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FIRST EVENING OF ROSH HASHANAH

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A CAROUSEL FOR MISSOULA

Who would ever think that a carousel in Missoula, Montana could have a connection with Rosh Hashanah? Beverly and I were on vacation in Montana early in the summer, when we stopped in Missoula. In the course of our wanderings, we discovered a remarkable carousel in a downtown park.

In 1991, Chuck Kaparich made the following proposal to the Missoula City Council: “If you will give it a home and promise that no one will ever take it apart, I will build a “Carousel for Missoula.” Remembering the many happy childhood hours which he had spent on a carousel, Kaparich had already carved four carousel ponies and had purchased an antique frame in thousands of pieces. The Missoula Council agreed to Kaparich’s proposal – and his Carousel for Missoula became a project energizing an entire community.

The Carousel web-site reports that:

“By Opening Day, May 27, 1995, over 100,000 hours of volunteer time had gone into the construction of thirty-eight permanent ponies, two chariots, fourteen gargoyles, gargoyle frames and mirror frames and the largest band organ in the United States – all within a jewel box building. Community members

donated time, services, materials and encouragement. School children collected over one-million pennies to adopt four ponies; stained glass artists constructed shimmering windows, mechanics poured babbitt; majestic horses' heads emerged from blocks of wood – and people formed lasting friendships among the woodchips. The community extended as far as Calgary, Alberta, where the Midnight Rose Carvers built a friendship horse for Missoula. The story of the Carousel includes wood and metal, concrete and colored glass, hearts and hands and countless hours of loving labor.”

What is especially intriguing is that the process of sustaining the Carousel continues as a broad-based communal endeavor, drawing on the talents, energies, enthusiasm and commitment of scores of volunteers. In 2001, in the course of just nine days, the citizens of Missoula added a delightful play area next to the Carousel. Once again, the entire community rallied around the project.

The Carousel web-site concludes:

“If magic can happen anywhere, it can happen in Missoula, where dreams are followed and promises are kept, and where people believe in making a life as well as making a living.”

For me, the Missoula Carousel becomes a metaphor for community and collective action, for pursuing dreams and achieving goals, for changing ourselves and our world for the better – indeed the very same themes which are at the core of the High Holy Days.

On Rosh Hashanah, we pray fervently for Hayyim – for life . . . for each of us and for all the Jewish people. I have always been impressed that in Hebrew the word Hayyim is in the plural. Our lives are inevitably intertwined with one another. No Jew can ever be entirely alone . . . and we are at our best when we give of ourselves, so that we touch and help others.

As our New Year now unfolds with all its promise and potential, each of us can make a difference in strengthening that vision of Hayyim – and if, along the way, we need a little extra inspiration, just reflect for a moment on a Carousel for Missoula.