S'lichot 5759

Dan Moskovitz, Kol Tikvah

When the great Rabbi Israel Ball Shem-Tov, saw misfortune threatening the Jewish people, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Later when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I don not know how to light the fire but I am still able to say a prayer."

And again, the miracle would be accomplished, the Jewish people would be saved.

Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say; "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient."

It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.

The it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God. "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer. I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient.

And it was sufficient.

Listen, God, Tonight as our congregation comes together one week before our holiest of days we lift our voices in a Kol Tikvah, in one voice of hope and prayer. Listen God as we tell the story of our people, our congregation and our community over this past year.

For many of us it has been a year since we spoke with you last. For others it has now become a regular occurrence. We have found companionship and community by attending services. The words of prayer come more easily to our lips. We sing the melodies without looking at the page, we are at home in our synagogue and we greet these High Holy Days as a continuation of a conversation with you that we enter into on regular occasion. For others walking into this sanctuary tonight reminds just how long it has been. Who's this young Rabbi, when did that banner go up, I don't recognize than melody. Yet with all that seems unfamiliar, their is much that is familiar. A certain sense of obligation and responsibility wells up in each of us this time of year, we know that on these high holy days we must be in shul, we must be there for our community and for our selves. Listen to our voices God as we tell our story.

Since last year many of us have lost ones dear to us. They used to hold our hand in services, hands that would zip up our dress, straighten out our tie, tie our shoes. Their lives were a blessing, and we carry their memory with us, especially tonight. Our tradition teaches that the souls of the righteous, the tzadikim sit beside you on a thrown in heaven, they assist you in your judgements during these holiest of days. We are not alone then, it comforts us to know that our beloved's soul is still looking out for us and caring for us all the days of our life. Listen our story God, sense our tears as we close a chapter in our story.

It has been a year since we spoke to you last, and in that time whole new chapters have been written. We have added to our families, we have new pictures in our wallets, new grandchildren, new children, a brother in law, a sister in law. Last year we took up only one row in the sanctuary, this year we fill nearly two. We rejoice with one another over these new members of our congregation, we join

together in that kol tikvah, that voice of hope that the stories they will tell, and the chapters they will write will be filled with safety and health. We pray that they may know in their own lives the joy and happiness they bring to ours by their presence here tonight. Listen to our story God, so many new names, so many new faces, thank you for adding these people to our lives.

God, it has been a year since we spoke to you last. In that time we have moved homes and jobs, if you came looking for us this past year God you wouldn't know where to find us as we are no longer where we were, in fact we might not be where we are now for very much longer. We have been constantly on the move God, movers and shakers, our area codes have changed, our zip codes have changed, we have changed. We are busier than we have ever been, we are wired and wireless. We can call china from the 405 freeway, but we don't have time to call our mother. We can nuke a 5 course meal in 3 and a half minutes in our microwaves, but we don't have time for shabbat dinner together with our family. Listen carefully to our story God, time is money and we won't have time to repeat it. Slow us down God, unplug us, reduce our bandwidth, our high speed access. We want slower speeds, we want it to take longer, help us to download and unload for time with our families, our friends, our spouses, ourselves.

It has been a year since we spoke to you last. In that time we have known sickness and health. Some of us are stronger than we ever were God, we have lost weight, gained strength, endurance, we work out, we tai boa, we follow our doctor's orders and now we are doing much better. But God, still some of us are not so good, we are in pain, and we are scared. Things hurt and don't work as well as they used to. We are following doctor's orders but its not helping, or its not helping enough. Listen to our story God, ailments and diseases that were once part

of another person's story are now part of ours, we need healing God, we need re'fuah, we need renewal.

It has been a year since we spoke to you last. In that time our community, our nation and our world has experience tragedy and disaster, both by natures hand and the hands our fellow human beings. Earthquakes, floods, fires, violent storms, endless droughts. Our story as a people is filled with such calamities, we call them natural disasters, but God aren't you present in nature as well? Help us heal our world as you do our lives, help us care for your Gan Eden, the paradise you created, help us not to abuse it, destroy it, cloud and clutter it with waste and toxins.

But God, our story this year is also not at all different than it was last year. We are still killing each other, we have still not learned to respect our differences, our individuality. We all want respect, but none of us get any, we say stop the violence with a gun in our hands, with fists clenched in rage. This is the part of our story that seems to be written in indelible ink, etched in stone than the march of time, the changing of the calendars never seems to change. God help us change the ending of this chapter in our book, help us re-write our history as a civilization so than we can be more civilized, more civil. Listen to our story God, we are struggling to get along with each other, help us be up to the challenge, teach us so that our struggles are not <u>with</u> each other, but how to be better <u>to</u> each other.

God we don't know the special place so we have come here to your house of prayer. We don't know how to build the fire, but one burns in our soul, we don't remember the prayer, but the words we spoke tonight are a beginning. And God this is our story, the story of our people, our congregation as we struggle to make sense out of life and loss, health and sickness, natures beauty and natures rage, man's humanity and inhumanity. Listen to our story God, sh'ma koleinu, hear our prayer.