

History of the Kol Nidrei Appeal

By Cantor Olivia Brodsky and Rabbi Joshua Stanton

In October 1916, [Rabbi Joseph Silverman of Temple Emanu-El](#) in the City of New York offered an appeal on the eve of Yom Kippur “to aid Jewish sufferers” amid the travails of World War I. The response he received was so significant in support of Jews around the world, that other organizations and communities immediately followed suit. They did so in support of the modern State of Israel, resettling refugees, and synagogue infrastructure.

More important than how the Kol Nidrei Appeal began is why it has had such an impact. On Kol Nidre, we stand and look into the *aron* – which means both holy ark and casket. We may don white or forego fine clothing to show humility. Many will not eat or drink after Kol Nidre ascends. It is, according to Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, as though we are attending our own funerals. We encounter fully the good that we have done, as well as that which we would want to change while we still have time. Then we emerge the following evening to life renewed; a second chance filled with possibility.

The Kol Nidrei appeal adds to the emotional cadence of Yom Kippur in a beautiful way. It is not, as some fear, intended to imbue even the holiest night of the year with a sense of materialism. Rather, it enables us to do good in our community so that it can be part of our living legacies – legacies which we behold and enjoy while we are still alive. Much as we might donate in memory of one who has passed, we give out of a love for each other and ourselves on an evening that we conceive of as our own, collective funeral.

Both of us give personally to the Kol Nidrei Appeal to the fullest extent that we are able. We give so that our community may live and thrive, whatever may transpire in the year ahead. We do so because of our faith in East End Temple’s future and because it embodies our values and aspirations. Our gifts are a token of gratitude for our lives. May we feel called to give out of love for each other and our lives, as we approach this sacred evening. Should you feel so moved, kindly contribute beyond your existing Community Commitment to the Kol Nidrei Appeal by [clicking here](#). We are grateful for your generosity.