

Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's Elul/Tishrei 5766/5767 (September 2006) Newsletter

Most people repent during the Selihot week preceding Rosh Hashanah; the more pious during the month of Elul preceding Rosh Hashanah; but I say that one should begin to repent immediately after Yom Kippur.

–Rabbi Israel Lipkin [Salanter], Founder of the Mussar movement

So, here we are again (for the first time)! As the New Year approaches, we tentatively welcome the final month of the Jewish calendar, Elul. It seems as if it was just yesterday that we were in shul, and as you read this column, you may be thinking, “uh, oh, how did I do this year?” A normal reaction for many of us, we look at our behavior occasionally during the year, but never with the same scrutiny as we do during the Days of Awe.

So, why do we request forgiveness, I once asked my childhood Rabbi, Stanley Rabinowitz, if we are only doomed to repeat our transgressions again during the coming year? He responded, and I paraphrase, that we do not know how we will act in the coming year, and so we try to change with the knowledge that even if we don’t make it to our destination, we will be further along on our journey.

Judaism provides us countless opportunities to be *menschen*, good people. We are provided guidelines and commandments that, to turn a phrase, keep us off of the streets at night. We learn how to care for each other, in part, due to the moral lessons of our heritage. We learn to care for ourselves, however, only by really living our own life and living it well.

It is my hope that we all take the time before Rosh Hashanah to make things right with our fellow – even if it makes us somewhat uncomfortable. Then, with a full heart, we may enter the New Year cleansed and refreshed, ready to make our world all the more beautiful for ourselves and those around us. It is much more up to us than up to God. After all, we are told by the Sages that God only forgives those who obtain forgiveness from their fellow.

The Days of Awe focus us on the truth of our own power – our power to change our world. It is a wonderful gift that Judaism provides us: an opportunity to make our world right before the New Year. It is an even more precious gift that we give ourselves, however, when we live our lives right from the day after the New Year until the end of our days.

It is my blessing for you that the sweetness of this season embraces you as you shed the past year’s mistakes and that you greet your new you with excitement, with honesty, and with a mind free from worry.

Sarah and I wish you all the most joyous holiday and a year bearing only the sweetest fruit!

Shanah Tovah Tikateivu (May you be inscribed for a good year),

Rabbi Gerald R. Fox

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