

Rabbi Phil's Almost Weekly Email...

Rosh Hashanah falls next week. Happy birthday to the world. Happy birthday to us.

According to the tradition, God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And the whole thing began. So, every year we come around again to the beginning.

This idea of a beginning, and celebrating that beginning constitutes a great metaphor for understanding something of what we are as a religious community.

We careen through the year. We fill our lives with doing, of which consists of a lot. We work, we play, we engage in the business of living every day. And in the midst of it we tend to lose our focus. We might well become enmeshed in a sea of troubles. We encounter happiness, hope and despair, love, and loss--the inevitable byproducts of living our lives.

Yet when the month of Elul comes around, the Jewish tradition teaches us that we need to take a break from our hectic existence and just reflect. The tradition offers us the opportunity to put aside the helter-skelter world we occupy and just be.

Just be.

For that task the Jewish tradition gives us reminders. In this season we eat apples and honey. Our challah is round. Throughout the month of Elul we hear the sound of the shofar. The days grow shorter and the nights just a bit cooler. And as the birthday of the world approaches, we are asked to hit "reset."

This is our great blessing, to arrive at a moment in the year when, spiritually speaking, we mindfully pause, and then we can begin once again.

But to do that we must reflect upon our lives, looking simultaneously to the past and to the future. We take stock of things and consider how to make a course correction. We apologize to those we've wronged. We resolve to make changes. We resolve to look into the light God created on the first day. When we do these things, we come away renewed and refreshed.

And so, come the birthday of the world, we begin again. This is our great opportunity, one that we give ourselves every year.

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At our Kabbalat Shabbat service this Friday night we will pause and replace the Torah covers with the special covers that signify the onset of the High Holy Days. Everyone in the sanctuary who so wishes can participate in this ceremony. I hope you can join me.

May God grant you a shanah tovah u'm'tukah, a happy and sweet new year.

Shalom u'v'racha,

Phil

Rabbi Phil Cohen

Ps. Please feel free to send me a note commenting on this piece. I'd love to hear from you. I can be reached at rabbiphil@kilv.org. I hope to hear from you. Again, a happy new year.

Pps. Neshama Carlebach has written a wonderful song apropos of this season called Return Again. You can hear it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twCYf8NQcGM>