

Marc Schwartzberg's Address to The Stanton Street Shul General Membership Meeting June 26, 2022

Oh, what a year this has been!

As I reflect on where The Stanton Street Shul was one year ago at our last General Membership meeting and I recall my hopes and dreams for the year ahead for our little shul, I could never have imagined the events that occurred over this past year. It's another reminder (like we needed another reminder), with Covid and everything else that has been going on in New York, the country and around the globe: "Man plans, and God laughs."

We started out the synagogue year with such high hopes!

We had plans for the high holiday services led by Rabbi Staller. Thankfully, we had wonderful services with beautiful explanations of the Avoda service and thought-provoking award-winning sermons delivered by our rabbi. We planned and accomplished for a large part of the year rich programming of weekly torah study led by our scholarly Rabbi.

We planned for shabbat & holiday events in our shul and in Shoshana and Rabbi Staller's home. Those were special events indeed, including gourmet cooking classes paired with torah lessons on Zoom from the rabbi's NYC micro kitchen.

The rabbi planned and held a community shabbat meal with over 100 participants to welcome young people into our community.

We anticipated robust shabbat morning minyanim and reestablishing Friday evening kabbalat shabbat services and a growing membership roster. Sadly, that dream has been postponed.

This past year did not go as planned. Tragically, Covid remains a factor. The board of trustees maintained a very conservative stance regarding social distancing, and mask wearing. I think we should be proud of this approach. Unfortunately, just like our country in general, COVID safety has become a divisive issue. Stanton street is not immune. My prayers are for everyone's safety and wellbeing.

As an active member of the entrepreneurial community, I have witnessed first hand over the years how different leadership styles can lead to personality conflicts. There are leaders that are successful at accomplishing difficult tasks - people who get things done. However, they are not aware of how their words may affect others.

On the other hand, there are people who are wonderful with words in a public forum and when it is time to communicate on an individual basis, they may not have the experience to communicate their thoughts effectively.

Also, generational differences with respect to employee/employer codes of conduct played a significant role in the failure of leadership of our congregation. Today's employee who enters the workforce for the first time has very different employment expectations than those of us who may have participated in the work environment for three or four decades.

Sadly, our shul fell victim to personality clashes. Shuls are not immune to conflict. Dare I say that shuls can breed conflict. People often take shul business too personally. Some may fail to remember that the community priorities outweigh any individual's preference. I hope and pray that as we go forward and

continue the rich legacy of our community and our shul in the birthplace of American Jewry, that we will always place the communities' priorities over any personal preference.

As a result of these conflicts, Rabbi Staller decided not to renew his contract. I know that there are many people in our community who are very disappointed by Rabbi Staller's departure—friends who learned so much from him and who thrived with him as our spiritual leader and moral guide. Fortunately, he remains local, and he and Shoshana are always welcome in our congregation. Our longstanding leaders Jeff Katz & Paul Ruffer are no longer active in our community. Their presence is missed. We wish them well. They too are always welcome back to our shul.

I am sorry that I couldn't find the words to foster peace amongst Rabbi Staller, Jeff Katz & Paul Ruffer. I sincerely apologize to Rabbi Staller, and my chaveyrim Jeff & Paul for all that I have said and done to harm you.

I apologize that my actions contributed to our current circumstances of being a community in need of repair and rebuilding; And regrettably not in the immediate position to thrive.

I wish that I could have found the way to communicate more effectively such that everyone felt heard, included, and apprised about goings on. I regret that I did not properly communicate to each and every stakeholder. Each one of you is vital to the future of this 109-year-old institution. I let you down. I am sorry.

That said, I believe we have reasons to be optimistic. We have a beautiful, well-maintained house of worship. We have devoted long standing members and stakeholders, people who show up for davening, people who care deeply. Stanton has generous donors, from those who regularly, consistently contribute \$18, to those who graciously contribute thousands of dollars without being asked. Every dollar counts. We will thrive when everyone participates to the best of their own ability. We have a diverse and eclectic congregation devoted to our treasured tradition of torah and halacha. We have StantonKids, a warm and friendly shabbat and holiday program for our treasured children. We host The Woman's Tefilla Group, a strong community of devoted women.

We have much to be grateful for. Together we will rebuild. Together we will repair.

Let us keep in mind the famous words of Hillel as quoted in Perkei Avot chapter 1 sentence 14.

"Im ain ani lei me li? V'chshani l'atzmi, Mah ani? V'im lo achshav, aymahsay?"

If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

Let us use this day to learn from what transpired in the past and plan for our future.