

Kavana – Opening greeting at Rosh Hashana
September 13, 2007 1 Tishrei, 5768.

Delivered by Cantor David Serkin-Poole, Temple B'nai Torah

Paraphrasing the words of Rabbi Cheyrl Peretz,

“On the High Holy Days, each and all of us stand naked in front of God; we share our frailty and humanity with each other. By opening our hearts to prayer and standing together as a community, reaching out towards one another, we support each other. By coming together to worship, it is as though we open our arms to one another and invite each of us into a collective hug and into the embrace of The Holy One.”

It is with this spirit of community embrace that I greet each of you. On behalf of the professional and lay leadership of Temple B'nai Torah, I welcome you to this Rosh Hashanah service and I thank Rabbi Mirel for giving me this opportunity to speak briefly to you. For I too, stand afraid of what might happen if my prayers are not good enough or are not heard by *The Almighty*. Recently, it was revealed that even, the great Mother Teresa spent many of her years in search of and yearning for her faith. I suppose, if Mother Teresa had her struggles, we are all in good company.

For many generations, the Hazzan or Cantor, would make an entrance into the congregation with the words of *Hin'ni*, literally, *here I am, afraid of my lack of worthiness*. It is as if to say, “How can I hope to lead the congregation in prayer, if I can't even get my own act together?”

In that spirit, although not chanting *The Hin'ni* just yet, (you'll need to get here early for the traditional Yom Kippur service if you want actually hear those words), let me share just one brief thought prayer or kavanah of admission. It comes at a time where many of us (myself included) try to own up to our frailties and find a better way than we did it last year.

I struggle with the notion of forgiveness. Not only do I worry if a god in heaven will be forgiving of my transgressions, I

wonder if I can let go of my own baggage enough to forgive those who I believe have wronged me. Indeed, during the time between Rosh Hashanah and next week's Yom Kippur, it is our tradition to work on those kinds of things. However, I must admit, at times, it is so hard. Last night, Rabbi Mirel reminded us to be concerned more about changing ourselves than others. Keeping with that theme, it makes me think of my own challenges. If this helps frame for you something that may be of use during these days of deep introspection, I offer it only as a humble suggestion. Mostly, I am just sharing with you some of my own efforts. You see, I who stands up on the Bima as some sort of role-model/leader, am just as troubled with the challenges, as Rabbi Mirel said last night, of trying to always choose life - *uvacharta bachayim*.

So, I leave you with this suggestion; when forgiving the other, your loved one, your neighbor, your co-working, your child, your friend –you fill in the blanks – I'm going to commit to taking the first step of compassion. That is, I hope to be able to dig deeply to find enough compassion to recognize the spark of humanity in even, and especially in, the ones who may have wronged me. Lest I add to my list of sins of being indifferent to one who is trying as best she can, I pray for the contemplative patience to see that even the one who has hurt me, is still, *B'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God. Let me better focus my lens to see that image more clearly. And, when I spend enough time, immersed in compassion, I may be able to arrive at forgiveness. I certainly pray that for my own wrongs, you, my community of Haverim, friends, can find it in your hearts to continue to engage with me in the spirit of tender compassion. Or as a great songwriter said 30 plus years ago sang, “...*just gimme some tenderness.*”

Shana Tova Tikatevu – may we all be inscribed in the big book in the Heavens for continued life, a life of meaning and most of all, a life filled with compassion for our fellow human beings.

Ken Y”hi Ratzon – So may it be God’s will