

A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

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Back to the Past



The movie was called Back to the Future. This true reality is "Back to the Past." On September 20, AJ will welcome my colleague Rabbi Ron Hoffberg for a *Shabbat* and *Selihot* program. Rabbi Hoffberg, a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, has been the Masorti (Conservative) rabbi in Prague of the Czech Republic for the last seven years. He is part of a small group of colleagues working with Jewish communities all over the globe to help them find their roots and rebuild an ancient glory.

In other articles on pages 4 and 5, you will find full information on Rabbi Hoffberg and the topics of his *Shabbat* morning, lunch and learn, and *Selihot* presentations. But it is not the topics that are crucial. It is that he will tell us about young people who are eager to learn who they are and find ways of expressing their Judaism. A fire of renewal burns within them and they bring hope to a charred landscape. Before World War II, Czechoslovakia had a thriving Jewish community. Prague was a jewel of living Judaism. But after Hitler tried to eradicate the community, and the Communists tried to suppress its open identification as Jews, a new generation is searching for its roots. They are going "back to the past" to find guidance for their future. And Rabbi Hoffberg is right in the middle of it. He will tell us the stories that link the historic Jewish community of Prague with its contemporary version.

As we at AJ stand on the threshold of our 150th anniversary, the experience of this old European community in renewal is a lesson for us. The American Jewish community has never suffered the kind of oppression that our European cousins have experienced. America was the refuge from the horrors of European persecution, and we are the children of refugees. We are a community that has been incredibly blessed with success in this land.

And yet the seeds of concern for our future are contained within that very success. Nurtured by the open society, will our children and grandchildren have the passion to continue to identify and live as Jews, to contribute creatively to the future of our people? In a perverse way, Judaism has often thrived in adversity and flourished in freedom. Our challenge is to embrace our heritage, to go "back to the past" with joy and love, and infuse our ancient heritage with new meaning that will inspire loyalty and devotion among our people today and generations to come.

May the High Holy Day season be one of communal and individual renewal. Inspired by the quest for our heritage by our cousins who have overcome great distress, may we embrace our future with conviction and creativity to establish a secure future for our congregation and our people.

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