

Erev Rosh Hashanah 2022

Rabbi Wilfond

A Vision statement for Community in 5783

Shana Tova Umetukah - May it be a good and sweet year for us all!

We celebrate *Rosh HaShana*. The word Rosh means “Head,” literally the “Head of the year.” Some people think “Mindfulness” is a new fad. But we Jews have been practicing mindfulness since the days of Bible. The central practice of Rosh HaShana is called “*Teshuva*.” (which means “To Turn,” to turn our thoughts and our actions.) The days that link tonight Rosh HaShana to Yom Kippor as one spiritual practice, are called the *Aseret Yamei Teshuva* “The Ten Days of turning.”

It is our tradition, at this moment, as the sun sets on the last day of the Jewish year, to turn our Rosh, our Minds to look back over the past 12 months to remember the journey we travelled from last Rosh HaShana till tonight.

For me personally, this past year has been a good one for my children who have become more settled in their schools and have made new friends since moving here from Jerusalem a little over two years ago.

Unfortunately, for the world, this has been a hard year marked by war in Ukraine. This war and its implications for us as Jews and for everyone in the world, will be the focus of my Devar Torah tomorrow morning.

Pause

Can you remember where were you this night, Rosh HaShana, 12 months ago? At this moment now, I would like to ask you to try and remember some the happiest moments of the past year. (Pause) Now try and remember one of the hardest moments you experienced of the past year. (Pause) Each of us has walked a different path. Some experienced the great joy of the birth of a child, or even a grandchild, others sadly lost loved ones or a relationship. Life is intensely personal. No two

people experienced the past year in exactly the same way. Each of us has their own story, and each of us is here because we have survived another year. What we share in common, is that we are here. What do you learn about life this year? Answering this question is the central practice of Rosh Hashana. To Turn our Rosh, our minds to recall, where we were? What did we do? What did we learn?

You might be surprised to learn, the words Rosh HaShana never occur in the Torah. The Torah calls this day by a different name, "*Zikaron*" a time of remembrance. The Talmud says on Rosh Hashana we should do "*Cheshbon HaNefesh*," which means remembering our past deeds and the mistakes we made that hurt other people. Life is hard enough. Our mistakes should not cause someone else pain. The Mitzvah of Teshuva of turning our minds to examine our deeds of the past year, is our Jewish way to take responsibility for our conduct, and to proactively

reduce some of the pain, to do *tikkun*, to repair, to make amends to family members, colleagues, friends or neighbors. Rosh HaShana and the ten days of Teshuva is our opportunity to do spiritual house-cleaning, so we can make a fresh start in a better new year.

Looking back at last year, is only half the task. One of Rosh HaShana's spiritual lessons is about the future, as the 18th century Rabbi, Levy Yitzhak of Berdichev, taught us. Levy Yitzhak may not have been inspired by the Roman God Janus, but his teaching about the real meaning of Rosh HaShana suggests he channeled a similar spirit. Janus was the Roman God of new beginnings. A two headed God, Janus could look back over the past, while simultaneously facing toward the future. The Month of January was named to honor Janus, this two headed God.

According to Levi Yitzhak, the Hebrew word Shana, does not only mean "year" it has another meaning "to teach."

As in the words of the *vehavata prayer* “*Vshinantam Levanecha*” “and you shall **teach** your children.” Levi Yitzkah says we must ask ourselves, what did this past year teach us? What did we learn? Levi Yitzhak taught the word Shana, also has a third meaning, “to change.” *Lishanot*. Based on what we have learned, can we improve ourselves and change our ways, break old unhealthy habits, and resolve to make life better? Levi Yitzhak said understanding the three meanings of “Shana,” as three steps of a spiritual progression is what Rosh HaShana is all about. Shana, its first meaning “Year,” means at this time of beginning a new year, let’s stop for a moment. Shana, its second meaning, learn the lessons this past year has taught us. And then Shana’s third meaning, Change, go forward with a New Head, a new Rosh, new thoughts. These are the three steps to achieve new start in a new mind set.

When we look back at the past year we tune into our individuality, because we each had different experiences. But when we look forward in to the future a shift occurs from the individual to the communal. We become connected to each other in the shared experience of gazing into the unknown.

Tonight, we stand together as a community on the threshold of a new year.

What new adventures and possibilities await us in the new year?

Different cultures have different techniques to help them peer into the future. Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe historically practiced “Tasseography” the reading of tea leaves. The druids would gaze in to a crystal ball. Jews too have own techniques of gleaning insight into the future. One way involves Gematria a playful practice of turning letters into numbers and looking for connections. The new year is Taf Shin Ayin Pay or the numbers 5783.

Each number can give us an insight of what might lie ahead. 5, 7, 8, 3.

At Passover six months ago, at the end of the Seder, some of us sang a song about numbers.

(DW sings. *Echad mi yodea? Echad ani yodea.*)

This Passover folksong is a type of musical gamatria, and I would like to use it to try and reveal some insights into the exiting possibilities for the new year 5783.

Hamisha mi yodea? Himisha ani yodea, Hamisha, 5. In the song what does 5 represent? According to the song, it represents the five books of Moses, *Hamisha Chumshay Torah*. Torah is Education. So what's new in education at the Temple this year? We have opened our New Teen Center, headed by the talented Dina Newman, a Rabbinical Student. Dina created and ran a premier teen program at Rodef Shalom in the Manhattan for seven years. It is a major coup to have recruited her to our Temple. Our teens can look forward to the best year

ever in teen programming in the history of our Temple. Our ECC, led by Patty Goldstick continues to grow and bring more families to join our congregation. This year we added a whole new class and we are serving more than 70 students. Our highest numbers ever.

Our Religious school led by Stephanie Ben Simon has a brand-new Hebrew Curriculum. And entire program of Religious School has been completed updated. Many of you have met Leah Kadosh our Bar Bat Mitzvah coordinator who is beloved to our students and families. Leah has a Masters in Jewish Education, and she radiates a joy and knowledge of Torah in ways our families cannot get enough of her teaching. For Adult Learning I want to acknowledge Dr. Joe Grossman who in honor of his 90th birthday set up Adult Education Fund to which you too can contribute to bring intellectually stimulating programs for adults, so that learning is not just for kids,

but is a lifelong adventure of growth and discovery. That was meaning of the number of the year, five. Torah.

The next number is 7. (RDW sings) *Sheva mi yodea?*

Sheva ani yodea? Sheva or seven represents Shabbat,

our day for spirituality. By now you have all heard our

new Cantor who is tonight leading her first Rosh HaShana

with us. Even more beautiful than her voice, is her soul.

We are blessed with one of the kindest, smartest and

best cantors in Westchester, if not all of New York! A

Cantor is much more than a soloist. A cantor is a member

of our clergy team and spiritual leader for our Temple.

Our Cantor has a degree in family and marriage

counseling and has been a leader of Jewish education for

many years. In Psalms it says "Sing unto God a New

Song." This is verse has come alive in our lives, here at

our Temple.

Also new, to our clergy team, we welcome a Rabbinical

Student from Hebrew Union College, Ashira Boxman.

Ashira will be leading on the Bima, teaching in our school and engaging our congregants in social action.

We did 5, that was 7, what the next number? 8. (RDW sings) *Shmonah mi yodea? Shmonah Ani yodea ?*

What is 8 in the song? It is the Brit. The covenant. What is a covenant? A sacred contract. At our Temple, contracts are overseen by our Executive Director. We are blessed to welcome Howard Greenstein, as our new Executive Director. Howard is our calm hand on the steering wheel, we are grateful to welcome him.

Our last number? *Shlosha Mi Yodea? Shlosha ani yodea.*

The last number 3 represents, the Avot. Abraham Isaac and Jacob. This is the three generations of the *Mishpucha*, the family. This is us, the Temple family of Shaaray Tefila and the generations within our community.

A few weeks ago, we celebrated with Dr Joe Grossman his 90th Birthday with a big BBQ. This was one of my happiest days at our Temple because the Temple was

packed with EEC Children, RS families, teens and empty nesters – all celebrating shabbat and enjoying Shabbat Dinner together. This is my vision of the word to come, at the Temple. This year we will be having monthly Shabbat dinners. And these are not only for kids, these are Shabbat Dinner for everyone, so that everyone is included in a vibrant intergenerational programming. As a congregation our greatest treasure is each other and the sacred community that we build together. This year on Yom Kippor afternoon I have invited one of the oldest members of Temple Dr. Joe Grossman, who I believe is a great sage, to share with us his life story and insights from his Jewish Journey. We will do this just before Yizkor, our time of connecting with our memories.

Jewish song writer Dan Nichols wrote a song about the importance of being a *Kehila Kedosha*, a sacred community.

Each one of us must play a part

Each one of us must heed the call

Each one of us must seek the truth

Each one of us is a part of it all

Each one of us must remember the pain

Each one of us must find the joy.

It's how we help

It's how we give

It's how we pray

It's how we live as a *Kehila Kedosha*, a sacred Jewish community

This Rosh Hashana is 5, 7, 8, 3.

5 – a year of learning, 7 a year of spirituality, 8 improving our administration, and 3 strengthening our sacred community.

May this new year be a time for renewal not only as individuals but for all of us together, as a *Kehila Kodesha*, a sacred community.

Shana Tova, a Gut Yontif, a gut yohr.