

Rabbi Urecki, Cantor Weise, fellow congregants & guests, Shabbat Shalom and La Shana Tova. A man started to snore in his seat at synagogue. "Please stop your snoring" the shammas pleaded. "You are disturbing the others in the synagogue." "Hey, look – I paid my annual dues and I'll do whatever I want," the man replied angrily. "Yes, sir" replied the shammas, "But you are keeping everybody else awake." So, Steve or Gary, if you see someone sleeping, it's okay – so long as they have paid their dues.

Last year we were told that in addition to daily expenditures that exceed our revenue, we had also experienced a continual loss of membership. As if that wasn't enough, we also faced the possibility of structural damage to our building. For my report today, I echo the words of Harry Lazaroff (May his soul rest in peace) when asked to give his report at a board meeting, "Everything is okay, in good shape."

Consider this: we made repairs to the Rabbi's house; refinished the gym floor; and as we all now know, completely renovated our front entrance. In addition to the daily maintenance and upkeep of a 63 year old building, we continue to have twice-daily services, a traditional Shabbat service, and celebrate all of the Jewish holidays throughout the year. We have programs for both adult and youth, educationally for adults we have classes in the Talmud, our bible, and in learning to read Hebrew. For our youth we have Sunday and Hebrew schools, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs beyond compare, and an active youth group. Socially our ladies auxiliary provides programs that include breakfast in the Succoth, Friday night dinners, art shows and even TV shows. Our men's club features an annual chili cook-off; guest speakers to keep us informed on current affairs and sponsors our sports award program. For our youth, we are an active participant in city church athletics and

corresponding activities. And now, with our new web page, B'naiJacob.com we are not only connected to the world, but you can find out exactly what is going on here at B'nai Jacob as well as research items of interest about our faith and synagogue. Remember, this is Charleston, WV – not New York City, and with all due respect, we're not okay, in my opinion, we're quite amazing.

We're amazing because we have a strong community. Our strength is found in our dedication and endorsement of B'nai Jacob. We are a diverse congregation; some regular attendees and some only once a week for Sunday school. Therefore, it seems as though everyone has a different opinion - and while we don't always agree, we all find common ground in support of our synagogue. For whatever reason, there is a spirit here which strengthens our bond. We hold strong to our beliefs and our traditions which are the foundation of who we are. Adapting to today's world, open and accepting of new challenges has been best described by Rabbi as *"traditional Judaism in a modern world."* As an example of the dedication of our members, consider that we are the only congregation in WV which continues to hold our daily minyon service, without fail. On Thursday, December 16 we had one of the heaviest snowfalls of the year, county schools were canceled, even Charleston Catholic (which never cancels) was closed, but we had 10 dedicated individuals that morning to make a minyon. This not only shows the level of commitment of our members, but also our strength and tireless resolve to continue our daily minyon without missing a single day! (I hope I didn't just jinx our record!) Just as it takes 10 people to make a minyon, it takes many individuals to maintain the spirit here at B'nai Jacob. Every day members donate their time – time away from home, work and other social activities – for the benefit of

our synagogue. I can't tell you the number of people who have come to me and simply asked, "What can I do to help?" You, the members of our congregation are the lifeblood of B'nai Jacob, serving committee after committee, preparing dinners and luncheons, leading daily services, supportive of Bar & Bat Mitzvahs, teaching Sunday School, coaching our athletic teams, and continually showing unwavering commitment. Our strength is not in our numbers, but in our desire to contribute. It is you who have made B'nai Jacob a success! Personally, I want to thank everyone for your time and effort. As we all know, we could not offer the services we have here and maintain this historic building with volunteerism alone, it also takes money. And our members have been generous to a fault, enabling us to overcome the increasing burden of operating expenses. Throughout history, our members have been very open-handed in their gifts to B'nai Jacob. Bequests are noted on a plaque in our lobby as well as in our golden book. I especially want to express my appreciation for our recent sizeable donations from the estates of Milton Koslow, Sam Wyland, and Bertie Cohen. Their remembrance of B'nai Jacob shows their everlasting patronage and is something to hold in our hearts. I would also like to mention my appreciation for the Wiseberg and Goldfarb families as well as other anonymous donors who have contributed so much for improvements to our synagogue. In addition I want to thank Betty Schoenbaum who has been so generous in more ways than I have time to mention. Every day we reap the benefits of Betty's generosity. Betty – you help to ensure the longevity of B'Nai Jacob and we thank you. We are blessed to have these people in our lives, in our community and in our congregation. They provide the fuel for our engine. We are all so grateful.

Everyone plays such an important part in our community, but unfortunately time does not allow for recognition of the contributions of everyone individually. However, I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the ones who are here on a daily basis, for it is they who represent the true spirit of B'nai Jacob. Nancy Morton: our secretary, our community/member liaison and our social event planner, who probably knows more about our community than anyone else. In addition to her duties as our office manager, she is always willing to lend her assistance in all events here at the synagogue. Personally, I want to thank her for not only what she does for me, but for everyone. Thank you, Nancy, for your dedication and commitment to B'nai Jacob.

And Terry Cooper: although his main job is to keep our building clean and safe, he also helps to ensure we are well prepared for all events, religious and social. Whether he is in the kitchen or the sanctuary or social hall, he is always here and tries to accommodate everyone. We appreciate your support, Terry.

And our Executive Director, Steve Max: even though he is very modest and doesn't like the attention, I must give credit where credit is due. Day after day, time after time, Steve is here ensuring we have a minyon, overseeing the functions and upkeep of our building, and at the same time trying to please others with his culinary talents or just his polite, kind way. His warm personality welcomes all and makes everyone feel comfortable. Steve, you represent the essence of B'nai Jacob's spirit. Your dedication and commitment to service are beyond value. Personally, I want to thank you for the assistance you have provided to not only me, but to Rabbi and everyone else here.

Although not here on a daily basis, I want to thank Cantor Weise for his annual pilgrimage to Charleston. It is more than impressive to see the energy and enthusiasm you bring to us each year. You help to elevate our B'nai Jacob spirit. We understand that this may be your last year but I want you to know that even though you live in Denver, you will always have a home here in Charleston. Whatever the future holds for you, you will always be welcome at B'nai Jacob.

Marilyn, thank you for leading our Sunday School & Hebrew School programs in addition to assisting with Shabbat luncheons, Friday night dinners and Oneg Shabbats. These are the obvious things that we see, however there are so many little things that I'm sure you do for B'nai Jacob which go unseen, and for all of your hard work, we are grateful.

Rabbi – words cannot adequately express our appreciation for what you do for our congregation. Your leadership, guidance and coaching is the basis of our spirit and energizes us all. Building upon the very foundation of who we are, yet open, accepting and finding solutions to the challenges of today, you have touched all of us and as a result we are a stronger community. You represent us well in the community and now nationally through APAC. In addition to your rabbinical duties, you still find time to develop our webpage, produce educational videos, and write weekly newsletters all for the benefit of our congregation. We can't thank you enough for all that you have done this year or the past 25 years. Therefore on November 18th we will be honoring you with a 25 year anniversary celebration, as our way of showing appreciation. We expect that you will be here for another 25 years, Rabbi. I hope all can attend.

As I mentioned previously, I cannot name every individual who has made a difference to our synagogue. I have compiled a list of those who make a regular contribution of their time. Please see the list on the tables by the prayer shawls.

As we look forward to next year we need to keep in mind how blessed we are and reflect upon the people who have helped – and who continue to help - to make B'nai Jacob strong. We still will face many of the same problems: loss of membership, maintaining an historic building, shortfalls in revenue, meeting the needs of a diverse congregation, and maintaining youth involvement post Bar and Bat Mitzvah. However, I remain positive that B'nai Jacob will prevail - because if we continue to hold onto our beliefs and create solutions to the challenges of tomorrow our spirit will remain strong. I have faith that those of you who show your support will continue to do so. For the others, in baseball terms, I ask you to step up to the plate. We have tryouts every day and I guarantee that you will not strike out. You might get hit by a wild pitch, and we may go into extra innings, but you will never lose. We have a coach that is destined to the hall of fame, a dedicated support staff and our team is loaded with All-Stars. A position is always open, be it player or spectator. We may or may not win the series, but I promise you we will be warm and friendly. We will welcome you, for this is our home – this amazing place we call B'nai Jacob. Thank you and may each of you be blessed in the coming year.