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## FIRST EVENING OF ROSH HASHANAH

3 SEPTEMBER 2013

The last time that Rosh Hashanah began as early as September 4 was in 1899. William McKinley was the President of the United States. Congress had just approved the use of voting machines in Federal elections - and a peace treaty had concluded the Spanish American War.

In France, Captain Alfred Dreyfus had been summoned from his imprisonment on Devil's Island for a second trial - and in Basel, Switzerland, just two weeks before that Rosh Hashanah, the Third Zionist Congress had heard Theodore Herzl's reports on his meetings with Kaiser Wilhem II. In case you are wondering, Rosh Hashanah will not occur again as early as September 4 until 2089.

Whenever Rosh Hashanah arrives - whether it is early or late on the secular calendar, it brings us the exquisite gift of the New Year and the joy of gathering here in our Synagogue as a community.

So first - before anything else - I want to say B'ruchim Habaim, a sincere welcome to B'nai Israel - the home which is all of ours.

The dictionary defines welcome as "one whose arrival gives pleasure." If perchance you do not know the person sitting near you, I hope that during the High Holy Days, you will introduce yourself- for in our fast-paced often anonymous world, our

**Synagogue should be warm, friendly and inclusive - where we are more than just the sum of our members. Welcoming others is a message that we care enough to transcend our own individuality and break through the metaphoric walls that tend to separate us - and since the era of Abraham, the first Jew, welcoming others has been a core Jewish value.**

**In a thought-provoking book entitled Wake-Up Calls, Joan Lunden, who for two decades was the co-host of "Good Morning America," offers the following mental exercise:**

- Name the five wealthiest people in the world.**
- Name the last five Heisman trophy winners.**
- Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.**
- Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer prizes.**
- Name the last ten Academy Award winners for best actor or actress - and finally**
- Name the last decade's World Series winners.**

**I know that I - for one - would not score very well on that quiz.**

**Joan Lunden comments: "The point is that none of us remembers the headlines of yesterday . . . and these are no second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields. But the applause dies. Awards tarnish . . . accolades and certificates are buried with their owners."**

**But here is another quiz:**

**List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.**

**Name three friends who helped you through a difficult time.**

**Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.**

**Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.**

**Think of five people with whom you enjoy spending time.**

**And finally:**

**Name a half dozen heroes whose stories have inspired you.**

**The lesson here?**

**Paraphrasing Joan Lunden: Credentials, money and fame are fine - but the people who really influence us, who really make a difference in our lives - are the ones who care . . . And she concludes: "They have been successful in their lives - and their awards are in our hearts."**

**So . . . Rosh Hashanah is that quintessential moment when we can get back to basics: to what really matters in life: our family, our friends, our community, our values, our faith, heritage and identity as Jews.**

**Every day in the New Year ahead will have 86,400 seconds. I checked the math. The most important question of all: How will we use our treasure?**