouses - to be open so that we can step outside of patterns that might keep us apart, instead of coming closer?

What can we do to come closer to our family members – those with whom we live and those who live in other parts of the country or world?

And what can we do to come closer to our communities - to our friends, our co-workers, and to TBZ?

I think this concept of *coming closer* is at the core of our communal experience on Yom Kippur. A number of times during our prayers we will join in the rising crescendo of the “thirteen attributes,” singing:

Adonay adonay el rachum vechanun

Erech apayim verav-chesed ve'emet.

Notser chesed la'alafim

Nose avon vafesha vechata'ah venakeh

This formulation comes from some especially intense episodes of *coming closer* in the Torah - between Moses and G-d.

To set the scene, Moses has just destroyed the first set of tablets after he came down from Mt. Sinai and saw the revelry before the golden calf. In the aftermath, Moshe pleads with g-d to be permitted to see his face - to approach closer, to come closer, to know g-d more closely. In a truly intimate moment, the Torah says g-d places Moses in the cleft of a rock, shields him with his hand so that Moses will not come *too close*, and then removes his hand so that Moses can perceive g-d's presence in a unique way.

In the next chapter, Moses again ascends Mt. Sinai with two new tablets. G-d envelops Moses in a cloud, stands with him, and speaks the thirteen attributes that our liturgy uses as a vehicle for Yom Kippur's forgiveness exercises.

In this sense, this central formulation of *t'shuvah* comes from the experience of *coming closer*. A traditional midrash provides that this happened - that the second tablets were given - on the tenth of tishrei; that is, on Yom Kippur.

So I ask again, what can each of us do this year to come closer?

Now let me talk about offerings. I'm sure you will all be *shocked* in a few minutes when I ask for your generous financial contributions to help TBZ continue to grow and thrive. Hopefully you will view this as an “offering,” and not as a “sacrifice.”

But first, let me ask you to consider what TBZ can and should be offering to you?

This is a two way street, a symbiotic relationship, one that can only really achieve anything if it is flowing both ways. So, what can TBZ offer to make your experience of this community more fulfilling? I'd like to ask the officers, board members, and committee chairs who are here now to stand up for just a moment. These are your fellow community members - please see them as points of contact to come closer.

The offerings that each of us can make to TBZ are more than financial. On Rosh Hashanah, each of you received the pamphlet “TBZ in action,” describing the committees and other activities here. There are committees for chesed, membership, tikkun olam, synagogue practices, LGBT, and Israel, just to name a few.

And you don’t need to “offer” all of your free time - feel free to start small, and see where it takes you.

By offering your talents, time, presence, and energy, you will strengthen the community. I firmly believe in this regard that the more you give, the more you will receive. In fact, I know it to be true.

Let me give you one example. As you may know, I had the honor to serve on TBZ's board – and as its chair – for a number of years. As you also may know, so far we’ve celebrated two bar mitzvahs – Aaron’s and Micah’s – here at TBZ. (Adina’s bat mitzvah will be on March 7, 2015 – and you’re all invited!)

I know that my feelings of belonging, connection, joy, and fulfillment that I experienced at those events were increased immeasurably by the offerings I’ve made to TBZ.

I also believe that you will come to see participation in the life of TBZ - as I have - to be an “offering,” and not a “sacrifice.”

And now for the financial piece. This community has been very generous in past years, and I know it will be again tonight. Let me suggest a few points that may be useful as you consider your offering:

- * Dues and fees cover only about 70% of our budget for this year.
- * The total we are seeking to raise in addition to dues is about \$200,000.
- * This breaks down to an average gift of (about) 360 dollars for an individual or 720 dollars for a household.
- * Remember, TBZ never turns anyone away if they cannot pay full dues. This is why this appeal is such an important part of TBZ’s fiscal health.
- * But, it is also an important part of our *spiritual health*. Your generous gifts enable TBZ to maintain its *real wealth* - a highly diverse community -- from young singles to seniors to families of all types and from all economic backgrounds.
- * Because not everyone in our community has the ability to give the average amounts, it is *essential* that those with the ability to give more do so. Offerings of \$1,000 dollars, 5,000 dollars, or even \$10,000 dollars are both critically important and deeply appreciated.

* Most importantly, we seek the communal goal of 100% participation. Even if you cannot give the average amounts, please give something. In fact, even if you do not pay full dues, please give something. Just as there was a sliding scale of *korbanot* in ancient days so that everyone could experience the fulfillment of presenting an offering, the same holds true here today.

* Finally, it is important that you understand that the board is a careful steward of the funds that you offer, and that your contributions will be used wisely.

So now is the time. Many of you already made a pledge when you ordered your tickets. We won't be offended – no chest beating necessary – if you give more here tonight. To pledge now, take out your ticket.

Open it up to the middle panel, and you'll see a list of dollar amounts. Choose which hole to punch – or you can punch out a combination of holes.

Again, we appreciate what you gave last year – it's helped us be here together tonight.

But now it is time to stretch a little bit more; to reach a little bit deeper; to offer a little bit more than you did last year. So, choose the circle to punch, and then go up one more.

When you're done, please give your ticket to the members who are walking through the aisles.

With your generosity, we will continue to *come closer*, and the *offerings* of our community will continue to grow and prosper.

On behalf of myself and my family, Sara, Aaron, Micah, and Adina, I'd like to thank you and wish you a good shabbos, a good yomtov, and an easy fast. G'mar khatimah tovah.