

Rabbi James Mirel
ROSH HASHANA EVE 2008

(Tell story of Rabbi Abraham)

The mystical story of Rabbi Abraham is our story also-it is a universal parable of the quest for life and meaning. The same mixture of fear and hope which lead Rabbi Abraham to the Western Wall brings each of us here tonight. And like him, we will discover the two faces of God and fate, sorrow and joy, loss and redemption.

Tonight as we begin the New Year each of us has an opportunity to choose life and to enhance life, if not in terms of length of days, though we pray we can, at least in terms of greater satisfaction and fulfillment.

The mystical quest as told in this story and all other similar stories is not the quest for something new it is the quest for the restoration of something lost.

Another famous Jewish story tells us that every soul is endowed with full knowledge and wisdom, but at the moment of birth an angel touches our lips and removes the wisdom from the infant, thus the indentation above the upper lip of each us. And why is the primordial knowledge taken from us? So that we may regain during our lives and those become the master of our own fates, through free will in Judaism, we believe, our fate is not written for us it is written by us.

Tonight I am going to ask you to use your power of imagination, with me as your guide as Isaac Luria guided his student Abraham and imagine what might be your equivalent of meeting the Shekhinah at the Western Wall during the year to come.

For each of us there will be a different path, but tonight I would like to present 3 general imaginative journeys that some of you might choose to take this year and set your heart on it tonight.

The story of the soul seeking to regain lost primordial wisdom points us to path of Khinukh, on-going education. Naturally my suggestion will focus on Jewish knowledge but all education is sacred. My own life was immeasurably enhanced when a middle school teacher encouraged me to study the String bass and join his newly forming school jazz band. Trying

any new educational endeavor is life-affirming at any stage of life. Tonight, my words are directed to those who might grow in Jewish knowledge, the adult members of our congregation are divided, like Gaul, into 3 parts: Jews by birth (about 55%), Jews by Choice (about 20%), and 30% are those who are not Jewish, but who lovingly support the Jewish journey of their family. The 20% that have studied Judaism formally as adults to become Jews are the heart of our adult education program. Tonight I ask the other 80% to study with me for 20 weeks beginning Oct 15th on Wednesday evening to learn anew or learn again the essentials of our Jewish experience. It is a free course open to all, and for some it may be the first step to becoming Jews or just being more knowledgeable and confident lovers of Judaism.

The story of Rabbi Abraham presents a second path, a spiritual journey to Israel and the Holy Western Wall, this time not by foot with ashes and sackcloth but by plane in jeans and tee shirts. In May we will be going on our third Temple Israel trip over the past 4 years. This will be for adult members of our community, soon there will be a family trip, and all Jewish youngsters from 18-26 are eligible for a free trip through the Birtright program. But however you choose to go, especially if you have never been to Israel, please consider if this is your time to go. There is nothing as uplifting as being in this ancient but oh so modern holy place with problems like every country in the world, but with beauty and holiness like nowhere else. Will you meet the Shekhina, the Divine Presence there? I believe you will. More importantly, you will find aspects of your own soul that you have lost or not yet known. As we say in our holy day prayers Ya'alel v'yavo- literally get up and go-your life will be changed.

Thirdly and finally for now, consider how you can become an agent for change in this world by bringing light and comfort to lives burdened by pain, loss, and emptiness. Some of you in your work life do just that as social workers, nurses, doctors, teachers, therapists, and other helping professions. Others do this as volunteers notably in our temple as part of our Mitzvah committee. But even those who do can do a little more and those who have not yet found a way can find a path this year. And as much as you can help others, your own life will be immeasurably enriched, just ask our bar and bat mitzvah students how they feel when they complete their mitzvah projects. The amount of pain in this world is staggering. Tonight I think of one of our members, who one day was a vital and vibrant wife and mother, a soccer mom and a soccer player, suddenly and inexplicably count down in a moment by an aneurism, in a near coma for months and now painfully

slowly going through rehab day by day. When I visited her recently she was being literally supported by physical therapists helping her, drawing her out, and ironically one put a small ball by her foot and almost begging her to try to move her foot and kick the ball. And I thought of this vital woman a few months before running down the field with grace and ease, kicking and heading the ball as if it were second nature. She has a sacred journey ahead, as does her family, a painful one, but not giving up. But those two young therapists - neither of them more than 30 years old - what amazing and sacred paths they have chosen. Each of us can be in large or small ways bringers of light to stricken lives. If we once knew in our souls the wisdom of compassion we can learn it again.

Whatever new path you choose this year, do it with fullness of heart and know that in some mystical way your soul was destined for greatness. Not necessarily the kind that will bring you fame or fortune, the greatness of living a life of meaning and service. If you choose, with God's help, this will be a life-changing year for each of us- AMEN