

Remarks for Burn the Mortgage Celebration

Rabbi Ari Sunshine

Congregation Shearith Israel

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*Yashar koach* and thank you Mitchell, to you and your whole family, and to your father Peter of blessed memory, for your collective generosity and inspiration that helped us reach this day. Friends, this is such a special evening for our community. In just a few minutes, we'll be heading outside to the Cohen, Small, Waldman Chapel Courtyard to finally burn our mortgage documents after all these years and watch them go up in smoke. In this context I can't help but think about two other instances in our tradition of things going up in flames, the first of which was when our teacher Moses encountered a Burning Bush which, miraculously, was not consumed, and the second of which is the candles of the menorah, which we'll begin lighting in a little over a week as we commence our annual celebration of Hanukkah. To me, the symbolic contrast between these examples is powerful. When it comes to burning the mortgage, it was our persistent resolve as a community and the dedication of so many leaders and generous donors throughout the years, through highs and lows, that has finally brought us to this point when we have made our mortgage disappear. Conversely, the Burning Bush and the candles of the menorah remind us that our Jewish people, vibrant Jewish life, and our faith in God, can never be brought low or extinguished. We're the one night's worth of oil that has burned for eight nights and almost 2200 years since. And now, unencumbered by our past debt obligations, our Shearith community and family can continue moving forward with our flame burning brightly. We have so much to look forward to, including but not limited to:

--the opening in the next several months of the David A. Segal z"l Family Simcha Play Center

--the continued growth of our Family Center and the burgeoning next generation and generations of our Shearith family

--our new proposed model of rabbinic leadership for our future

--a congregational family that rallies when needed to offer comfort and warmth for those who have suffered loss or are in pain, and also celebrates wholeheartedly together for happy occasions such as this one and many other simchas

--vibrant activities, learning, and engagement in our shul across all age ranges and demographics

--and soon, a robust effort to grow our Shearith Israel Foundation leading up to our synagogue's 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.

There is much to be proud of, and much excitement that lies ahead. I'm thrilled and honored to be a part of this very special congregational family and am grateful that we are able to gather and rejoice tonight in this long-awaited present moment as we anticipate our bright future. In that spirit of gratitude, I invite you to join in with us as we thank God for reaching this milestone, as we sing the blessing of the Shehechyanu together.

*(WE SING TOGETHER)*

Praised are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has kept us in life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this wonderful and sanctified occasion of retiring our mortgage. AMEN!!!

Now, please join us as we walk around the corner and outside into the courtyard so we can make it official! 😊