

A Shabbat Shuvah Message from Rabbi Rheins

Brave Words for Uncertain Times

This week, the Shabbat between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur is called *Shabbat Shuvah*, the week of *teshuvah*, repentance/return. It marks for each of us a spiritual and ethical intention to prepare ourselves for the unknown challenges that we'll face in the New Year. Indeed, "Who shall be tranquil and who will be troubled; who will be calm and who tormented; who will be humbled and who exalted?" We are confronted with our hard reality of mortality, the fragile thread upon which we tread.

Beyond the concerns we have for our personal well-being and the health and welfare of our friends and loved ones, we are also prompted to look to the wider community and the state of humanity. Needless to say, our world has been rocked with political and social division, moral decay, the shocking rise of anti-Semitism and the unsettling chaos of threats and the rattling of swords by nations around the world. Some are quick to point fingers outward to accuse and blame others. The Jewish ideal is to first look in the mirror: What have I done to contribute to the divisiveness? What can I do to correct the past mistakes and help my family, my community, my nation, and this world heal?

The Jewish philosophy is to acknowledge that while we cannot control the actions of others, we are very much empowered to control ourselves. Still, there is uncertainty. Will we be up to the task? To that, this week's Torah portion *Vayeilekh* offers us a powerful and reaffirming message. Moses is delivering his last address to the Children of Israel who are just on the east bank of the Jordan River, about to cross over to the Promised Land. At 120 years old, he confirms the obvious: he will not be able to lead the people any longer; they will be going on this uncharted journey without him. In a firm but commanding voice Moses calms the sense of trepidation and doubt that is growing among the crowd. He reminds them that just as God has been with him and with their ancestors, so too, God will be with them. He emboldens them by reminding them that the Children of Israel have an exalted destiny to be a light unto the nations. True, there will be enemies and obstacles and setbacks and failures, but as long as we keep trying, as long as we keep believing that we really can help to heal a broken world, then we will succeed.

Moses then offers these words of encouragement to the Children of Israel and to his successor Joshua: *Chizku v'imtzu al-tir'u*, **Be Strong and resolute, do not fear!**

At his first inauguration address in March 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt shared similar words to a nation still staggering under the economic and social calamities of the Great Depression. For his message, FDR borrowed the theme Moses established: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

For those who think that the current situation is rough and that the political and social divisions today are harsh, just read a bit about the 1930s. For that matter, read about the mess this country was in 50 years ago in 1968. Living in fear and doubting our

future is not the Jewish way and it is not the American way. We acknowledge failures. We learn from our failures. And we get to work building a better tomorrow.

This Friday's *Erev Shabbat* service (6pm) is going to be especially blessed as we welcome the Confirmation Classes of 1977 to celebrate their reunion. We'll read Torah and enjoy a fabulous *oneg*! On Shabbat morning our service begins at 9am.

Of course, we all look forward to seeing you for the Yom Kippur services Tuesday night and Wednesday (all day!).

G'mar Chatimah Tovah!

Rick

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