

Yom Kippur Kavana
10 Tishrei, 5769 - October 9, 2008
Delivered by Cantor David Serkin-Poole
Temple B'nai Torah, Bellevue, WA

Yamim Nora-im, the Days of Awe - What an appropriate phrase for these 10 days of introspection on our last year and upon this New Year. Indeed they are days of awesome responsibility to reflect deeply on our journey, personally and as a community. Speaking of our community, permit me to indulge for just a moment to acknowledge something very different this year in our community. As many of you know, earlier this year, our wonderful accompanist of over a dozen years, Mr. Dick Woodruff, experienced a serious stroke that has affected his left arm and left leg. As he convalesces at home and continues to make gradual progress, I know all of you will join me in praying for his good health and we look forward to the day when we will welcome back to his temple that he has served so faithfully for over a dozen years. And I would be remising if I did not welcome our new resident accompanist, Mr. Stephen Marshall-Ward who has so beautifully taken over the responsibilities as our regular accompanist and assisting me with the choir. Welcome Stephen. May you, too, find Temple B'nai Torah a home of loving sanctity.

So, how are you doing on those promises? On Rosh Hashanah, I proposed that we be bold in our promises for this year. If we dream big, maybe, we can fulfill some of those dreams that we dare to dream, and continue that process for the next year.

Last night, Rabbi Mirel poignantly recalled for us one of the earliest stories in the Torah that reminds us of some of the essential mythic origins of humanity's development. If Rosh Hashanah reminds us of the birthday of the world and all its manifestations, then I posit this image; Yom Kippur is like the emerging of the butterfly from its cocoon. Surely, all things start out small. Even physicists tell us that the big bang is thought to have started out from the smallest speck of existence. Yet, all things propel toward the next stage. The creeping caterpillar emerges into its destiny - a butterfly - ready to fly toward the freedom of experiencing more of this creation than it could, when only at the ground level.

Is that not much like our journey from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur? Each in our own way has spent this time emerging into the butterfly that now takes off into the new year, with some preprogrammed divine help, now we have been given the wings to fly beyond where we were last year.

For nearly 3 decades of teaching B'nai Mitzvah students, here at Temple B'nai Torah, I have tried to remind each of these precious young souls that the moment they begin preparation for this new stage of life, the past is over. They are there already, if they simply open their eyes, hearts and minds to their new status. There is even a Jewish tradition that tells us that once a youngster is in the midst of preparation for Bar/Bat Mitzvah, she/he can now be counted as one of the 10 in a minyan. That is, the moment we contemplate a new stage of development - think of the Kavanah about which Rabbi Mirel spoke last night - the intentionality being a fact - WE'RE ON THE ROAD TO THE DESTINATION. But, there is a cautionary **word of humility** that Rabbi Lawrence Kushner reminded us cantors at a recent convention of the American Conference of Cantors when he said, "...If you think you're there, you're not...if you're thinking about it and not so sure, you have a better chance of getting there..."

Imagine this; each of us emerges from our larva status, protected by the shell of years' past, into the exquisite butterfly's flight that can be this year, know that we are already flying. Ours is the task today to take notice of our new found wings and now, decide where we shall fly. The Talmud teaches us that, in the days of The Jerusalem Temple, the service of Yom Kippur was solely dependent on the high priest - that if he could not fulfill the practices of the day, they were rendered not fit (literally not "kosher"). Imagine how much responsibility lay on his shoulders! This is the responsibility that now rests on ours!

As I have told each Bar and Bat Mitzvah student, since you took upon yourself the leap of faith to move forward into searching for a new stage of life, you are now there, you are now counted by others. How shall we count ourselves today? Where shall we fly now? On what branches shall we stop this year? This year's world is now your own destiny, no longer limited by the protection of the old cocoon. Let us shed last year's shell and make a bold effort to fly to new places of meaning and especially, beauty. Our time is so limited. For those of us who have experienced the loss of a loved one this year, we know that so keenly. But, 5769 has already begun. On this day of Yom Kippur, we have arrived, no longer anticipating. Let us not waste even one more moment, lest we miss the chance to find the next beautiful flower on which to land. Let us not return next year and say, "if only..." Let us fly now - not tomorrow, to those new and holy destinations that enable us to engage with this sacred world that we have been given to experience and to honor. Maybe, this year, we will get a glimpse of the Sh'china, the Holy Presence and her loving gifts to our universe, if we but take the chance to fly with our newfound wings.

Ken Y'hi Ratzon
So may it be God's will