

Kavana 5769, September 30, 2008
Delivered by Cantor David Serkin-Poole
Temple B'nai Torah, Bellevue Washington

Gut Yontuv to all on this 1st day of 5769, the Jewish New Year. It has been some year. We are fragile souls who have taken the chance, once again to come to be together with our community as we individually make a **Heshbon Nefesh**, an accounting of our soul. Emunah, faith, comes in many forms. Is it not the quintessential act of faith to come here and open our souls and minds to the possibility of us participating in the writing of this new chapter we call 5769?

Last night, we heard Rabbi Mirel challenge us to look at three ways to be more intimately involved in our community. Today, I want to pick up on that theme by looking at the foundational work that so many base our first look at the New Year, this Rosh Hashanah.

As we take stock, this **Heshbon Nefesh**, each of us will do so in our own private way, while sharing this same collective space. What an irony it is that we search deeply into the very fabric of who we are while we share this public time. It pleases me to no end that the culture of Temple B'nai Torah has never been one of showing up for "the show of it." I suspect, some of us have experienced places like that. But, that is not our congregation. So, we show up for something much more than just the physical presence and seeing old friends (although, I must admit, simply seeing and being with loved ones is indeed something quite wonderful, all by itself).

We are here, yearning for much more than only to be noticed in our external garments. Than, what is it that we are to notice? What is it that is to command our attention for these *Yamim Nora-im*, these days of awe, that will, if we do it right, become sacred, not only as a day on the calendar - but, sacred in our hearts?

Key to our gathering is this illusive notion of "sacred" - Kadosh, K'dushah, K'dushin, M'kadesh, all words that invoke that which is holy, sacred and distinctly and intentionally, above and beyond the casual. When I meet with a couple about to be married, I often ask them this question; Soon, you are about to recite the words, Harei at or atah M'kudeshet/M'kudash, *with these symbols of our commitment, we promise to make our relationship holy* - What is it that you promise? A simple question - but a question that often causes a huge pause. Of course, the quick answer from the couple is, typically, "eternal love." But, beyond

that amorphous, yet lofty promise, the real question is, how does that translate into action?

I want to suggest for your consideration that, as we begin our journey through this Rosh Hashanah day, until the final breaths of N'ilah at the end of Yom Kippur, each of us asks ourselves, "...what am I promising this year?" Popular gurus of the day tell us to be "realistic" and promise only what you are absolutely sure you can keep. I am going to suggest a less cautious alternative; let us dig deeply into our souls and try to make bigger and more important promises than we have ever before made. Here are some to get the creative juices flowing. Take the ones that ring truthfully for you. Add to this list the ones that challenge you personally.

What can I promise that I have not yet fulfilled for those I so dearly love?

What can I promise to my co-workers and colleagues?

What can I promise to the next generation?

What can I promise to those with whom I disagree?

What can I promise to my congregation?

What can I promise to our unselfish Temple leaders who work countless hours to steer our congregation on a righteous path?

What can I promise to my community and country?

If you are a visitor or guest, what can you promise so that maybe in the future, you'd consider becoming a full member of our congregation?

What can I promise to my parents, those living and those not?

What can I promise to Israel?

What can I promise to Israel's neighbors?

What can I promise to the cause of peace in The Middle East?

What can I promise to God?

Inspired by the words of Rabbi Michael Lerner, I leave you with some of my own promises. If they work for you, please, take them and spread them around. I hold no ownership of them.

I promise to seek peace, let me BE peace.

I promise to seek justice, let me be just.

I promise to seek a world of kindness, let me be kind.

I promise to seek a world of generosity, let me be generous with all that I have and to everyone I encounter in my life and to those whom I do not encounter but who still need my help..

I promise to seek a world of sharing, let me share all that I have.

I promise to seek a world of giving, let me be giving to all around me.

I promise to seek a world of love-- let me be loving beyond all reason, beyond all normal expectation, beyond all societal frameworks that tell me how much love is "normal," - beyond all fear that giving too much love will leave me with too little.

I promise to be open, aware, sensitive and receptive to all the love that is already coming to me, from:

- the love of people I know, -

- the love that is part of the human condition,

- the love that is in the holy souls right here in this room, fellow members, especially my students and teachers.

- the accumulated love of past generations that flows through and is embodied in the language, music, agriculture & recipes for cooking or preparing food, technology, literature, my neighbors' religions, and family heritages that have influenced me.

I promise to pass that love on to the next generations in an even fuller and more conscious way.

I leave you with this prayers for our New Year. Brucha Bivracha ha-ahat, Holy One of Blessing, let me be alive to all the goodness that surrounds me. And let that awareness of the goodness and love of the universe be my *magen*, my shield and protector.

Hear the words of my mouth and may the meditations of my heart find acceptance before You, Eternal Friend, who protects and frees me so that I may be a *shaliach tzibur*, your messenger of real freedom of the soul for all whom I encounter. With humility as your cantor and friend, I pray that you can join me in the affirmation of Amen-