

Weekly Teaching

September 8, 2017

A rabbi's calendar clock sometimes is off-kilter with the rest of the Jewish world.

For me, Rosh Hashanah preparation begins soon after the beginning of the secular New Year.

I start writing vignettes, and by the beginning of August, I will have hundreds upon hundreds in my High Holiday folder.

Roseanne then reads all that I have written, and grades each from "A" to "F."

Many times I have wanted to argue for a higher grade, but over my career I've learned her instincts are usually right on.

After the grades are in, I push aside all of the B+ and lower graded writings, and then choose which of the remaining materials I might use, and how to thematically connect it with our High Holy Day Liturgy.

After all of this is done, I then re-edit the chosen materials.

I have found that the shorter the vignette, the greater the impact.

Besides the vignette preparations, I of course give thought to the sermons themselves.

Here, I have the liberty to speak longer, although I always try to recall Mark Twain's sage advice that no sinner repents after the first 20 minutes of a sermon.

Sermon themes percolate throughout the year.

I generally try to address non-political themes. Although, at times the rabbinic voice does need to be heard as applied to our present Jewish and human challenges within the political arena.

My bias as a congregational rabbi is to focus on what our sacred teachings might offer so as to help us create greater meaning in our lives.

Rosh Hashanah itself, comes to us with the offerings of different challenges by which we are to be especially mindful.

The name, "Rosh Hashanah," literally "head of the year," is the marker of our Jewish New Year.

But, the Rabbis also teach us that Rosh Hashanah has three other names:

- Yom Truah
- Yom HaDin
- Yom HaZikaron

Yom Truah means a "Day of Cheering" and it alludes to the shofar blasts. (The Shofar blasts, with the prescribed different sounds, are cued by the calls: "Tekiah," "Truah," "Shebarim" and "Tekiah Gedolah.")

"Yom Truah" is a reminder that Rosh Hashanah is to be an especially festive and joyful time.

I think, even more important than the attending of worship services, is the custom to gather with family and friends for the Rosh Hashanah meals.

Growing up, Rosh Hashanah was “Shabbat on Steroids;” the Passover Seder with no chametz limitations. To this day, I can still “smell” and “taste” my mother’s stuffed cabbage and matzah ball soup. And, my Bubbye’s Z’L kugels are as significantly etched in my mind.

My mother Z’L forced us as children to go shopping for new clothes right before Rosh Hashanah; not because of the need to dress up for services but rather, to “look like a mensch” at the Rosh Hashanah dinner table.

Enjoying the company of loved ones is at the heart of Rosh Hashanah, and sitting down eating delicious foods certainly makes for a good and meaningful gathering.

“Yom HaZikaron” means a “Day of Recollection,” and it captures the idea that it’s during the Ten Days of Awe—from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur—that God recalls and examines closely all of our deeds and occurrences during the previous year.

Additionally, these Holy Days becomes the time by which we can similarly recall and examine.

The last name, “Yom Hadin,” means “Day of Judgment.”

Besides the joy and recollections, we take seriously the opportunity to appropriately reflect upon our lives, and then seek effective means by which we can address our weaknesses, and further strengthen our strengths.

Of interest to the Rabbis is that the Hebrew word “Shanah” (Year) is a close homonym with the word “Shinooy,” which means change.

Our New Year becomes the prompting for our change for the better.

Our life’s goal is to experience true happiness.

The Jewish prescription by which we can best pursue happiness is to seek the opportunities for joyful interactions with our loved ones, honestly take a look at our lives, and seek the course changes in directions when necessary.

I’m excited for the soon to come arrival of the High Holy Days, and I pray we should all be blessed with a New Year that brings us Happiness, Health & Peace!

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch

rabbimitch@templesholom.com