

Thank you, Rabbi Jason and Susan, for inviting me to speak today about what JCP means to me and my family.

Today we will read from the Torah about the High Priest's preparations for Yom Kippur in the ancient temple in Jerusalem. It is a dry read, even by Leviticus standards: The priest shall don a tunic. Not just any tunic, a linen tunic. He must wear it atop of linen underpants. And so on.

For most of us, rule-filled narratives like this don't channel our Jewish imaginations. Yet even though I've never seen the sacrifice of a live bull--that's what the priest is getting all dressed up for, by the way--as I stand here today to tell you my "JCP Story," it is rules like these that serve as my foil.

I was raised Orthodox in Los Angeles and New York City. My husband, Jonathan, grew up similarly in New Jersey. We were part of a warm and rich community bound together, most notably, by ritual observance. What to wear, when to eat, how even to tie your shoes (which, if you're interested, is right first, then left, then laces...).

Ours was also a community united by tragedy. Like many people I knew, all of my grandparents survived the Holocaust, and their experiences and sacrifices reinforced the existential importance of the "rules."

My upbringing could thus best be described as "immersed in Judaism," but what I was most attracted to was the ways in which Judaism interacted with the larger world. The talmudic concept of *tikkun olam*, which asks Jews to literally "repair the world," is a thrilling one, especially for those of us who believe that Jewish texts, values, and experiences have something to say to the broader world. This was certainly something I was taught, but it was not central to our observance.

So as I got older, I became more pluralistic. I studied history, art history, and French. I lived abroad. Went to law school, where I met Jonathan. I made lots of friends with Jews and non-Jews alike who had different formative experiences. As a result, my sectarian understanding of community began to evolve.

Eventually I went to work in government, focusing on counterterrorism and working right near ground zero. The terrible attacks of 9/11, which I later learned played a big part in the formation of JCP, expanded the concept of community for the entire nation. We were all Americans that day in a way that has unfortunately become fleeting. That JCP stepped into that void says a lot about the unique way JCP expresses the concepts of Jewishness and community.

As an adult, I've come to understand personal meaning through concentric circles of community. We live in New York City and most of us in Lower Manhattan. These are important associations for all of us. I am also a member of our local Community Board, which provides an often cantankerous forum for those who live *near* each other to find ways to live *with* each other, and I'm often amazed at what is accomplished.

But the JCP community is at the center of my circles. We started as a family at JCPlay with our son Gabriel, who is now in the Sun Room. Our daughter Clara is starting JCPlay this fall. Last spring, every time I told Gabriel "No," which happened a lot, I heard back in song "No, No, No, I will not let you go." That little pharaoh in training **is JCP**.

But JCP is so much more than just a nursery school, a high holiday synagogue, or a community center. No sooner had Hurricane Sandy hit, with power out in many of our homes, did JCP try to get in touch with community members to go help those in need. Those were some of the very first emails I received when I re-charged my phone. That's tikkun olam and **that's JCP**.

We have a public sukkah on Duane Street. That's no novel thing In NYC. But when we close down the street for our annual Sukkot block party, we literally invite the whole Tribeca community. It is not an event *for* us--the JCP community--but it is one *by* us. **That's JCP.**

We lit an enormous menorah in Washington Market park last year for all of downtown to see. It was raining, but we were all singing and socializing and proclaiming our pride in who we are and the organization we love. **That's JCP.**

Those are some of the experiences that have helped shape living Jewishly with JCP for me and my family. But what do I hope for the future? I'd like JCP to have its own permanent home to better serve the local Jewish community as well as the downtown community as a whole. I'd love to see more interaction between these two communities. And I'd like to see JCP have a national impact, as a model for other urban centers.

Thinking about this communal future makes me think about the past, to an amazing speech delivered in 1933 by the Grand Rabbi of Munkacz, Hungary on the occasion of his daughter's wedding. The speech is available on YouTube and, as I watch, I scan the crowd looking for the familiar face of my grandfather who was was a student at the yeshiva in those years. More than 20,000 people attended the wedding and heard the Grand Rabbi deliver a fiery address denouncing secular and assimilated Judaism in America as futureless. We, of course, all know the tragedy that befell the European Jewish community a decade later.

I know that the Grand Rabbi would not approve of the progressive Yom Kippur service we are having today. But I believe that JCP has begun to lay down the roots for a new kind of Jewish-American community that will enable us to pass to our children a unique brand of authentic, accepting, and experiential judaism that will indelibly speak to both Jewish values and

the Jewish obligation to repair the world. **That's a great community and that's JCP.**

Thank you for the chance to share my story. May we all be blessed to have our names and the names of our loved ones sealed in the book of life.