

SPEECH FOR YOM KIPPUR 1995

RABBI URECKI, CANTOR WEISS, FELLOW CONGREGANTS AND GUESTS; IT IS ONCE AGAIN A PLEASURE AND AN HONOR TO DELIVER THIS STATE OF THE CONGREGATION ADDRESS AS PRESIDENT OF CONGREGATION B'NAI JACOB. THE TWO YEARS THAT I HAVE HELD THIS OFFICE HAVE PASSED QUICKLY FOR ME AND HAVE BEEN MOST INTERESTING AND GRATIFYING. FOR WEEKS I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO THINK OF A THEME FOR THIS SPEECH. THEN, A FEW NIGHTS AGO, I SAW THE COMEDIAN, GALLAGHER, AT THE CAPITOL THEATER. HE OPENED HIS ROUTINE BY SAYING "HERE I AM IN WEST VIRGINIA, THE STATE THAT IS HIDING FROM AMERICA. THERE'S NO STRAIGHT ROADS ANYWHERE AND YOU'RE ON THE WAY TO NOPLACE".

HE MADE THESE REMARKS AS THE TYPICAL HILLBILLY DIG THAT WE HAVE ALL HEARD MANY TIMES THROUGH THE YEARS, BUT, THE FACT IS THAT WHAT HE SAID IS WHAT I SEE AS BEING OUR CHARM IN WEST VIRGINIA. I TRAVEL AND APPRECIATE WHAT BIG CITIES HAVE TO OFFER, BUT AFTER TEN MINUTES OF SITTING ON THE PARKWAY OR BELTWAY IN PITTSBURGH OR WASHINGTON OR NEW YORK, I AM READY TO RETURN HOME. IT IS EASY TO LIVE HERE, TO DO WHAT WE WANT TO DO AND TO DO IT ON A DAY TO DAY

BASIS.

BUT MY JUDAISM IS PRETTY IMPORTANT TO ME TOO, AND AS MUCH AS I LIKE WEST VIRGINIA, IT IS NOT WHAT YOU WOULD CALL A "JEWISH STATE". THEN IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT SITTING HERE, LIKE AN OASIS IN THE MIDDLE OF WEST VIRGINIA, IS B'NAI JACOB SYNAGOGUE. FOR ME, SOMEONE WHO HAS LITERALLY GROWN UP AT THE SYNAGOGUE AND WHO HAS BEEN INVOLVED, AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, IN VIRTUALLY EVERY ASPECT OF SYNAGOGUE LIFE, BE IT RELIGIOUS, EDUCATIONAL OR SECULAR, I SPEAK TO YOU TODAY WITH THE UTMOST IN PRIDE WHICH I FEEL FOR OUR CONGREGATION. WHEN SEARCHING FOR A THEME FOR THIS SPEECH I KEPT COMING BACK TO THE GLORIFICATION OF B'NAI JACOB. I AM JUST PROUD OF ALL WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED.

PRIDE IN OUR INSTITUTIONS IS BECOMING A RARE COMMODITY. BY AND LARGE, THE HEROES AND RESPECTED GROUPS OF MY YOUTH SUCH AS ATHLETES, OFFICE HOLDERS, MEMBERS OF PROFESSIONS, SCHOOLS, BANKS AND CORPORATIONS ARE NOW VIEWED CYNICALLY WITH RIDICULE AND SCORN.

FORTUNATELY, OUR SYNAGOGUE, B'NAI JACOB, IS ONE INSTITUTION THAT STILL MAKES US FEEL PRETTY GOOD. IN THIS, OUR 102ND YEAR, WE

HAVE SHOWN THE FLEXIBILITY TO ADAPT TO THE TIMES WITHOUT COMPROMISING OUR LONGSTANDING TRADITIONS. WE ALL HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON THIS LAST YEAR DURING L'DOR VA'DOR WHEN WE WERE THE GRACIOUS HOSTS FOR OUR RETURNING FRIENDS AND FAMILY. WE WATCHED OUR THREE GREAT RABBIS OF THE LAST 65 YEARS STANDING SIDE BY SIDE THROUGHOUT THE WEEKEND. BUT AMONG US, WHOSE CHEST DID NOT SWELL AT LEAST A LITTLE BIT WHENEVER RABBI URECKI SPOKE, READ THE TORAH OR CONDUCTED A SERVICE IN HIS ALWAYS PROFESSIONAL, IF UNDERSTATED, MANNER, KNOWING THAT HE IS OUR RABBI, ONE OF US, OUR LEADER FOR THE LAST NINE YEARS. HE IS ALSO THE ONE WHO, AS HE REPORTED IN LAST WEEK'S ROSH HASHANAH SPEECH, LOOKS FORWARD TO CONTINUE LEADING US WELL INTO THE NEXT MILLENNIUM.

OUR BUILDING, ALWAYS FUNCTIONAL AND AESTHETICALLY PLEASING, SEEMS TO BE IMPROVING WITH AGE. IT IS GETTING OLDER BUT IT IS ALSO GETTING BETTER. RECENT CHANGES, SUCH AS OUR MODERN MIKVAH, THE NEW LIGHTED HANDRAILS, THE EXTENSIVE LANDSCAPING, AND THE MAGNIFICENT STAINED GLASS WINDOWS, WILL SOON BE SUPPLEMENTED BY OTHER PROJECTS CURRENTLY BEING PLANNED. AMONG THESE TO WATCH FOR ARE THE NEXT

PHASE OF OUR STAINED GLASS WINDOWS TO BE INSTALLED IN THE CHAPEL WITHIN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, FINANCED BY GENEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS, A MODERNIZATION OF THE LIBRARY THROUGH INCOME GENERATED BY THE SLUTSKY LIBRARY FUND, CONSTRUCTION OF A SUPPLEMENTAL STORAGE BUILDING WHICH WILL FREE UP SPACE IN THE BALCONY FOR A MODERN MULTI-MEDIA RESOURCE CENTER (MORE ON THAT LATER) AND A THIRD VOLUME OF OUR GOLDEN BOOK TO BE GIVEN IN MEMORY OF MEYER AND FLORENCE LEVIN.

THOSE OF US WHO HAVE GROWN UP HERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PROUD OF THE SHUL AND I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT, ALONG WITH OUR NEWER MEMBERS AND FRIENDS, WE CAN CONTINUE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE TO SET AND MEET LOFTY GOALS AND ENJOY A PLETHORA OF ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES.

FROM A CENSUS STANDPOINT, WE BASICALLY HELD OUR OWN LAST YEAR. THIS PAST YEAR SAW THE ADDITION OF FIVE NEW FAMILY MEMBERS. OUR CONGREGATION CELEBRATED THREE BIRTHS, FOUR BAR MITZVAHS, THREE BAT MITZVAHS AND FIVE WEDDINGS. UNFORTUNATELY THE PAST YEAR ALSO SAW THE PASSING AWAY OF 11 MEMBERS. OUR MEMBERSHIP CURRENTLY IS AT 225

FAMILIES AND WE HAVE 62 KIDS ENROLLED IN OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL. WHILE OUR CONGREGATION HAS NOT GROWN IN SIZE OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, NOR HAS IT SHRUNK, AND WE HOPE THAT ANY NEWCOMERS AND OTHER UNAFFILIATED VISITORS WHO ARE WITH US TODAY WILL SOON CONTACT THE OFFICE ABOUT MEMBERSHIP.

SEVEN YEARS AGO, A TRUST FUND WAS ESTABLISHED BY BETTY AND ALEX SCHOENBAUM TO BE USED TO ENHANCE THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF OUR SYNAGOGUE YOUTH. THOUGH THE INCOME FROM THIS FUND HAS BEEN USED IN THE PAST FOR CERTAIN NEEDS, SUCH AS SALARIES FOR OUR TEACHERS, I RECENTLY APPOINTED A COMMITTEE TO STUDY OTHER SWEEPING NEEDS THAT CAN BE UNIQUELY FULFILLED BY IMPLEMENTING THESE FUNDS. SOME PRELIMINARY IDEAS INCLUDE THE PURCHASE OF MULTI-MEDIA COMPUTERS WITH JEWISH EDUCATIONAL SOFTWARE, A LASER PRINTER, VCR TELEVISION COMBINATIONS FOR USE IN OUR LEARNING CENTERS, NEW DESKS FOR OUR CLASS ROOMS, VARIOUS AUDIO VISUAL EQUIPMENT, AND THE PURCHASE OF NEW PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT. SOME OTHER POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES INCLUDE A TRIP TO THE HOLOCAUST MUSEUM FOR OUR TEENAGERS AND SUNDAY SCHOOL UPPERCLASSMEN AND BRINGING IN SPECIAL CANTORS AND MUSICIANS TO

PERFORM FOR OUR YOUTH AND CONGREGATION AS A WHOLE. OUR HEBREW SCHOOL AND SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE WELL ESTABLISHED AND ESSENTIAL IF WE ARE TO ASSURE THE CONTINUED SURVIVAL OF OUR CONGREGATION IN THE FUTURE. THE SCHOENBAUM EDUCATION FUND GIVES US A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO TRULY ENHANCE OUR YOUTH PROGRAMS AND ESTABLISH UNPRECEDENTED STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE FOR A SHUL OF OUR SIZE. SHOULD ANY OF YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR THE UTILIZATION OF THESE FUNDS, PLEASE REPORT THEM TO ME OR OUR INCOMING PRESIDENT, STEVE RUBIN, SO THAT THEY MAY BE PASSED ON TO THE EDUCATIONAL COMMITTEE AND, ULTIMATELY, TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE SCHOENBAUM FUND.

OUR FINANCIAL PICTURE AS A WHOLE IS ABOUT THE SAME AS I REPORTED TO YOU LAST YEAR. ALTHOUGH THE GENEROSITY THAT RESULTED IN THE SLUTSKY LIBRARY FUND AND THE SCHOENBAUM EDUCATIONAL TRUST PRESENT WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITIES, THE USE OF THOSE FUNDS IS RESTRICTED TO THE NARROW PURPOSES SET FORTH IN THE RESPECTIVE TRUSTS. INCOME AND PRINCIPAL FROM OUR GENERAL FUNDS CONTINUE TO BE USED IN EVER INCREASING AMOUNTS FOR OUR REGULAR MAINTENANCE AND BUDGETARY NEEDS. OUR ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS NOW EXCEED \$200,000.

OUR DUES AND OTHER REVENUE FUND LESS THAN 3/4'S OF THIS AMOUNT. IT HAS NOW BEEN THREE YEARS SINCE WE HAVE HAD A REVISION IN OUR DUES STRUCTURE AND, AS NOTED, WE CONTINUE TO OPERATE AT A SIGNIFICANT DEFICIT TO OUR DUES REVENUE. NOT ONLY HAS OUR DUES PAYING BASE FAILED TO GROW, BUT WE HAVE LOST SOME OF OUR HIGHER PAYING MEMBERS THROUGH DEATH OR MOVING OUT OF TOWN. FOR THOSE REASONS, I ASK YOU TO PAY YOUR STATEMENTS UPON RECEIPT, AND FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO MAY BE BEHIND ON YOUR DUES TO BECOME CURRENT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. I ALSO ANTICIPATE THE NECESSITY IN THE NEAR FUTURE OF ANOTHER DUES RAISE TO ENABLE US TO NARROW THE GAP BETWEEN OUR REVENUES AND EXPENSES. THE FEES WHICH WE PAY HERE ARE LOW COMPARED TO THOSE IN OTHER COMPARABLY SIZED COMMUNITIES. FURTHERMORE, ASSESSMENTS ARE MADE ON THE BASIS OF ABILITY TO PAY. ANY FINANCIAL HARDSHIPS WILL OF COURSE BE DEALT WITH FAIRLY BY THE DUES COMMITTEE, BUT I ONCE AGAIN IMPLORE ALL OF YOU TO CARRY YOUR FAIR SHARE OF THE FINANCIAL LOAD IN ORDER TO CONTINUE TO MAKE ALL OF OUR MANY ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE.

THE NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES WE PROVIDE IS

IMPRESSIVE. THERE IS THE SUNDAY SCHOOL, HEBREW SCHOOL, JUNIOR CONGREGATION, BAR AND BAT MITZVAH BREAKFASTS AND B.B.Y.O. ACTIVITIES FOR THE YOUTH. WE HAVE OUR MEN'S CLUB, LADIES AUXILIARY, CHEVRA KADISHA, ADULT EDUCATION, BIBLE CLASSES AND CHOIR WHICH ENRICHED OUR SERVICE LAST NIGHT. WE OFFER BASKETBALL, SOFTBALL AND VOLLEYBALL TEAMS FOR KIDS OF EVERY AGE AS WELL AS ADULTS. THE HIGH PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPATION AMONG OUR MEMBERSHIP IS THE REASON ALL OF THESE ACTIVITIES HAVE AND WILL CONTINUE TO THRIVE. FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE NOT ACTIVELY ENGAGED WITH MANY OF THESE GROUPS AND THE NEWCOMERS TO TOWN, I URGE YOU TO DO YOURSELF AND THE SYNAGOGUE A FAVOR BY BECOMING INVOLVED. ONLY BY OUR MEMBERS REMAINING ACTIVE CAN OUR SYNAGOGUE CONTINUE TO COMMAND RESPECT AND HAVE A PRESENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY WHICH BELIES OUR MODEST NUMBERS.

ALONG WITH ALL OF OUR SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, THE MOST IMPORTANT FUNCTION OF THE SHUL CONTINUES TO BE TO PROVIDE AND CONDUCT RELIGIOUS SERVICES. WE ARE THE ONLY SYNAGOGUE IN THE STATE OFFERING DAILY MINYANS AND OUR CONSECUTIVE EVENING MINYAN STREAK

NOW STANDS AT 3,318. WHILE WE ARE STILL DEPENDANT ON THE HARD CORE, LOYAL MINYANAIRE TO SHOW UP EVERYDAY, MY PLEAS LAST YEAR FOR INCREASED PARTICIPATION WERE EMBRACED BY OUR CONGREGATION AND MORE PEOPLE OF MY AGE GROUP AND YOUNGER NOW SEEM TO BE ATTENDING ON A REGULAR BASIS. THE MORNING MINYAN IN PARTICULAR STILL NEEDS HELP AND I, AGAIN, RENEW MY REQUEST THAT EACH AND EVERY MALE MEMBER OF OUR CONGREGATION COMMIT TO ATTENDING ONE OR TWO SERVICES PER WEEK SO THAT WE WILL ALWAYS BE ASSURED OF A MINYAN AND OUR IMPRESSIVE STREAK MAY REMAIN ALIVE.

I HAVE PURPOSELY REFRAINED FROM THANKING AND ACKNOWLEDGING THE MANY INDIVIDUALS WHO LEAD ALL OF THE AFORE-REFERENCED GROUPS AND PARTICIPATE IN SO MANY WAYS IN OUR CONGREGATION. THIS WAS DONE TO HELP EXPEDITE THE SPEECH AND TO PREVENT OFFENDING ANYONE WHOSE NAME MAY HAVE BEEN INADVERTENTLY OMITTED. BUT, TO ALL OF THESE PEOPLE, YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, WE KNOW WHO YOU ARE, AND WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED COMMITMENT.

I WOULD BE REMISS, HOWEVER, IF I DID NOT PERSONALLY ACKNOWLEDGE TWO VERY SPECIAL PEOPLE, UNSUNG HEROES IF YOU WILL,

WHOSE PRESENCE IS OFTEN TAKEN FOR GRANTED AND WITHOUT WHOM WE COULD HARDLY IMAGINE THE SYNAGOGUE AS IT EXISTS TODAY. THESE TWO PEOPLE ARE AT THE SYNAGOGUE VIRTUALLY EVERY DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. I AM PERSONALLY CLOSE TO BOTH OF THEM, BEING THE SON OF ONE AND THE DE FACTO ADOPTED BROTHER OF THE OTHER. BOTH ARE THE DRIVING FORCES BEHIND MANY SHUL PROGRAMS. DAILY THEY FOREGO BREAKFASTS WITH THEIR SPOUSES DUE TO THE POPULAR MEALS SERVED FOLLOWING THE MORNING MINYANS AND SCHEDULE THEIR DINNERS AND SOCIAL PLANS AROUND EVENING PRAYERS.

NO, I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT THE RABBI AND MY DAD. REMEMBER, I SAID UNSUNG HEROES. I AM REFERRING TO MARILYN AND MY MOM, JEANETTE KANNER, WHO DO SO MUCH EVERY DAY AND, IF ANYTHING, SHUN RECOGNITION.

MARILYN, THROUGH HER COMMITMENT TO OUR YOUTH IN TEACHING HEBREW SCHOOL AND OVERSEEING THE SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM, IS A VITAL COG IN PROVIDING JEWISH EDUCATION AND INSURING A LOCAL JEWISH FUTURE. SHE ALSO PROVIDES A SOUNDING BOARD TO OUR RABBI AND COOKS AND PREPARES INCREDIBLE MEALS FOR THE MASSES OF OUR SHUL, BOTH AT

THE SYNAGOGUE AND AT HER HOME. IN HER OWN QUIET WAY SHE HAS BECOME A LEADER OF THE LADIES AUXILIARY AND OF THE SYNAGOGUE AS A WHOLE.

THOUGH QUIET IS NOT THE FIRST WORD TO COME TO MIND WHEN DESCRIBING MOM, I THINK IT APPROPRIATE TO RECOGNIZE HER ACHIEVEMENTS. AFTER ALMOST FIFTY YEARS IN CHARLESTON SHE HAS TAKEN ON A MATERNAL ROLE WITH ALL OF OUR CONGREGANTS AND HAS BECOME OUR UNOFFICIAL HISTORIAN. SHE STILL CONTINUES TO HELP IN ALL SUNDAY SCHOOL AND LADIES AUXILIARY ACTIVITIES, IS ACTIVE IN CHEVRA KADISHA, GETS OUT THE AUXILLIRITE EVERY MONTH AND PROCESSES THE ANNUAL PASSOVER FOOD ORDERS. SHE REGULARLY ATTENDS SERVICES AND IS A FIXTURE IN THE KITCHEN. IT IS ALSO MOM WHO SPEARHEADED THE MOVEMENT THAT RESULTED IN A BATHROOM ON THE ELIZABETH STREET SIDE OF OUR BUILDING. MORE IMPORTANTLY, SHE HAS REMAINED IN THE SHADOW OF MY FATHER AND ALLOWED HIM TO INDULGE HIS PASSION FOR THE SHUL IN A MANNER THAT BENEFITS US ALL.

WHILE MANY OTHER WOMEN CONTRIBUTE TO OUR CONGREGATION'S WELL BEING, MARILYN AND MY MOM ARE OBVIOUSLY SPECIAL TO ME, AND THIS IS MY FINAL OPPORTUNITY, AS PRESIDENT, TO PUBLICLY ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR

ACHIEVEMENTS, AND TO, HOPEFULLY, NOT EMBARRASS THEM TOO MUCH BY MAKING THESE REMARKS.

LAST YEAR I CONCLUDED MY SPEECH BY SAYING THAT THERE ARE STILL MANY OF YOU HERE TODAY WHO WE WILL NOT SEE UNTIL NEXT YEAR AT THIS TIME. THOSE WHO NEVER ATTEND A FRIDAY NIGHT SERVICE, A SATURDAY MORNING MINYAN, A LADIES AUXILIARY OR MEN'S CLUB FUNCTION. THE SHUL IS, AND HOPEFULLY ALWAYS WILL BE, HERE FOR YOU AND IT NEEDS YOUR PARTICIPATION TO MAINTAIN THE STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE WE HAVE COME TO EXPECT. THE SHUL IS NOTHING MORE THAN A COLLECTION OF VERY SPECIAL PEOPLE WHOSE NAMES AND FACES CHANGE GRADUALLY THROUGH THE YEARS. BUT, IN THIS SECOND CENTURY OF OUR EXISTENCE, IT IS UP TO THOSE OF US WHO ARE HERE TODAY TO CONTINUE TO UPHOLD OUR LONG AND PROUD HERITAGE. AS I SAID EARLIER, WE HAVE A SYNAGOGUE TO BE PROUD OF. MAKE A RESOLUTION NOW TO BECOME MORE ACTIVE AND INVOLVED THIS YEAR. YOU WILL NOT REGRET THE DECISION.

FINALLY, AS ALL WHO KNOW ME ARE AWARE, THE PRESIDENCY OF THIS CONGREGATION IS A JOB FOR WHICH I HAVE PREPARED ALL MY LIFE AND WHICH I HAVE CHERISHED. B'NAI JACOB HAS ALWAYS BEEN AND WILL

CONTINUE TO BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF FAMILY LIFE FOR SHELLEY AND ME,
AND I WILL ALWAYS BE AVAILABLE TO SERVE MY SHUL AND MY RABBI AS
LONG AS I AM ABLE. THANK YOU FOR THE SUPPORT WHICH YOU HAVE GIVEN
TO ME AND ACCEPT MY HEART FELT THANKS FOR ALLOWING ME TO SERVE. TO
ALL OF YOU I WISH ANOTHER HAPPY AND HEALTHY NEW YEAR.