

I can't say I'm looking forward to the holidays this year. The changes in my life – the ending of my marriage, the selling of the house, the packing up and moving, the process of starting over – have been, to say the least, overwhelming. Like a giant sponge, they have absorbed virtually every fiber of my consciousness, leaving me with hardly a moment to think about anything else. But here comes September – and *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* – and that unrelenting reminder: “You’re a rabbi. Vacation’s over. Back to work.”

And yet I know that nothing could be better than this ritually mandated time to let go of the past and open up to possibility. Oddly enough, I learned this lesson in the middle of the summer.

It was the last Shabbat of July, the Friday night with the pot-luck dinner. Jodi Nussbaum and Kenny Cohen were leading services, Joel Dorow was accompanying on the harmonica. It was the first time I had been to an *Erev Shabbat* service since the letter announcing the divorce had been mailed out. Walking down the hallway towards the chapel, my mind was awash with anticipation. What will people say? Will they probe and ask questions? Will they gush with sentiment? Will I be able to handle it? But as I approached the chapel’s entryway, there was Steph Lurie awaiting me with a smile and a *siddur* and a *Shabbat Shalom*. A minute later someone – I don’t remember who – squeezed my arm on the way to his seat. As the service was about to begin, Esther Kettler turned around and said *Gut Shabbos, Rabbi*, telling me everything she needed to say with her eyes. Then Lois Rothenberg stood up, walked over and offered her help, whatever it was I needed (including – and Lois I will forever be grateful for this – moving boxes). And then Jodi welcomed us, inviting us to sing. And we did. *Hallelu. Hinei Mah Tov. Shalom Aleikhem. Lekha Dodi*. All of us. Everyone. Singing. In unison. A congregation.

It was the best Shabbat I can ever remember. Sitting in the back row, singly softly enough to allow my ears to dominate my voice, I was able to hear the sound of community. I can’t begin to tell you the healing it brought to my heart that Shabbat. It was a Shabbat filled with *shalom*. It also happened to be *Shabbat Nachamu*, the first Sabbath after *Tisha b’Av*. Translated it means the Shabbat of “comfort”. How did God know? But of course, *every* Shabbat is a *Shabbat Nachamu*.

This is why we congregate. This is why we build synagogues. To be part of something larger than me, yet in a place that includes me. A place where I can share. And at no time is this more true than on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*.

The *Yamim* (or “Days” as they are called) are a sacred opportunity for the entire community to affirm why it exists. Even as we enter the sanctuary as individuals, each bearing a suitcase of failures and fears and hopes and dreams, we collectively coalesce to form a cacophonous voice of oneness. It is this process of relinquishing of self as we join with others in prayer that allows us to discover and nurture the soul implanted within. And this is how we grow. This is how we move on. This is how we discover the new that waits *in potentia* with the sound of the *shofar*.

But do not be misled. It’s not the holidays *per se*. It’s not the apples and honey or the new clothes. It’s not the rabbi’s teaching or the cantor’s voice. It’s not the *shofar* or the casting of crumbs into the flowing waters. It’s the people. It’s their joined voices in

common cause. And whether they realize it or not, whether they intend it or not, that *cause* is each other. There's a reason why the prayers on the High Holy Days are in the first-person plural.

The Holy One created the universe *ex nihilo* – from nothing. *Rosh Hashanah* is our celebration of this truth. But for us the process of creation, the means wherein we bring new things to and of ourselves into existence, can happen only with the help of others. *B'yachad*. Together. *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* are the times we have set aside to help each other become the people God created us to be. All you have to do is show up. And sing. It's the singing that makes the difference.

Come to think of it, I really am looking forward to the holidays this year. More than a duty, they're a gift. As are you.