

**President's Address, Yom Kippur 2013**  
**Michael Greenberg**

Shana Tova and Shabbat Shalom. It's not very often we can say both on the same morning.

I hope everyone has enjoyed the summer – a somewhat shorter summer this year, as the holidays are the earliest in over 40 years.

Now you may think that the president of the temple gets to take the summer off. After all, installation is in May, then you have a couple of meetings...a month, followed by lots of time to work on your Yom Kippur speech.

In the few short months I have been your president, I did get to take some time off, but Anshe Emeth is a very busy place in the summer. For example, we had 3 Shabbat BBQs, with attendance sometimes doubling our expectations. If you want to see how many tables we can fit in the social hall, come to one of our summer BBQs. I had the pleasure of grilling hamburgers and hot dogs for 120+ - once in the pouring rain – rain so hard it bounced when it hit the roof. This “monsoon BBQ” had the highest attendance of all 3 events.

We had some great Shabbat services - one led by the Urban Mitzvah Corp kids – many of them our kids – which moved me in ways I find hard to express with simple words, but it makes me proud, and it should make everyone here proud, of the investment we make in our children – our youth – the future of our community and our people.

There is one event we have in the summer that merits a special mention. It's not our biggest fundraiser, it does not have any special speakers, corporate sponsorship, live entertainment, or a special dinner. It is, in the words of its chief organizer, not a particularly glamorous event. But this event speaks to the core of what we do for the larger community. I'm talking about the rummage sale.

I'm a bit embarrassed to say that before this year I've never been to one. After all, what's the big deal about a rummage sale? Well, let me tell you.

A few days before the event, I was copied on an email, from my wife, to one of the organizers –

Hi Debbie,  
Mike and I can help out this Sunday morning. We're available for the early shift, 8:30-10:30AM. See you then...

Yes, even the president gets volunteered....

You see, the sale starts at 9am, and “training” begins at 8:30. I thought “training” for a rummage sale?

So a bit groggy, I roll into the parking lot at 8:30. There are no parking spots.

There is actually no room to drive. There are 100 people waiting in line to get in. We actually count them - we have to give out tickets with numbers and meter traffic into the building so we don't get overrun.

Inside, the volunteer team is getting everyone and everything ready. Reitman Hall is filled to capacity with clothing. Several classrooms are filled with different goods – housewares in one room, linens in another, furniture in a third, and so on. And then there is the boutique – where we sell our most expensive items – designer clothes, jewelry, hand bags, for upwards of \$20.

At 9:00am the doors open. I quickly realize this is much more than a rummage sale. Think about Filene's basement – the original one in Boston – on wedding dress day – or the flea market at Englishtown. Now think about all that in our temple – staffed by volunteers – at \$2 an item. We do this for long hours on a few days – and we sell a staggering \$12,000 worth of items at \$2 a piece.

My favorite line of the day - a rather well dressed woman waiting in line for the boutique asks me “where's the high-end stuff?” I tell her she is in the right place, and the right line.

So what does this say about Anshe Emeth? Let's talk numbers. Ninety volunteers from 68 families. That's better than 10% of the congregation. Ages 7 to somewhere north of 90 years old. Countless hours spent organizing, folding, haggling, and folding again (and again).

Beyond simple numbers - I think this one “unglamorous event” speaks to our core values and mission as much as anything else we do. It's about acts of loving kindness – G'milut Chasadim – it's about helping others – it's a great mitzvah – it's about repairing the world – Tikun Olam – one sweater, and one pair of shoes at a time. I can't tell you how proud I am to be president of a congregation that does this, and I can't thank everyone involved enough.

I also want to thank everyone else – our rabbis, our cantor, and all of our professional staff, who work incredibly hard to make Anshe Emeth the place it is. Anshe Emeth also runs on volunteer power. 100s of volunteers, 1000s of volunteer hours at meetings, seminars, BBQs, Spruce up days, and too many other events to name. To all our volunteers – thank you.

How do we make sure we can keep this momentum moving forward? How do we make sure we can be there for our community and the larger community in the years to come ? To answer this question I have to tell you about my other job. In my other job I'm in charge of “things that break”. I'm an IT director for one of the “old line” investment banks. If your PC breaks – I get a call. If your I-phone can't get email – I get a call. If “the internet is down”, or if a hurricane causes the Hudson River to flood a building in Jersey City, resulting in a data center with no power, I get a call.

Now about every 5-7 years we have to make a major investment in some IT “thing” – I won’t bore you with details – but let’s just say we have to replace the ...“franistans”. This is usually an expensive undertaking, and no one understands why we have to do it.

About 10 years ago we had to do this. Now 10 years ago the firm I worked for was not a publicly traded company. It was a private partnership. In a partnership, every dollar spent or invested was a dollar out of the partner’s pockets. There were no IPOs or Bond auctions to raise cash.

Think about that old Smith Barney commercial from the 1970s with John Hausmann – the famous British actor who said “At Smith Barney – we make our money the old fashioned way – “we earn it”. 10 years ago the guys I work for sounded...and looked just like this.

So it’s my job to convince the SENIOR partner we need to do this work. The day comes for the meeting. The senior partner, an older French gentleman, is named Michel David Weill. The firm has been in his family for 185 years. I was just a bit nervous. At the appointed time we convene on the 62<sup>nd</sup> floor of Rock Plaza, in a wood paneled office arrayed with antique furniture, overlooking central park. A Cuban cigar is burning in an ashtray.

So I tell him – Michel – we need to replace the franistans.

In a big puff of blue cigar smoke he asks me (I can’t do the French accent) “So why do we need to do this – this is broken now and it no longer works?”

And I say – NO – it still works, but it won’t for long. We need to do this work now before we have serious problems.

He asks me – “didn’t we just do this?”, and I say NO, that was 7 years ago.

He asks me how much – and I tell him \$3.5 million dollars.

Now he sits up, and glares at me

Another puff of blue smoke - “And if we don’t do this now?...”

I say, if we don’t do this work now, you and I will be having a very different conversation in 6 or 9 months. It will go something like this:

You will ask me - What do you mean these franistans failed? You didn’t know this could happen – you did not anticipate this problem? How could you let this happen?

Another puff of blue smoke, a raised eyebrow, and then from somewhere behind me, someone says - "Michel – we need to do this". Then the slight nod – and an exhortation – "Don't spend any more than you have to!"

And so we did the work. I'm happy to report I am still employed.

Once again, I'm a little nervous. I have to make another presentation to another tough group – well maybe not so tough. While Anshe Emeth is not a business, it's been in OUR family for 155 years. In a very real sense, it's a partnership - everyone here has a share, and every dollar we invest is a dollar out of OUR pockets.

So now it's now my job to tell YOU... we have to replace the franistans.

Not in a literal sense – there are no upcoming construction projects, and no immediate need to replace any of our mechanical systems, but it is time to build in a different sense. It's time to build our future. It's time for L'Hibanot, which means "to build up". The goal of this new project – you may have seen the posters – it to celebrate our past and to build our future.

We are going to celebrate all year long. The focus will be to celebrate within our community and with the larger community in New Brunswick. After all, we have a lot to celebrate – Anshe Emeth has been here in New Brunswick for 155 years. Rabbi Miller has been at Anshe Emeth for 40 years. We have been the focal point of reform Jewish life in central New Jersey for a very long time. We have been a vital part of the New Brunswick community for a very long time. Our celebration will culminate with a huge gala in December of 2014. Any yes, you are all invited.

Between now and then you will be hearing a lot more about L'hibanot – from me, from all the various teams working on the project, and from our past president, Marc Rothstein, who has graciously agreed to lead this initiative

You might ask me;

Didn't we just do this?

The answer is no. The renovation project we called Legacy was 10 years ago, and while we started the Promise campaign 5 years ago, that effort is not complete.

You might ask me: "How much is this going to cost?" . It's going to cost about \$5 million dollars, but we have already raised \$1.5MM. I want to thank everyone involved for helping us reach that mark.

You might ask me: - Do we need to do this now ? Is something broken, it does

not work?

Well, the answer is YES, we need to do it now. We need to use this initiative as a true opportunity, maybe the last such opportunity of my generation, to build our future:

- We need to build so we can preserve this wonderful and sacred space. This building is heavily utilized, and over time things need to be repaired, replaced, and upgraded.
- We need to build so we can continue to attract and retain the very best people – professional and rabbinic. Without our dedicated human resources, nothing we do here is possible.
- We need to build so we can attract and retain members. It's no accident we continue to attract new members, and our religious school enrollment has actually increased this year. Other institutions in our community cannot make this claim. We must continue to provide attractive and innovative programming that appeals to the broadest audience possible, ensuring that we remain an educational, cultural and religious Center of Excellence.
- We need to build so we can continue to invest in our children and their future. Anshe Emeth sends more kids to Israel on the EIE program than any other congregation in North America...by a factor of two. We are not the biggest, or the most wealthy congregation in North America, but maybe we are the healthiest, because we know that investing in our children pays huge dividends.
- We need to build so we can continue to grow a culture of loving kindness. We need to make sure that no one is ever turned away from Anshe Emeth because they can't afford to be a member.
- We need to build so we can eliminate our mortgage. You have certainly heard about this before. Two years ago you heard about it on this same morning. You heard about a promise we need to keep to ourselves and future generations. It's no coincidence that the past president who spoke those words now leads the effort to keep that promise.
- Finally, we need to build so we never have that "other conversation" I mentioned earlier.

So may it be written. Ken Yahe Ratzon

Shanna Tova and Shabbat Shalom

