

Erev Rosh HaShana
September 18, 2020

Shana Tova.

Tonight is Erev Rosh Hashana. We begin the Jewish new year 5781. It's a time of *Simcha* - of joy. The past year, is over. *Dayenu!* May I ask you to say with me the words of *shehechyanu? Baruch ata Adonai eloheun melech ha-olam. Shehechyanu – vehiguanu lazman hazah.* Thank you God we are alive, we are together and we are able to share this moment. And let us say “Amen.”

Last year, when we heard the shofar blown we could not imagine that this Rosh HaShana we would be in a pandemic. Many in our community have lost loved ones, battled with illness or lost jobs. It has been one of the most difficult times

many of us have ever experienced. Caring communities, like our Temple, are needed more than ever before for spiritual strength.

We call this day Rosh HaShana. Shana means year, but it also means change. Many of us feel like we have been hit over the head by change. We wear masks, not just on Purim but every time we venture from the safety of our homes.

To live as a Jew means to share life -with *mishpucha* (family) and *Kehila* (community).

Doctors tell us to be physically healthy we must be socially distant. This is a challenge for us as Jews because we are a community.

Our website describes us best. It says Temple Shaaray Tefilah “Celebrate, learn, pray, connect.”

The pandemic has changed *how* we do things – but

it has not changed *what* we do. We still **Celebrate, learn, pray, connect.**

When the pandemic hit. They cancelled the Olympics. But we cannot cancel Rosh Hashana. **Celebrating** time, like Rosh Hashana gives us structure and hope. We are reminded time is a gift. We may not be in Caramoor, but we still are connected. Tonight, its like you have invited your temple community of friends into your home to celebrate. This Rosh HaShana has some pluses. No need to dress up. No need to rush through dinner. No need to hunt for a parking spot. On this Rosh HaShana we can focus on the essence.

Celebrate, **learn**, pray and connect. Learning is at the core of what we do as Jews. Our Religious

school is not closed. We have set up tents for classrooms. *Ma Tovv Ohalecha Yaakov*. “How beautiful are your tents O Jacob.” This describes how we gather to learn. Education is not only for children. It is life-long. One of my goals for the new year is to create Night School for Jewish Learning once a week for adults, with multiple classes to choose from in concurrent and consecutive time slots. Classes in Jewish literature, philosophy, arts, history, creative writing, music, Israel, Hebrew, yoga, Yiddish, cooking and more. With the help of our adult education committee we want to get everyone involved in learning as part of your regular rhythm of Jewish life.

Celebrate, learn, **pray** and connect. Praying is at the core of what we do as Jews. I admire prayer as

the bravest act of chutzpah. Prayer is the Jewish protest against “*What is.. is.*” Prayer is how we channel our energy to challenge reality.

If you have ever seen the Western Wall, The Kotel in Jerusalem, you may have noticed the plants that grow between the ancient stones. At first glance this appears impossible. Plants need water and soil. How can these plants grow in a place where for six months of the year there is no rain. These miraculous plants are a metaphor for the power of prayer. “God may that which appears impossible may it become possible.”

In this pandemic, we have more people attending our shabbat services than ever before. Our virtual services have made it easier for our people to get a dose of hope. God knows we need it.

Celebrate, learn, pray and **connect**.

Connecting is at the core of what we do as Jews.

Connecting means going beyond ourselves and being active in the larger society. Tikun Olam

“repairing the world” is our rallying call for social justice. Our society is just beginning to

acknowledge the problems of racism. As Jews we oppose racism in any form. Our vision is of a

country that honors diversity. Our mission for our

Temple is to create a safe space that welcomes all people of any color, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Tonight, we eat apples with honey. It is one of the most important ways to greet the new year. With

honey we wish to add sweetness to diminish any

bitterness. The apples, remind us of the Garden of

Eden a picture of what heaven on earth could look like if we live with respect and compassion to others.

May we all be blessed with good health and happiness during 5781. May we all be blessed to meet this time next year, with a sense of accomplishment that each of us has done our best to make this world a more just and compassionate place like the Garden of Eden, full of crisp apples dripping with the golden honey of blessings.

My wife Debbie and I, along with our children Isaac, Elicia and Rafi wish you a *Shana Tova U'Metukaa* sweet, healthy and good year. *Gut Yontif Gut Yohr.*