

ROSH HASHANA SERMON
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Let me begin my words the way a rabbi should begin his words ... with a blessing. Let me teach you a blessing: "*Boruch attah Hashem Elokeinu melech ha-olam michaye hameitim* – Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe who revives the dead." Our tradition has us recite this blessing if you see someone who you haven't seen for twelve months. So let me say it to many of you: "*Boruch attah Hashem Elokeinu melech ha-olam michaye hameitim* – Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe who revives the dead." I know the blessing sounds strange - to say to someone you haven't seen for twelve months that you thank God for having revived the dead - but that blessing has a very important lesson to it. Every person is constantly changing, every person is constantly being reborn and revived. And so, if you see someone whom you haven't seen in twelve months, that person is really not the same person you saw then ... he is a new person ... and so you recite this blessing.

This blessing underscores the entire meaning of our High Holydays. The ten days beginning with Rosh Hashana and concluding with Yom Kippur are referred to as the "*Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* – the ten days of repentance." To repent means to change one's actions, to change one's habits, to becoming different, to become new and improved in the coming year. If ever there was a year where change is uppermost in our minds, it is this year when both Presidential candidates claim to be the best agent for change, because they sense that change is what the American people want. And who can blame them? There is an unpopular war in Iraq, the economy is in critical condition, there is no bipartisan cooperation, America is unpopular on the world scene and we have a President with some of the lowest approval numbers in history.

And change has already happened! Before a new President is elected change has happened. It has happened with the Republican nominee for President being John McCain – the oldest Presidential nominee in history. That old line of mine that there are three stages in life: youth, middle age and 'you're looking good,' takes on new meaning with a 72 year old running for President! He really looks good ... and his mother - 96 years old - looks even better! Change took place with Hillary Clinton coming close to receiving the presidential nomination and Sarah Palin receiving the Vice Presidential nomination ... this in a country where it wasn't that long ago that women didn't even have a vote! With Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin and so many others like them in America, and in Israel with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Speaker of the Knesset and the expected next Prime Minister all being women - we men now have to accept that there is some truth to what Jack Nicholson once said about women: "They're smarter than us, they're stronger than us and they don't play fair."

But the biggest change comes with the Democratic Presidential nominee being Barack Obama. This is truly historic! Obama won the Democratic primary in Alabama! Mention Alabama to anyone my age and you can't help but picture images of George Wallace and Bull Connors with police dogs and blacks being beaten and attacked. And now ... a man whose skin is black is a candidate for the Presidency of the United States. What a powerful message this

sends to Americans, to the world. As Leon Weiseltier wrote in the *New Republic*: “The question is no longer whether a black man can run for President. The question now is whether to vote for him.”

Yes, the times they are a-changing! And not just in America. This year there has been a change in leadership in England, France, Germany, and Italy. It's a new millennium and we seem to be living through an era of some of the greatest changes in history. The way we look back in awe at the names of Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell and Orville Wright ... for centuries to come people will look back in awe at the names of Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Sergey Brin. From Amazon and E-bay, to Google and gigabytes, to WiFi and iPhone ... change is taking place overnight, and we want it and we applaud it and we ask for more. And we are getting it ... like it or not, the crisis on Wall Street is going to bring changes to our life-style on Main Street ... ready or not! Indeed, all of my High Holiday sermons will focus on change because change is in the air all over the world ... all over except in one place. And that is in the *Jewish* world. While the buzzword the world over seems to be that of ‘change,’ the big word in the Jewish world is that of ‘continuity.’ That's the buzzword, the selling point, the bottom line, of all appeals: “Jewish continuity.” Put those words into Google and you'll find 36,800 web pages! “Jewish continuity,” the most oft-used words in the Jewish world today, and also the most dangerous. Sure, continuity is good when used as a code word for tradition, for a chain linking the generations. But it is dangerous when it is understood to mean more of the same, keeping things as they are, doing things as we've always done them! We have to learn that continuing the same knee-jerk reactions to issues as we've done in the past does not serve us well in the present and future.

In the early 1950's a commission was put together to determine whether it really made sense for there to be three Jewish defense agencies – the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, and the American Jewish Congress. After all, they were all doing the same thing, it was costing a lot of money, and it was felt that in light of the Holocaust Jews were more accepted in America. The commission came back with the report to merge the three agencies into one. And, of course, it was never implemented. Unlike The March of Dimes, which after polio was basically eradicated, changed and reinvented itself into an organization that works for research on maternal health, The Jewish defense agencies, rejecting change, decided to just keep on fighting those anti-Semites. And here it is more than half a century later, Jews have become accepted at the highest levels of society; a Jew has been a candidate for Vice President of the United States ... two Jews sit on the Supreme Court ... a Jew is now the Attorney General ... thirteen Jews are Senators ... thirty are Congressmen ... all numbers way beyond our proportions! Even more, more Americans said they would vote against Mitt Romney because he is a Mormon than said they would vote against Joseph Lieberman because he was a Jew. Did you hear of any calls to establish an Anti-Defamation League for the B'nai Mormons? Even more, even more ... did you know that for the past 30 years one of the U.S. Senators from Minnesota has been Jewish, Boschwitz, then Wellstone, then Coleman! This, in a state of 48,000 Jews amongst 5 million Minnesotans! And the next Senator will also be Jewish because both candidates running for office are Jewish! Amongst the New England blue-bloods, the Boston Red Sox changed the date of their opening game because it conflicted with Pesach and Theo Epstein, the team's General Manager, had to go to his family's Pesach Seder. If you wanted to argue this decision you could go to baseball's Commissioner ... but Bud Selig was going to be at

his family's Seder ... as well as the owners of the San Francisco Giants, Andrew Freedman, and the Pittsburgh Pirates' Barney Dreyfuss, and the Milwaukee Braves' Emil Fuchs, and the Houston Expos' Charles Bronfman, the New York Mets' Freddie Wilpon and the Chicago White Sox Jerry Reinsdorf ... all Jews, proving the truth once again that here in America Jews may not play for many sports teams, but Jews sure *own* many teams! Even more ... even more ... last December I attended the White House Chanukah party, and I stood in the same room with the President of the United States listening to the U.S. Marine Band playing "I Had a Little Dreidel." And what have we Jews done in reaction to all this? We went and created a fourth Jewish defense agency – the Simon Wiesenthal Center to fight the anti-Semites! Sure, there are anti-Semites – always have been and always will be. Sure, there is a problem of anti-Semitism on some of the streets of Europe. And sure, even here some of them don't like us. But then again, we don't like some of them. More important, there is no anti-Semitism in any area of our government. Here it is, our country is in the midst of one of the gravest economic crisis in our history and the House of Representatives takes a two-day recess for Rosh Hashana... and everybody understands. We Jews are accepted but that doesn't stop the Jewish Defense Agencies from spending \$130 million a year fighting the anti-Semites! According to the Anti-Defamation League, there were 1,554 anti-semitic incidents reported in the United States last year. That comes out on average to \$83,655 per incident that these organizations are spending. Why don't they just give the money to the anti-Semites and buy them off!

Let me tell you a little something about the country in which we live. We are in the midst of a severe economic crisis. Historically, Jews have always been blamed for economic woes with the accusation that Jews control the world's economy, that Jews control the banks, that Jews only care about money. Well, let me tell you about the country in which we live. Who did George Bush appoint to head the World Bank? A man by the name of Robert Zoellick ... a Jew. And who did he replace? Paul Wolfowitz ... a Jew. And who did the President of the United States appoint to head the Federal Reserve? Ben Bernanke ... a Jew. And who did he replace? Alan Greenspan ... a Jew. Four of the most significant and important appointments in regard to money and finances have been made to Jews. In some ways major control of the American economy and the world's economy are, in fact, in the hands of Jews. Did you know that? Did you hear any complaints in our country about this? Were there any editorials or outcries or protests that Jews are taking over the world? That it's all our fault? Except for some lunatic fringe websites, nobody seems to see anything unusual about this. And yet, every week we get envelopes from the Jewish defense agencies for more and more money to fight the anti-Semites – money that could be used to make it possible for every Jewish child to have a day school education. There are so many families that simply can't afford to give their children the most intensive and meaningful Jewish education. You do the math ... 2-3 children can break the bank. And what do we Jews, calling for continuity, do to help them? We fight the anti-Semites!

And perhaps even worse than that ... not only are we not providing Jewish children with the Jewish education they deserve, I fear that Jewish children – in looking at the money we are spending fighting the anti-Semites – think that we have lost our minds. No colleges or universities have had their doors closed to them because they are Jewish. No job opportunities have been denied them because they are Jews. Quite the contrary, the non-Jews they know not only do not hate them, they want to marry them!

We have got to start changing how the Jewish people operate if we want to keep our children connected. The way we have operated did not engage, Jewishly, many of our generation and seems to be “turning off” more and more of the next generation. And we can’t afford that! We live in a world where people are changing everything, including their religion. An important Pew research poll this year revealed that 47% of the American people have changed their religious affiliation during the course of their lifetime. That is an incredible number! People are no longer willing to follow a particular religion just because their parents did! It’s now an open marketplace of pick and choose ... and many of our children are not choosing another religion, they are just choosing to be nothing.

And so, we have to ask ourselves: when everything else seems to be changing around us, can we just keep on doing things the same way, or are there things that we can change that will show our children that being Jewish is something special, something unique ... that being a Jew brings with it a heritage and tradition that is worth emulating. I don’t know! I worry ... I worry what our children think of our people and our behavior. Does it make them proud, or is it sometimes downright embarrassing? Let me give you a few examples.

This year when Israel celebrated its 60th anniversary, I delivered a sermon about Barbara Streisand. Shimon Peres, the President of Israel, personally invited her to perform at Israel’s gala 60th anniversary celebration to sing Aveinu Malkeinu, and she accepted. But she did not show up! While newspapers and gossip columnists wondered why she cancelled, I wondered: why was she invited? The Israeli newspapers quoted President Peres as saying that he had heard many Cantors “but none who could sing Avinu Malkeinu like Streisand.” Obviously, President Peres has never heard *our* Chazzan ... and I think had they given Avi Albrecht enough time, he could have learned the words and tune for Avinu Malkeinu! But Peres went on to say regarding the Streisand invitation, “After 60 years it is time to say thanks for being on our side.” So, I ask you: What does it mean to be “on our side?” Barbara Streisand was invited to Israel to sing at its 60th anniversary ... she didn’t show up. And I tell you: that should not have been a surprise. I know of no public visit Streisand has ever made to Israel, ever! She would do well to listen to the words of another entertainer just as popular as she is who said, “I’ve heard so many great things about Tel Aviv and Israel, but hearing is one thing ... and experiencing it for yourself is another.” Thus spoke Paul McCartney who gave a concert in Israel last week, despite threats on his life! If you Google “Barbara Streisand” just about the only thing associating her with Israel was 30 years ago, at Israel’s 30th anniversary she sang at an Israel celebration ... in California! 30 years ago everybody was singing for Israel! 30 years ago Israel was basking in the glory of the Six Day War and having survived the Yom Kippur War and the glorious rescue at Entebbe. Israel had lots of friends then. Since then, Barbara Streisand seems to have lost her voice when it comes to Israel. Two years ago during the war in Lebanon, 85 high profile Hollywood celebrities took out a full page ad in the *Los Angeles Times* condemning Hezbollah and Hamas for their terror attacks on Israel. Among those who signed were: Nicole Kidman, Bruce Willis, Danny DiVito, Sylvester Stallone ... but Barbara Streisand didn’t sign. In fact, with the exception of Michael Douglas, not a single Jewish Hollywood personality signed! Also in honor of Israel’s 60th anniversary, this year’s Israeli Film Festival, held in Los Angeles, honored Carl Riener and his son, Rob. One newspaper correspondent made the mistake of asking them why they were being honored. Carl Riener replied, “When you get old, people want to give you awards. We’ve never been to Israel and we don’t really have much of a connection.” So you tell

me ... why did the Israeli Film Festival honor them? And then we wonder why our children don't feel the connection to Israel that we do. We Jews idolize these people, saying how proud we are that they are Jewish. And you know what? Our kids become Jewish just like they are ... with no commitment, no connection, no aspect of being Jewish having any impact on their lives.

And it starts even earlier ... it starts when our children enter the adult congregation of Israel at their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Bar and Bat Mitzvahs have undergone quite a change, in case you haven't noticed. And it's more than just the fact that the menu has changed ... from pickled herring to sushi. (I always wonder if Japanese, at their rites of passage, serve gefilte fish.) But that's not the problem. The problem is the theme. Today Jewish parents have to confront the issue of what is to be the *theme* of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah? It used to be that the theme was very obvious ... the theme was a child was becoming an adult in the eyes of Jewish law; that the child was becoming a responsible Jew. And I still stick to that theme when I address parents in preparing for their child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Remember, I tell them, this is a major Jewish experience in their lives ... there is the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, there is their wedding and there is the funeral. These are defining moments in the life of a Jew, so make sure it has meaning as a Jew. And I tell parents that it doesn't matter whether you keep kosher or not, but at this one event – the Bar or Bat Mitzvah – make it kosher, show that becoming a Jew means something, and you are sensitive to friends and family who keep kosher and don't want them to come to a religious celebration where a vegetarian substitute has to be provided for them. You don't want them to feel that they are being 'punished' for keeping Jewish law. And parents look at me like I'm crazy, because my theme is not their theme ... their theme is the Orioles, or the Ravens or Wonderwoman or Las Vegas with top entertainers. That's what's important ... that's what counts! Don't take my word for it ... you all know I'm just an old fashioned rabbi who is totally 'out of it.' Listen to someone whom our children look up to ... his name is Snoop Dogg and he writes: "I performed at a Bar Mitzvah and I'm telling you, man, these little (blank blanks) they were singing my (blank), they were cussing and singing the dirty version. I'm talking about 12 and 13 year old little white kids singing this real 'gangsta' (blank). Man, I was shocked. I just gave them the mike and let them (blank) go." Such nachas ... such Yiddishe nachas! Snoop Doggy Dogg was shocked ... but we're not! Our Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations have become the object of ridicule in books and movies, and we just continue making ourselves look foolish. I read of a Bar Mitzvah – and this is true, I'm not creative enough to make this up – where the theme was The Terminator. The Bar Mitzvah boy's name was Josh and the invitation was a video tape of him dressing like the Terminator and doing an Arnold Schwarzenegger impression saying, "Come to my Bar Mitzvah, or else!" Listen to one mother's description of what happened:

"When I dropped William off at the five-star hotel ballroom everything was decorated to look like metal. There were robots standing guard with blinking eyes and moving arms; destroyed tanks and cars strewn about which were rented from a movie prop house, and inflatable jungle gyms and slides all in camouflage colors. There was even a life-sized Arnold Schwarzenegger cutout for guests to sign. After the *aliyah latorah*, Josh made his grand entrance to a T2 motorcycle – his Bar Mitzvah gift from his parents! During the traditional candle-lighting ceremony, Josh lit 13 candles with a butane lighter shaped like a Terminator rifle."

I'm sure that Bar Mitzvah experience ... that entering into the adult congregation of Israel ... must have made a lasting impression on Josh's life as a Jew. I have a feeling that as a Jew, all we can say to Josh is: Hasta la vista, baby!

And one more example of how continuing to do "business as usual" undermines the fiber of the Jewish people. In some ways, it is the most shameful thing that has occurred within the Jewish community in recent years. I am referring to the announcement that government authorities had conducted the largest arrest of illegal immigration in American history. And it took place at Agriprocessors, the largest kosher slaughtering house in the United States. The news was on the front pages of newspapers all across the country. And while Jews should have bowed their heads in shame, instead we found spokespeople for major Jewish organizations defending the slaughter house! The head of the Young Israel movement gave them a clean bill of health, while the spokesman for the Agudah attacked not the owners of the slaughterhouse, but those Jews who were criticizing them, saying that the owner was entitled to the benefit of the doubt, and had not been found guilty yet. That may be true; no trial has taken place yet. But do you know some of the things Agriprocessors is charged with? Health and safety laws were violated, unsafe working conditions, substandard housing, violation of child labor laws ... 13 year old children were being forced to work 18 hours a day, being paid \$5 an hour; a "crack" laboratory was being run at the plant; false identification cards were issued, exposure to hazardous chemicals. They were charged with 9,000 violations of Iowa's Child Labor Laws! 9,000!

This is a company whose Chasidic owner, Abraham Rubashkin, has been cited by the National Labor Relations Board and was involved in a health care scandal. Most every member of his family – two sons and a son-in-law – have been indicted or convicted for some illegal activity over the years. These are the people in whose hands we put the good name of the Jewish people? These are the people we trust with one of our most sacred rituals?

And then the audacity of many rabbis saying: But this doesn't mean the meat isn't kosher ... this doesn't mean we still can't use that slaughtering house. If we stop, the price of kosher meat will go up! It doesn't matter what happened with the plant's workers ... the meat is kosher! That attitude is really going to encourage the next generation to want to buy into the Jewish way of life! In fact, the attitude goes so counter to Jewish belief. It is Rav – the codifier of the Talmud – who stated that from the perspective of God, it makes no difference "whether a man kills an animal by the throat or by the nape of its neck ... the whole purpose of the commandments was to refine humanity." Yes, that is the whole purpose of Judaism – to refine humanity, to teach humanity decency and menschlichkeit. But that is not the focus of Judaism today ... today, from Barbara Streisand to The Terminator to kosher slaughtering ... the focus has turned to materialism and commercialism and Hollywood and glamour. What happened to scholarship and learning and piety and prayer and mitzvot? So, if our children ask: why be Jewish? It is understandable. We live in America and you can be anything you want.

Don't get me wrong, those in the know – rabbis and laymen alike – are trying to counter all this, to change all this. But where are they looking to find the answers? They are looking at Evangelical churches, at mega churches that are bringing in people by the thousands and seeing what we can learn from them. The *Jewish Times* had a cover story on what the Jewish

community can learn from Chicago's highly successful Willow Creek Community Church. Just about the same time that cover story appeared, *Time Magazine* had a story listing ten ideas that are changing the world. And one of the ten was the 're-Judaizing' of Jesus. Just when Christians are starting to understand that Jesus was a Jew, we Jews are starting to go to Christian churches to find out how to kick-start our religion. Don't we understand that in so doing we are telling our children that when it comes to religion, it's all a matter of marketing ... it has nothing to do with theology. And, in this marketplace of ideas won't some of our Jewish children be tempted to say: why do I have to go to the cheap imitation when I can be going to the real thing? John Hagee, the controversial Christian evangelist, may have gotten himself into plenty of hot water for saying that God brought about the Holocaust so that the Jews should go to Israel, but he was right on target when he said that if rabbis would put more emphasis on putting Jewish children into Jewish schools, young Jews would never want to become Christians.

Yes, the responsibility is on us ... rabbis and laymen alike – to bring about the changes that can bring our children, and indeed, more of you, to feel connected and committed to the Jewish people. Changes must be made, but let us not fall for changes that are simply cheap imitations or that can backfire on us. I don't know whether to laugh or cry when I read of synagogues trying gimmicks like Rock services or Caribbean services, gospel services and pet services, with rabbis officiating at pet funerals and group 'bark mitzvahs.' In the words of the *Wall Street Journal*, "Congregants at Temple Beth Shir Shalom in Santa Monica, California have an animal prayer sung to the tune of 'Fiddler on the Roof: May our God protect and defend you, may God always shield you from fleas.' I'm telling you, our religion is going to the dogs! Synagogues have gospel choirs coming to lead the service in singing Ein Kelokeynu. Believe me, I know the power of a gospel service. My bothers and I once took a Sunday morning tour of gospel Harlem and we sat in the balcony of one church and couldn't help but get caught up in the mood. We stood as the congregation stood and sang and clapped. And the person next to me was singing at the top of his lungs the words, "I'm so glad I've got Jesus in my life." And I turned and I saw it was my brother, Saul, singing! Yes, the singing is inspiring and uplifting, but doesn't anyone see anything wrong with a church choir singing in a synagogue the words of Ein Kelokeynu, which means "there is no God like our God."

Oh, we've got to change. And thank God there are Federations like ours and foundations like those of Bronfman and Wexner and others which are strong advocates for change and fund new, innovative programs. But change doesn't always mean doing something new. Sometimes it means doing something old. The changes being called for on Wall Street are really a call to returning to doing business the way it *used* to be done: with standards and accounting and responsibility. Similarly, our people can learn a lesson from Howard Schultz, the founder and chairman of Starbucks. Starbucks is a great American success story ... it went from 1000 stores to 13,000 stores in one decade and offered good surroundings with music, a place to meet and get people to pay \$4 for a cup of coffee by calling it a "grande." But Starbucks has run into trouble. Yes, the economy is at fault, but Howard Schultz realized that Starbucks was also at fault. Schultz realized that much of what they had added to Starbucks was, in his words, "the watering down of the Starbucks experience." He noted how coffee that used to be made by hand was now being made by an automatic espresso machine. That "flavor locked packaging" had replaced the actual roasting of coffee beans, that the machines were preventing customers from seeing their mochas made, that automation had removed the aroma from Starbucks. Andrew

Silow-Carroll, writing in *The New Jersey Jewish Times*, took note of how closely this experience mirrored the Jewish experience here in America. The American Jewish community has grown successful, but as Schultz wrote about the Starbucks stores, we “no longer have the soul of the past.” We have watered down the Jewish tradition and robbed it of its aroma. Schultz could be speaking of the American Jewish community when in speaking of Starbucks, he said, “We desperately need to look into the mirror and realize that it is time to get back to the core and make changes necessary to evoke the heritage, tradition and passion that we all have for the true Starbucks experience.”

He’s right, you know, and I can prove it. Some of the most successful new, innovative programs in the Jewish community have been the ones that bring us back to our roots. You want to get our children to care about Israel, you don’t have to try fancy gimmicks, just take them there. And that’s what Birthright Israel has done. You want to get our children to understand the depths of the Holocaust? Don’t give them a multi-media presentation, just take them to Poland and show them. And that’s what the March of the Living has done. You want to better educate our children Jewishly? It’s not a matter of getting them new software, it’s a matter of reaching their hard drive. And that’s what Federations across the country and the Weinberg Foundation in our community have done in providing scholarships to day schools.

Yes, it’s a new changing world, but it still yearns for the old-time religion. And that can only be achieved by returning to our roots. And that’s what I want to ask each and every one of you to do in this New Year that beckons. I want you to do teshuvah ... I want you to change as a Jew. And I don’t ask you to do anything new, I ask you to do something old ... something you’ve done in the past but for one reason or another, stopped doing. For some of you it might mean lighting candles once again. For others it might mean reciting a blessing once again. For still others it might mean coming to a class on Judaism once again. You know, you didn’t learn everything you needed to know about Judaism in Hebrew School! For some of you it might mean putting money in a charity box once again. For others it might mean being honest once again. We all started off that way! You used to come for Kaddish, Yizkor and Yahrzeit. Why did you stop? Some of you used to come to services more often. Come on back! For all of you it will mean becoming a committed Jew once again ... little by little, yiddel by yiddel.

And if you can’t think of something you once did Jewishly that you could do again, let me help you. I started this sermon by telling of the blessing we recite if we haven’t seen a person for a year; thanking God for reviving the dead. But you know, there is a prayer we are supposed to recite every morning thanking God for reviving *us*. It’s the first prayer each of us were taught ... the words: “*Modeh ani lefanecha melech chai v’kayom sh-hechezarto bi nishmati b’chemlah rabbah emunatecha* – Thank you, living and eternal King, for mercifully returning my soul within me. Great is your faithfulness.” With all of the chaos enveloping us these days, what a beautiful way to start the day. I recently read of an incredible experience regarding this prayer. There was a convention of neurologists from all over the world, and one of the main topics was the phenomenon of people fainting upon getting up from bed. One of the speakers said that study and investigation showed that the fainting is caused by the sharp transfer between lying down and standing up. She said it takes 12 seconds for the blood to flow from the feet to the brain and when a person stands up upon waking up, the blood gets thrown to the brain too quickly and the result is fainting. So she suggested that each person, upon waking up, should sit

on the bed and count slowly until 12 to avoid dizziness, weakness and/or fainting. Everyone applauded her presentation. But another professor, a religious Jew, asked for permission to speak. He said, “We Jews have a tradition which is thousands of years old ... to say a prayer of thanks to God for meriting us to wake up healthy and whole. The prayer is the Modeh Ani, and it is supposed to be recited when one is still on the bed and sitting down. The prayer has twelve words in it, and if you say it slowly, with concentration, it takes exactly 12 seconds to say it.”

12 words in 12 seconds. Can you find 12 seconds in your day to thank God? Can you get yourself to say the Modeh Ani in the morning? We all said it at some time ... why you stopped, I don't know. But you can remember when you started doing it once again. Let it be today. I've printed up cards that our ushers will be happy to give you on the way out with these simple, but meaningful and beautiful words that remind us that in a world of constant change, God is linked to us and we are linked to God ... who can help us change for the better.

With pride in our past and great hope for our future, with the hopes for nachas, genuine Yiddishe nachas, let us begin this year and every year, this day and every day, proudly proclaiming: “*Modeh ani lefanecha melech chai v'kayom sh-hechezarto bi nishmati b'chemlah rabbah emunatacha* – Thank You, O living and eternal King, for mercifully returning my soul within me, abundant is your faithfulness.” Amen.

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