

Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's Iyar/Sivan 5767 (May 2007) Newsletter

When You Know Better, You Do Better

“And in the end, the love you make is equal to the love you take.”

–*John Lennon*

We often speak about what to get in life. We think that there is a deal out there waiting for us, a special we have to rush for to capture, a moment we might miss. These thoughts often lead us to miss what is right before us.

I am not advocating that we should stop planning our lives or looking ahead so that we don't trip and fall, as it were. I am, however, suggesting that many of us, in our era of specialized commerce and customized lives, miss the joy that faith in our ability to meet what may come our way brings to our existence. Our tradition teaches us to think a great deal before we act, but it also advises without exception, that there is the right time for the right words, deed, or even thought.

As time passes, we are faced with the normal comings and goings of what it means to be a human being. In order to mark those comings and goings and recognize how special they are (and we are), we make rituals. As Jews, we do not make rituals where we are at the center, though. We make rituals where God is at the center. We are spiritual beings. Even when we don't feel spiritual, we understand the language of striving, striving for something that is greater than our present existence. Being aware of our connection to something greater than ourselves is much of what being a spiritual person is about.

Recognizing our place in the world – essentially, knowing who we are – is a large part of being a more spiritual being, as well. We are not immortal, but through our children and through the impact we make in the lives of others. We make love in the world, and we receive it. We engage with the holiness around us and we receive as much holiness back. It is this ebb and flow of our lives that makes for much of the joy of living.

This month, we are blessed at Temple Beth Shalom to have three important reminders of what is greater than ourselves. We are blessed to see two young people ascend our Bima to acknowledge their new-found responsibility for their selves according to our laws and traditions. It is through them that we live on and our wisdom survives. No pressure, though!

We also find ourselves this month standing again at Sinai, on Shavuot, to receive the Law, hamasoret (the tradition), for ourselves and generations to come. This act reminds us that when we engage with the holy, holiness comes to us. This is a large part of the message of the love that is expressed through the marking of our people's receipt of the Torah. When we open ourselves to follow certain precepts, to utilize them to guide our lives, we make space to receive their blessings. Big or small (in any setting), the challenges we face are made manageable by the wisdom we acknowledge and follow. No one likes complete anarchy; we are beings who thrive with boundaries, even though we try to push through them.

As Maimonides alludes to in his writings, the more we learn, the more we understand. And the more we understand, the more we act in ways that make the world a better place. Essentially, we learn in life so that we can do in life.

Such is the preciousness of our lives – we are not stagnant, we are dynamic. For beings like us, each day passes . . . literally, it passes. It is gone. Another like it will never come. So, let us not miss a moment to join together to pray, to share, and to live. Each day and each of us is precious. Let us live our lives with this truth in mind.

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