

Sept.-Oct. 2011

Rabbi's Teaching:

When We--and the World--Are Aroused From Slumber

Elul, the month before Rosh Hoshana, is one of the most intense times in Jewish life. We review our lives and strive to become closer to G-d and our G-d given potential.

The day before Rosh Hoshana has unique significance and special laws and customs. We sound the Shofar in Synagogue every weekday morning during Elul except for Rosh Hoshana Eve.

Why?

Kaballa sees here a reflection of a cosmic process. It imagines that just before Rosh Hoshana the world "goes to sleep". This does not mean that the world stops functioning, any more than our bodies cease to exist when we sleep at night. However, the inner, Divine Will, which purposefully animates the world, temporarily recedes. For the day before Rosh Hoshana, this Will ponders and evaluates creation, just as Jews reflect during this period on their lives. On the first morning of Rosh Hoshana, the Shofar loudly resounds. The world is aroused from its slumber, and our souls are given renewed strength.

The powerful and particularly Jewish message here is that G-d requires our effort, our Shofar cry to "remind" the world and its inhabitants of the need and possibility of transformation. There are numerous Jewish viewpoints about why G-d created the universe, but they all agree that that the creation of humankind was the final goal. In the central metaphor of the High Holiday liturgy, G-d is "Avinu Malkeinu," a Father-King, who needs our love, adoration and cooperation to achieve His purposes.

We have seen this past year one tyrant after another fall from power. Thousands of heroic and high-minded people understood (in whatever religious or secular language they use) that the world was not created for cruelty and inequality, but for human dignity and social development.

The dictators they deposed were men with massive power: secret police, tanks, gunships, and the threat and apparatuses of torture. Their fall began with their equivalent of the Shofar blast, the primitive and uncomplicated insistence that freedom is a G-d-given right, and that every person has the privilege and obligation to transform the world for the better.

We are inspired by these fighters, just as we are stirred by the thousands of men, women, and children now in our country who have shown that natural disasters will not diminish their passion for sustaining life and rebuilding community.

The Talmudic Rabbis referred to people as "Shutafim LaKadosh Baruch Hu," G-d's partners in physically and ethically maintaining the world. G-d created the world from chaos, with no external compulsion, only with the desire to bestow goodness. We have the same possibilities before us. We have radically more

choices than we generally imagine. We can shake off the burden of guilt and the dullness of routine and find new purposefulness in our work, our intimate relationships, our families, our commitment to social justice, our Jewish observance and spiritual growth.

Now is a time to imagine: If I could forget the frustrations of past failures, what would I now try? If we were not so scared of being hurt or ignored, who might we ask for forgiveness, for a new slate? If I was not so positive that "I'm not a religious person" what new experiences might I try? If we trusted ourselves more, what goals might we set for the coming year?

This is what it means for the Book to be open, for the Father/King to be approachable, and for life and death, sickness and health to be undecided matters. Because of the awesome newness of these Days, much is in our hands.

Shana Tova

A good, healthy and happy New Year

Rabbi Weintraub