

## **ROB'S PRIMER FOR SURVIVING TOUGH TIMES AND WHY WE NEED TO OPEN OUR WALLETS FOR CBS**

I'm working on a short self-help manual, called, "Rob's Primer for Surviving Tough Times". We all have periods in our lives when we face extraordinary challenges. The year 5769 was such a period for me.

In the last year, death rang the bell in our home twice. First, for my sister, Jil, who died last March, at far too young an age. Second, for my mother, Charlotte. During January and February, after my sister's cancer metastasized into and damaged her brain, she and my mother lived down the hallway from one another at the Kline Galland Home, both barely coherent. It was bizarrely convenient, visiting the remnants of my childhood family in rooms 70 feet apart.

While my sister and mother were dying, my family's real estate development lending business was decimated. Until 2008, our business had made money every year since my father and I started it 25 years earlier.

My personal and career crises have tested me like never before in my life. In responding to these challenges, here's Rob's Primer for Surviving Tough Times:

Step 1.           **Develop a loving, healthy family life.** The most important step for me was to marry the cellist we heard earlier this evening, and to have three wonderful children. That and have the good fortune to have had loving, inspirational parents.

Step 2.           **Find a great synagogue and participate.** In 1982, partly due to an accident of geography because we lived a

few blocks from the synagogue, my future wife, Kathleen, decided that Rabbi Ira Stone would be her guide and that Beth Shalom would be the place she became Jewish. As a Reform Jew I resisted what seemed to be excessive observance, but joined her in the synagogue course, “A Year of Living Jewishly”. After Kathleen became Jewish, we officially joined the congregation, and were warmly welcomed by the Beckers, Rosenzweigs, Steifels, Shapiros, Migdals, Weinbergs, Starins, Erlitzs and many others, some of the early pillars of the congregation. We married soon thereafter, and introduced our three children, Samara, Philip and Harry to the world through the synagogue. We joined a synagogue-organized Havurah which included the Gussins and Weses, Our children participated in Prosdor, joined USY and celebrated b’nai mitzvah at the shul. In the 80’s, Kathleen joined a raucous group of actors/Jewish educators with a sense of humor including Mark Dykan (of blessed memory) and Etana, Michael Scherer and Jason Kintzer who performed schtick on Purim and other holidays and which group continues with new energy, actors and inspiration today. I also experienced CBS board service vicariously through Kathleen, who became board president in the 90’s.

Step 3.           **Open yourself to accept support from the community:** When my sister Jil was sick, people called, friends visited, we were fed, supported, loved. My brother-in-law and nieces were also supported, as extended Beth Shalom mishpocha.

Three months later, as my mother left the Earth, Rabbi Borodin was right there, with kind and wise words, actions and comfort. Again the shul was like a warm blanket on a cold winter night. We were fed, we were comforted. Minyanim were led, our house was filled with support, stories, and love.

Step 4.           **Cherish memories of loved ones, and go out and start making new memories.** I’m working on this.

Step 5.           **Stay married to the cellist.**

Step 6.           **Notwithstanding temptation caused by business pressures, don't lower your ethical/professional standards, because otherwise you won't like the person that does survive.** (Thank you Shelly, for your support in this area.)

Step 7.           **Exercise.** Maimonides was one of the first commentators that explicitly identified exercise as a positive imperative in order to follow the Talmudic directive to "take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously."

Step 8.           **Pay it forward.** Help others through deeds and Tzedakah: Ah, you're thinking, here's the commercial message in this personal story, and you're right. But it's not exactly what you think it is. In the same way that affirming your faith in God in the Kaddish is one of the best ways to move forward from death, giving tzedakah and serving others is a similar but more participatory path to move beyond your own pain, look outward and to affirm life. By acting not in self-interest but in the interest of others, you are adopting the essential quality of God and opening yourself to the abundance of the universe. We're also commanded to do so.

Jewish law makes clear that after our own family, our community institutions must be supported. In the days of the Temple, a census was taken by tallying the shekelim given to support the Temple. In other words, that's how you were counted. It wasn't how much you gave that mattered, but everyone was counted on to give.

I hope you're not experiencing one of life's traumatic periods. Some of you probably are. Here at Beth Shalom, you know that if crisis hits, you, too will be comforted by your friends sitting around you. You, too will be fed if you're sitting shiva. You, too,

will be surrounded by the community which will work very hard to rouse a minyan for kaddish. And you'll be helped in many, many other ways. Maybe your children will take advantage of the Jewish education at the religious school. Maybe your future spouse or son-in-law will become Jewish after attending adult education classes here.

Because of the economic downturn, there are three times the number of congregants who have asked for dues reductions or tuition reductions than in past years. We have fewer new members joining now than last year at this time, and fewer requests for high holiday tickets. We think this is due to the economy -- people are holding on to their resources. The number of congregants needing economic assistance is growing, and it is our job to dig down deep to help them. Some people count on Shabbat kiddush lunch for a good meal during the week. We ought to be able to provide it for them. Why do we need to stretch to help? Because there aren't many of us who are feeling flush these days.

These are challenging times. When life gets tough we all need community more than ever. Please be generous and support your shul community as much as you can.

At this time, I'd ask everyone to please pull out their admission tickets. One of them has dollar gifts, and the other volunteer opportunities. Please hold them in your hand. Now, please fold back the portion indicating the financial gift and the volunteer contributions you can make to the synagogue. After you're done, please pass the cards toward the isles.

[say the following as people are opening their cards and folding back the tabs]

Almost all of the congregation's annual revenue beyond dues comes from the people in this room, and it comes right now. The fate of our Beth Shalom community, the place we have relied on and will rely on in times of our greatest need, and the place our children and friends' children will grow to become Jewish citizens needs our support, and our commitment tonight.

Step 9.           **The last but not least step in my survival primer is to express gratitude.** Thank you for your love and support during my family's trials this past year – and those thank-you cards – I'm working on them. Thank you, also, for your support for others and the community, and specifically the financial health of Beth Shalom. As we continue our service tonight and tomorrow, we'll continue to thank the Almighty for the many gifts we have been given, and ask nicely that we will all again be written into the book of life.