Shana tova. I am honored to speak to you tonight and give the Kol Nidre dvar. My intention is to share my personal TBZ and life journey and to convey to you my belief that each one of us needs to go beyond our normal contributions to financially support TBZ this very unique and special synagogue.

I would imagine if my mother, in blessed memory, a woman who grew up Orthodox in the early part of the 20th century, would have known that her daughter was speaking before a congregation on Yom Kippur, she would have been shocked. In those times, for women to have any kind of real control in religion, money, and power would have been considered, in the words of Tevye from Fiddler on the Roof, unthinkable, unheard of, absurd.”

Yet, as one of the other characters in Fiddler on the Roof said, change has always been in the air. TBZ had been a model of a dynamic synagogue that has incorporated that kind of change into its core. Women have been and are often at the forefront of positive change.

In my life as someone who was born during the Holocaust, I have lived through some of the worst changes for the Jewish people but also some of the most positive.

It’s 1956. I am twelve years old and my parents are members of a Conservative Synagogue in Queens, New York City. I was the very first girl in my family to be “Bas Mitzvahed”. I was proud, as was my family, except for an Orthodox grandfather who did not come. I imagine for him my Bat Mitzvah would have been “unthinkable, unheard of, absurd.”

As pleased as I was, I also only partly understood that this advance for girls was very limited. In reality, I was being prepared for second-class citizenship. The ceremony was outside of the real service. It was held Friday night and not Saturday morning. Most importantly, I was not allowed to read from the Torah, nor allowed to wear a kippah or tallit. I was not given any of the rights that boys were given. Moreover, my Rabbi firmly did not believe in egalitarianism or women Rabbis.

When I became 13, I stopped any kind of participation in our synagogue and while keeping throughout my adulthood a strong Jewish identity, I withdrew from organized Jewish religion. It seemed to me that this was not the place that my dreams could be realized.

1999

Changes have taken place throughout the world, changes have taken place in Judaism. I was 56 years old and joined Temple Beth Zion in Brookline. It was then as it is now a wonderful congregation - filled with bright, interesting seekers of meaning and Jewish commitment. Previously in the history of TBZ, lay leaders rejuvenated the older synagogue by hiring a brilliant, innovative Reb Moshe Waldoks. He transformed a more rigid formulation of Judaism to an alive practice
and also changed a more patriarchal model of The Rabbi to a Rebbe who sat among his people and who ensured that TBZ hired female Rabbis.

2003 – I was 60 years old and at TBZ I had a reaffirmation of my Bat Mitzvah. For the first time in my life, I led the regular service. I wore a yarmulke and a tallit. I for the very first time read from and carried the Torah. Like other women from my generation who were finally Bat Mitzvahed as middle aged and older women, I wept and I shook. I was part of the first generation of women to gain an equal entrance into the covenant of the Jewish people. Unthinkable, unheard of, absurd.

2019 – I am 75 years old. TBZ is making a big move. With the support and encouragement of our gifted Founding Rabbi, TBZ is installing its very first female Senior Rabbi, Rav Claudia Kreiman. While the percentage of women rabbis has increased in the United States in the last few decades, Rav Claudia is one of only about 25% of female senior rabbis in the progressive movements of Judaism. She and some other few women have broken through one of the hardest glass ceilings in organized religion and institutions throughout the world. This is a very big deal, one that should never be trivialized. It would be an understatement to say that for thousands of years, Jews would have thought: unthinkable, unheard of, absurd.

Rav Claudia is an unusual woman with an interesting and profound background. She is brilliant, competent, gifted and visionary. She will maintain the best of TBZ and is forging new paths. We as a congregation who embraced the talents of Reb Moshe are now in the process of embracing the journey that we will take with Rav Claudia and her Spiritual Team, and they with us. As usual, TBZ is on the cutting edge of positive change and continuity. I am proud of my generation of women who made possible the paths of our younger sisters. And I am also proud of the men of TBZ who have backed this momentous time in our history. Thank you to TBZ for making my dreams and the dreams of so many women and our allies become reality.

I want to emphasize the recent inclusion of Rav Tiferet Berenbaum, Director of Congregational Learning and Programming in Rav Claudia’s spiritual team. Rav Berenbaum is also a very gifted, sensitive, and creative Rabbi. She is one of only four Black women Rabbis in the United States. TBZ is again on the cutting edge: of the many US synagogues dominated by white Ashkenazi Jews, we are finally recognizing that Jews are a people with many races. We are celebrating that diversity. We are a people not only hurt by Antisemitism, but also by racism from the outside and also from within. We are beginning and willing to do the hard work of facing some of the big hurts around racism and hopefully wanting to heal them.

Getting Older

I am still 75 years old. And I hear my mother say, why do you have to talk about your age? That’s not what older women do. But I do and I will. We are seeing a new generation of older people in TBZ- a large demographic – including those like myself.
who have been in TBZ for a long time. Like me, many of us were nervous and scared when the change in Rabbinical Leadership was announced and plans began. How would we be treated by younger Rabbis? How would we be treated by the growing number younger people, who too rightly want more of a voice in TBZ? Would we be valued and be respected, or would we be seen as irrelevant?

But an amazing thing is happening at TBZ. There is a current of activity that I have never seen before among our elders. There are Wise Aging courses, meetings of elders who are trying to articulate what we want and need. Rav Claudia held open community meetings where we had opportunities to share our fears, concerns, and our hopes. Unthinkable, unheard of, absurd. I tip my yarmulke off to Rav Claudia for listening, listening, listening and supporting this new emergence.

My mother when she was widowed was often asked: When are you going to move to Florida? She never did, but instead moved to be with her two daughters in Boston. I have periodically been asked: when am I going to move to Florida? My answer is that I decided at least 10 years ago that this is my home, Greater Boston, and TBZ. You are who I want to be close to. I want to be with you as I live out my new dreams and have my new adventures and face both the good things and the hard about getting older. This includes the very personal and the larger crises facing our world today, such as climate change. I want to know and be known by all the younger people of TBZ. Lastly, this where I most likely will die. And I want to be with and be remembered by people who knew me and my significance.

I’ve shared with you what the TBZ community has meant to me; now please take a moment and consider the impact it has had in your life.

<pause>

It’s up to us as a community to provide the financial support that ensures TBZ will continue to be TBZ – one of the finest synagogues in the United States. We have a policy that no one will be turned away for financial reasons. At the same time, dues and fees at TBZ cover only about 70% of our annual budget. That means just to break even we need to raise the additional 30% through our donations.

Many of us ask, what is the right amount? An amount that is possible and personally meaningful to you. This means some of us may give $72 or $360 or $1,000. And it’s essential that some of us who are able give more. Some of you have already made your contribution, and we thank you so much.

Take out your High Holiday ticket. At the bottom of your ticket is a tab with your name. This tab is removable, there are tiny perforations to make it easier to removed so all you need to do is fold and pull- as demonstrated by Sarah Fendrick and Carol Kamen. (Point to them).
That is your name card, hold on to it... you'll need it in just a moment.

On each chair there is an envelope, you might have noticed it when you sat down. Inside your envelope is your Annual High Holiday Appeal pledge card.

Please choose a donation amount by folding over the tab that is a meaningful pledge for you. Now, place your name card and your High Holiday Appeal pledge card back into the envelope. Unlike last year, there are no stickers to place.

Sarah, Carol and our ushers will be coming around to collect your pledges. Thank you for your generosity.

G’mar hatima tova, may you be inscribed in the book of life.