

Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's Tammuz/Av 5767 (July 2007) Newsletter

The Making of a Spiritual Community

The world has been moving at a fast pace lately. From changes in the North Korean nuclear issue to the roller coaster of national politics to the frenetic changes in Israel and among its neighbors, it is hard to keep up. We search for meanings, sometimes where there are none, in the hopes of feeling more secure.

And yet, Summer has arrived and we should be happy, right? After all, Brigantine is the Summer playground *par excellence* – Sun, sea, sand, and everything that goes with them! So, why do I feel a little sad, a little anxious? Perhaps it is the juxtaposition of the turmoil presently taking place in the Palestinian territories and our observance in the Jewish calendar of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple there coupled with the 40th anniversary of the Six-Day War.

Together, these events together remind us that the Jewish people are more vulnerable than we'd like to think. It's true, we have done relatively well for ourselves in this country and in many around the world, but the worry of a safe future lingers. No matter how distant we are from Israel, we wonder what will be for our brethren there as the world around them is in full flux. Out of the corner of our eye we watch history unfold and we feel like we cannot help.

On the contrary, though we may feel drawn to give into this sadness or anxiety, we should take the period between the 17th of Tammuz (the anniversary of the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by the Romans) and the 9th of Av (the anniversary of the destruction of the Holy Temple itself) as a time to reflect upon how blessed we are – we are descended from the remnants who survived the butchering of between 600,000 and 1.2 million Jews in this three-week period; we are living in a time when Jews are not only tolerated in most of the world, but are welcomed; and we are living all around the world and enriching it with our Jewish ethics, religion, and culture. We are living. This may not erase our concerns, but if we allow ourselves to see the forest for the trees, we just might be inspired to renew and reconnect ourselves to our heritage and to our community.

“Spirituality” was, for a time, an over-used and completely misunderstood word. Part of what it means to live a spiritual life is to be aware of the world around you, to be in sync with life, and to elevate one's purpose in life to higher ideals and practices. While we take stock on our internal compass during Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur, perhaps Tisha B'Av, and the 17th of Tammuz before it, are when we look at where we are as a people. The destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem forever changed Judaism. The Priesthood declined without the Temple and the Rabbis ascended and the enrichment of Jewish communal and religious life has been the responsibility of the average Jew ever since.

Therefore, let's take this time – as we putt-putt around in our boats (or on our neighbors!), take walks on the beach, and enjoy Summer backyard barbecue parties – to take account of where we are as a people and as a community. Where would you like to see us go as we soon move into the coming year? What values do you wish us to reflect? What kind of spiritual nourishment are you seeking and how will we elevate further the spiritual and communal life of Jewish Brigantine? Only you can answer these questions. I look forward to

being your partner as you explore them and I would love to hear your thoughts on how you will help to elevate Temple Beth Shalom and the Jewish people.

May we all know the blessing of having our holy Temple, our Temple Beth Shalom, serve as a meeting place where we nourish our souls and raise our spirits.

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