

Meyer and Gertrude, an elderly Jewish couple, were on a plane, traveling together to the Far East. Suddenly, over the aircraft's speaker system, the captain announced,

“Ladies and gentlemen, I have an urgent announcement. Our engines have developed a problem, and we need an emergency landing. The good news is that I can see an island below us that should be able to accommodate us. The bad news is that this island appears to be uncharted—I am unable to find it on our maps. So the odds are that we will have to stay on the island for a long time before any rescue comes...if ever.”

Meyer turns to Gertrude, “Gerty, dear, did we lock the door/turn on the alarm?”

“Yes dear, I think so.”

“Are our life insurance policies paid up?”

“Of course.”

“Did we pay our pledge for the Kol Nidre appeal?”

“Oh my God, I forgot to send off the check.”

“Thank Heavens! They'll find us for sure!!”

Yes, it's time for the Yom Kippur appeal.

Last year at this time, we set some pretty high goals together. If you recall, it was exactly a year ago that our drive to beautify our space began; we aimed to raise \$10,000 in support of our hiddur mitzvah initiative - \$2,000 more than we had ever previously raised during YKA. We wound up raising \$12,000 total.

With all of your help, it no longer feels like we're davening behind my bubbe's bathroom shower curtains, and we now have these beautiful mechitzot to call our own instead. I think they make a significant difference, and help our physical space mimic our spiritual space. Frankly, when we daven upstairs - now all I can think about is how disheveled the rest of the room looks.

Similarly, funds have already been raised to begin construction on a new portable Aron Kodesh; building the Aron will begin when we have a better sense of where

Kol Sasson will be housed for the long-term. Which brings me to the future of Kol Sasson, and some of the challenges we face as we enter our Bar Mitzvah year of operations.

While we remain nimble and operate on an extremely light budget, if you've been around our community for the past year, you may sense that in many ways, we're at a critical point of transition and growth. Should our membership continue its steady incline, our space from our gracious hosts at TBI may not hold us for much longer. (Look at our attendance on RH day 2 as an example). If it does, it will most certainly need significant renovation. If it does not, we will be forced to find alternative, viable options for space. In either case, we will need to be prepared for what's ahead.

As our children continue to grow, and age out of our small groups and programming – we must provide a framework for them to not simply show up to shul, but to genuinely love and look forward to their participation at Kol Sasson. **If we do not properly invest in our children** – and in our programming with them both inside and outside of the shul walls – all we have built here may be for naught. The pride that we feel, the ownership of community, the sheer joy of building something greater than ourselves – if our children do not grow up with the same sense of enthusiasm for this project we call Kol Sasson, Open Orthodoxy, Critical Halakhic Inquiry, Post Denominationalism – whatever you want to call it, the we will have failed them. We must continue being leaders in the partnership minyan space, and **continue setting the standard for all of them** with our youth programming. We must allocate significant resources towards the establishment of a robust youth initiative – possibly a youth director - and bar/bat mitzvah program, so that when families visit our community, they can see themselves raising their family here without making religious or social sacrifices. It is clear that there are more social options, more educational opportunities for our kids in other shuls in the area. Many of us make sacrifices to be here, but this doesn't have to be the case.

Several members lost loved ones and family this year. As a community, we rushed to aide them with minyanim, food, and kaddish accommodations during a difficult time...but what about everything else? What support and guidance can we realistically continue to give to them on an ad-hoc basis? Absent a local rabbinic authority or Executive Director, with all of our busy lives, how can we ensure that we're not letting any of our members and their needs slip through the cracks during their most vulnerable of times?

These are among our growing pains – and they are not imagined, they are real. To tackle any one of these issues in earnest is a serious financial undertaking, at the very least 50k or 60k apiece. Lucky for you, I'm not asking for that amount of money. But I am asking that in our bar mitzvah year, much in the way a bar/bat mitzvah begins to take ownership and is responsible for his/her future that we begin to take ownership of ours. We are not yet forced to make any of these decisions –yet. Which gives us some time to build towards them. So tonight, on our bar mitzvah year, our goal is \$13,000. Not to spend on any immediate need, or project, but to prepare us for the needs and projects ahead.



You might recall that I had two asks of you on this day last year – one for your support in our campaign to raise money, and one for a more precious commodity: your time. While the former was a success, in the spirit of cheshbon hanefesh, I have to tell you that we've fallen significantly short of our goals in the latter.

Despite a healthy influx of new members, and the veneer of a well-oiled machine – Kol Sasson is an institution that is really run by the limited energy of roughly 10 families. Think about that for a second...this is not a desirable structure. For anyone. So, I pose a question to you now:

Why are you here?

I don't ask this in a philosophical lens, nor do I ask this in a condescending way; of course, I am thrilled that each and every one of you is sharing the most sacred of times with our community. But nonetheless, I legitimately ask each and every one of you this question. On the most traditional and holy of nights, why are you spending it with Kol Sasson?

There are 15 synagogues and dozens of other services happening within a 2 mile radius of us – but thankfully you're here, and I want you to think just for a moment about why that is. Maybe you like the people here, and enjoy their company. Perhaps you are energized by the active empowerment of women in the observant sphere. Maybe being able to think critically about halakha – openly in a communal structure – is important to you. Maybe you're here because you have a son or daughter, and you hope to have an inclusive bar or bat mitzvah celebration with them in years to come, an experience you cannot get in other observant shuls in the area. Lastly – and I'm sure this is the reason for most everyone here – perhaps you're just absolutely enthralled with the robust, vegetarian and cholent-free Kiddush.

What would you do if Kol Sasson disappeared tomorrow? Where would you go? Sure, some of us would just pick the next best local option – whatever that is – and not skip a beat. Others would sincerely miss what we have here, but begrudgingly adapt or conform as necessary. However – I'd assert that for the vast majority of our community, we would heavily mourn. Personally, I have become so accustomed to our davening, our warmth – I simply cannot daven anywhere else without feeling entirely out of sorts. Perhaps I'm an outlier, but I'd just as soon daven by myself than in another local minyan. Using the recently acquired business portion of my brain, I'd suggest that we have a unique differentiation from our competition.

Why are you here? And how much is it worth to you? At the end of the day, we are a community; not a shul. In a community, people make sacrifices for the greater good

– that’s just the way it goes; the way it has to be. How much of yourself are you willing to sacrifice to ensure that what you love about Kol Sasson can continue?

I will not make the asinine demand – as other shuls in the area have done – to insist that we all “give until it hurts.” And the good news is, while I have confidence we’ll reach our goal of \$13,000 tonight – I’m not even talking about money. I’m talking about your time. Ladies and gentlemen, on this evening of annulment of vows – I will make one: if the level of volunteer commitment in Kol Sasson does not increase, what you love about Kol Sasson will disappear. I don’t care if you think you won’t do a good job. We will develop you. I don’t care if you think you don’t have any time – you do. Take the 3 hours you spend on facebook each week and give a third of it to the shul. I don’t care if you think someone can do a job better than you. You are needed. You are valued. And you must step up. If there’s something you want to bring to our community or add to it – take it upon yourself to get it done. Sam Glassenberg did this with our Shavuout retreat. Avi Janssen did this with our leyning challenge. Judith Glassenberg did this with our kashrut policy. The Adlers have done this with special events.

Money is nice. And we need to plan and wisely invest in our future, for whatever it holds. But if you enjoy Kol Sasson as it is – and want to retain the feel of community and possibilities available to us – then we have a problem that in the long run, money absolutely cannot solve.

As the last time in front of you as President of Kol Sasson, I’m now going to do the thing that gets leaders in trouble most of the time – thanking people individually. I’d like to specifically thank all of the current officers and committee chairs who have invested a significant portion of their lives – each and every week - into building Kol Sasson over the past two years, and taking responsibility upon their shoulders in doing so. If I forget your name...well, I won’t be president next month anyhow.

To all of Kol Sasson's past presidents and founders: Jane Shapiro, Steve Katz, Rochelle Katz, Rebecca Minkus Lieberman, and Daniel Weinberg – your vision, dedication and spirit have given us the gift of this community. Thank you for entrusting me with it over the past two years.

To Debri Klein – our shul VP in name but MVP in reality. You have been a steadying influence on me, have volunteered in every which way on every single committee, and have an unrelenting passion that raises everyone's game. Thank you.

To Phyllis Nutkis, who has the most thankless job in the entire shul. As our treasurer, Phyllis volunteer's countless hours to pay our bills, reconcile our books, and keep track of various shul data. She does this job because she enjoys being behind the scenes, but that doesn't mean that it's not a lot of work. Phyllis – thank you.

To Avi Janssen, our amazing ritual VP. Having no previous experience in the ritual sphere, you have stepped up, created a leyning competition that effectively ensures that most of our kriyah needs will be met – and you've led by example by jumping in and participating as well. Thank you.

To David Lieberman – our Finance VP for the past SIX YEARS – thank you for setting aside time from your physician's schedule to set the financial vision for the shul, leading us to a budget that is not only healthy, but also for the most part in the black. Thank you.

To Marc Swatez: Secretary isn't the most demanding of jobs, I'll admit – but you have been sage counsel to me and the other officers, and have done a fine job on countless initiatives that have significantly enhanced Kol Sasson. Thank you.

To Will Lennon: Thank you for diligently ensuring that new members of our community are hosted, welcomed, and made to feel warm about Kol Sasson.

To Josh Feigelson: Education has been the hallmark of our congregation since it started, and your wisdom and presence elevate that space and our community more than you know. Thank you for all that you do.

A thank you to our Gabbaim that steady us: Sarah Weinberg, Arthur Rosenson , Daniel Weinberg and Jane Shapiro.

To Shari Lennon, Leah Rubin, Sarina Gerson and Cara Taxy – thank you for your oversight of our children’s programming.

To Debbie Lesch and Rachel Sakofs – thank you for your invaluable work on the chesed committee.

Thank you to Shaina Sugar – and the entire Kiddush committee - for revamping Kiddush, organizing misc shul meals, and ensuring that our pantry is always stocked.

Why are you here?

Will you be on this list next year?

Will you support Kol Sasson’s future?