Shanah Tova.  Shabbat Shalom.

Today's Torah reading is Parshat Nitzavim. You know – this is where God tells Moses to gather all the people of Israel so he can tell them what is required of them before they enter the Promised Land. This is the last speech Moses makes to his people, because God tells him he cannot join them on this last journey.

This was also the Parsha at our last officers meeting two weeks ago, and I told my fellow officers that I felt like Moses, that in two weeks I will gather the people together for one last speech.

After all, wasn't Moses the president of his congregation? For 40 years?

Now, I know what you are thinking. You're thinking about the great vice-presidential debate between Lloyd Bentsen and Dan Quale in 1988. If Senator Lloyd Bentsen were here today, he might say something like this to me:

Mike, I served with Moses. Mike – I knew Moses. Moses was a friend of mine. Mike, you're no Moses.

But it's ok, I consulted with Rabbi Bazeley before writing this speech. I told him I thought the Parsha was great, but it was missing just a couple of things I really need. He told me: No problem Mike, after all,  scholars have been interpreting the Torah in different ways for thousands of years, so you can do the  same.

So here is an interpretation of Parshat Nitzavim which I guarantee you will not find in any book, or on any website.

God said to Moses:

Moses: (Yes God) – gather the congregation on Yom Kippur morning - early and late services - so you can deliver your last opening address. Tell them what a good year it has been. Make sure you thank everyone for all of the good work they have done over the past year.

Set forth the challenge you have for them. Tell them what it means. Explain it clearly, so they all understand.

And Moses: (Yes God) Tell a joke or two while you're at it. But don't take too long.

And Moses:  (Yes God) – Don't screw it up. This is the last chance I'm going to give you to speak to them. After this, I'm giving your job to someone else.

And Moses: (yes God) – Don't forget to tell them about the party!

So it has been a very good year, and a very busy year here at Anshe Emeth.

It's always great to be President when you get to report good news. Here are just a few highlights:

We ended our fiscal year with a small surplus. This is great news considering the size and scope of the program we have here.

Our membership numbers are healthy. And by healthy I mean about the same as last year. We are perhaps the only Jewish institution in Middlesex County that can make that claim. While there has been some turnover, it's normal, and we have many new families here. A special welcome to all of you who are here for your first HH services.

Enrollment in our religious school is up – a little.

Enrollment in our Gan is up - a lot !

This year's Golf Outing, in May, was the best attended ever – with over 130 golfers. We had to close it out because we ran out of room. We raised over $60,000 - an increase of almost 100% from last year. Next year's golf outing will be even bigger. I think it may have something to do with the honoree – I hear it's the next past president, but I'm not sure.

Our Rummage Sale brought in $20,000 last year – another record. While $20,000 is not a small amount of money, it's not the dollars that are important. It's $20,000 at $2 an item. That's 10,000 items of clothing, shoes, furniture and other assorted things people in our larger community need. It means someone can walk with their head held high because they have a new suit to wear for a new job, or new sneakers for the first day of school.

This year's Rummage Sale is once again off to a record start, with another $10,000 worth of items sold.

This is how we make a difference.

All this is possible because so many of you dedicate your time and resources to making these events and projects a success.

I want to thank Rabbi Miller for his 41 years of leadership, his encouragement, his insight and wisdom, and most of all for his patience in working with me for the last year and a half as we juggle our schedules and try to squeeze in a half an hour here, or a dinner there. Sometimes it's a quick call at work, or 15 minutes before a board meeting, or more likely a conversation on the train. Sometimes it has to end too soon since I'm about to go under the Hudson River, but he always seems to have the right perspective on just about anything I need help with.

I want to thank Rabbi Bazeley for his friendship and advice on so many things, and his tireless dedication to the religious school and the Temple. I want to thank him for

the courage and vision to put together an entirely new HH experience this year. He took a risk here – and it paid off. 55 people came on the first day, 75 the next, and last night 90. Someone posted a comment on our Facebook page that reads "I am looking forward to Yom Kippur services with you." I wonder how many other Temples can make that claim!

I want to thank Cantor Ott for our music program. Music really is the heart and soul of our movement. I'm not sure I would be standing here today without it. You and I know our kids are very talented. Just come here on any Shabbat, or any HH service and you can see and hear their talent. On guitar, in the band, in the choir, in a small group like Jew Directions, or singing solo. This is not just a few talented kids – this is many kids – year after year after year. How do we produce so many talented kids? While it may have something to do with the parents, talent needs care and feeding – like a beautiful garden. For the last 15+ years, Anna Ott has tended to this garden, and we are so grateful for the work she has done and continues to do for us and our kids. I also want to thank the band, the choir… all the choirs, and the extraordinary Piano Dave.

I want to thank Heather Kibel, our Executive Director. Heather is really the Temple's Chief Operating Officer, Chief Administrative Officer, coordinator, scheduler, advisor, and my friend. Things run smoothly here because Heather has her finger on the pulse…of everything and keeps us all in line. It's not an easy job – but no one does it better – all the time, and always with a smile.

I want to thank Alyson Bazeley for doing such a great job as our Director of Youth Actvities. Over the past year and a half our kids have been more engaged than ever, and our programs are a great success. From the Purim Carnival to AETY board overnights to special mitzvah projects, to the upcoming trip to the deep south,…at Anshe Emeth we invest in our kids. These investments are paying huge dividends, and we are grateful to have Alyson with us.

I want to thank Inna Shepard, our Director of early Childhood Care. She has turned around a Gan program that was in dire straights a year ago. From 7 students and bleak financials to 20 students and a balanced budget. Than you Inna for making a real impact for our youngest members.

I want to thank the entire office staff for their help and assistance every time I call with a question.

I want to thank our custodians for keeping this facility in such good shape under conditions of very heavy use.

I want to thank all of the spouses and partners of all our volunteers for giving up THEIR partners and spouses for countless meetings, conference calls, and events. On Tuesday nights, and Wednesday nights. On Saturday mornings and Sunday mornings. For all of

our events and functions. For conference calls at lunchtime and after dinner. For slicing out time at work for emails and updates to spreadsheets and powerpoints. We are talking about 100s of volunteers and thousands of volunteer hours. Without this effort, we would not be where we are today. To each and every one of you – I am proud to work with you and to be President of such a dynamic community.

Now what was this I said earlier about a party….

Well.. Invitations have been printed, envelopes stuffed, and postage applied. On Thursday over 1000 invitations were delivered to the post office.

I want to invite you to a party. Not just any party, but a real blow-out. The biggest party you will go to for the next 155 years – guaranteed. I know you have received a Save the Date card, and I know you have heard about the celebration on December 6th, but this event is going to be BIG – I mean really BIG. It's going to be right here, at Anshe Emeth.

It's a big celebration – it's a celebration of US. Of 155 years in New Brunswick. It's about celebrating Rabbi Miller's 40 years of service, It's about celebrating who we are and what we stand for, and how we contribute to the larger community here in New Brunswick.

It's about honoring Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, and New Brunswick Tomorrow, two great institutions here in New Brunswick

We are going to have great entertainment – a Jazz club, dancing, Broadway talent, stargazing on the rooftop garden, a silent auction, other great programs, and so much more. And let's not forget food – lots of it – and it's going to be really good.

You might wonder how I can be so confident about the success of this party. Well… I have inside information. It's not just because I am the president. After all, the president is not supposed to know every detail of every event.

But I know the party planners….

Sometimes I can't help overhearing things at meetings…in my kitchen. There is a large committee working on this event, actually all the L'hibanot events, and this team has been putting in incredible amounts of time and energy planning for this event. I want to thank each and every one of them, and one very special volunteer in particular – who happens to be married to the president of the congregation - the hardest working volunteer in my house – Helene Greenberg. I know this party is going to be a success because my wife really!! knows how to throw a party. You don't want to miss this – and make sure to bring a friend or three.

Most important, this event will celebrate the success of our financial initiative – L'hibanot. On this front, I have more great news to report.

To date, we have raised almost $1.3MM dollars. Over the summer, with your help and generosity, we have made great strides, going from about $850,000 in May to $1.3MM now. I want to thank everyone who has participated for their generosity and continued commitment to the future of this community.

I also want to thank all those who have not participated….yet.

Today we have a challenge. Not just to finish this initiative by December 5, but a challenge from a very few, very generous families. The challenge is this:

They will contribute $500,000 to L'hibanot IF we match them by December 5.

Every new donation made between now and December 5 will be matched, dollar for dollar, up to $500k. If we meet this challenge, we will have virtually all the funds needed to retire the mortgage in 5 years – and hopefully in less time. REPEAT

You know why we need to do this. You've read the brochures, you've see the posters, and you have certainly heard about it from me. You may have even received an email or a phone call.

You know we need to be able to attract and retain the very best people – professional and rabbinic. Wiithout our dedicated human resources, nothing we do here is possible.

You know we need to maintain this beautiful building because it is so heavily utilized. Just come here any Saturday morning and see for yourself.

You know we need to continue to be a center of excellence for learning and study

You know we need to continue our outreach to the larger community by growing a culture of Gimelut Chasadim – of loving kindness.

But L'hibanot is about much more than this

L'hibanot is about maintaining the fabric of OUR community

L'hibanot is about the Anshe Emeth CDC and the incredible amount of support it provides to the community with items like medical supplies, wheelchairs, diapers, and classes for new mothers.

L'hibanot is about the Jewish Historical Society and the treasure of information contained there about the history and legacy of this community.

L'hibanot is about Shabbat Services when the junior choir sings their hearts out, and the awesome band plays, and Piano Dave gives us a few special riffs.

L'hibanot is about Havdalah led by our youth group, singing around a fire, in David and Lisa Levine's back yard.

L'hibanot is about Shabbat BBQs on the roof with over 150 people.

L'hibanot is about Steak and Scotch in the Sukkah – a week from Sunday!

L'hibanot is about Oneg Shabbat, and the Oneg after the Oneg, which at my house ends around 1am.

L'hibanot is about standing right here and presenting a B'nai Mitzvah with a certificate for travel to Israel

L'hibanot is about standing right here and celebrating a 50th wedding anniversary, and a 95th birthday, and a 102nd birthday

L'hibanot is about standing here and naming a baby, or being with a couple under the Chuppah

L'hibanot is about being with a family in mourning, and comforting the bereaved, and wrapping our arms around them and letting them know that we are here for them.

L'hibanot is about sitting here last Friday on Rosh Hashanah morning and listening to our kids – your kids – sing and play melodies that were both haunting and sublime, and being moved to tears because it was so beautiful.

For all these reasons, and many more, I ask you to join us – Helene and me, the officers, the board, and all the families who have already decided they are going to make this a success. If we all do our part, it will not be hard, but we all need to do our part.

At the end of this week's Parsha, Moses tells the people ….I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, but with those who are standing here this day, AND with those who are not standing here this day.

In 1926, 80 families in New Brunswick decided to build a temple with 450 seats. 80 families and 450 seats. Today we sit in those very same seats. Those 80 families made a covenant with those who were there, and with those who were not there – the generations to come, and the generations past.

Now it's our turn

Let's meet this challenge together. Let's finish this by December 6th. If we do, I promise never to speak of this again on Yom Kippur morning.

Ken Yahe Ratzon. So may it be written.

Shanah Tova and Shabbat Shalom