

Teshuva, Tefillah, and Tzedaka

By Rabbi Murray Ezring, Temple Israel

L'Shana Tova U'Mitukah! May we all experience a good, sweet and successful 5773. In a very short time we will gather in our synagogues in greater numbers than at any other time of year. Some of us will be present for the hope of a truly moving spiritual and religious experience. Others will gather to be part of an unequalled social experience. Still others will attend services just because they always have.

One of the most familiar lines of liturgy, from the Mahzor, is found in the Jewish mythical setting presented in the *Unatanah Tokef*. The prayer paints a picture of God's courtroom. It presents the possible punishments. Then as a final transition to the positive, we are told: "But Teshuva, Tefilla,

and Tzedaka can transform the harshness of our decree." This phrase defines Teshuva as a process for us.

Teshuva can be translated in different ways including Repentance or Return. We have all been taught that this return is a return to God, Torah, and Jewish tradition. I believe that this is true, but limited. The Return sought on the *Yamim Nora'im* is even greater. It is clear that the focus of this prayer is for us to live a better life than we have been. The great sage Rava in Tractate Shabbat 31a, teaches that there are five questions we will be asked when we finally appear before God for judgment. The first: "Did you conduct your business honestly?" I was shocked when I first read this. I expected something like "Do you believe in God?" or "Did you do your best to follow halachah?" Instead, we will be asked how we treated others in business.

The concepts of tefilla and tzedaka remind us that teshuva refers to rebuilding relationships. In shul, we begin to rebuild our relationship with God. We also begin to rebuild our relationships with parents, spouses, and children who are sitting with us. As Rabbi Dr. Louis Finklestein said, "When we pray, we speak to God.

When we study, God speaks to us." It is very important for each of us to take time to study Jewish text. The combination of prayer and study is our way of socializing with God. The more time we spend surrounded by God's words and presence, the better our understanding of and our relationship with God.

Too often we forget that the second defining term of Teshuva is Tzedaka. The root tzedek does not mean charity, but righteousness. The most righteous behavior we can exhibit to our family and friends is to give them our time and presence. In today's America, too many of us give our time to our careers and other pursuits that take us away from our families. Frequently, we rely on activities provided by others to care for our children. Just as our relationship with God is defined by the time and effort we put into that holy relationship, so too the sacred relationship between parents and children, husbands and wives, grandparents and grandchildren is defined by the time we spend together. I believe that is why our Rabbis taught us to spend the month before Rosh Hashana seeking out those we might have wronged and apologize for what we have done. At the same time we are taught that if someone

apologizes to us, we need to forgive them as a sign to God that we are worthy of Divine forgiveness.

In February's AARP, Bronnie Ware wrote of five regrets of dying. Among them were "I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings. I wish I had stayed in touch with friends." (To which I would add: I wish I had spent more time with my family.) Imagine how much better our lives would be if we were all able to express to those most important to us how we really feel about them. Rabbi Allen Maller wrote a poem in which he reminds us: "God gives opportunities but not forever. God takes opportunities away after a while. So don't hesitate or delay" Make the time to spend with your loved ones and with God to ensure a meaningful future. Share your feelings with those you want and need most in your life beginning with family and friends to prepare for a renewal of your relationship with God.

This year, as we gather to celebrate the New Year in the Jewish calendar, may we all experience a successful Teshuva a return; a rebuilding of our relationships with our families as well as our relationship with our Parent and Creator in heaven.

L'Shana Tova Tikateivu ✧



Happy New Year

from
Bill & Patty Gorelick

Happy New Year

Bob & Anne
Yudell

High Holiday Greetings

from

LEBO'S

Barbara & Jerry Levin
Linda & Mark Goldsmith
Rabbi Binyamin & Ilana Levin
Brian Goldsmith - *Certified Pedorthist*

✧ Temple Kol Ami ✧

L'Shanah Tovah

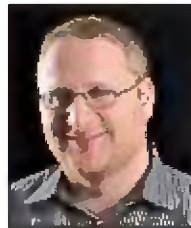
By Rabbi Michael Shields, Temple Kol Tikvah

Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky once wrote: "*Berakhot*, blessings, help us to see the world through thankful eyes Today, at the beginning of the year, find something to be grateful for. Then say a prayer of thanks."

More than ten years ago, a minyan (or two) of Jews and their families decided to form a Jewish group at the Lake. We will forever be in the debt of Rabbi Ezring and Temple Israel for their support over these past years. They extended Jewish love and learning, as well as professional support to the burgeoning Jewish community. Now, Temple Kol Tikvah of Lake Norman consists of more than 160 families and our school facilitates educational programming for nearly 130 children.

It is also important at this time of new beginnings to thank the Shalom Park Community. Shalom Park is a unique and vibrant center of Jewish life that has made the Greater Charlotte Jewish community strong in numbers but also in spirit and participation. The success of the Charlotte Jewish community has led to more Jews and their families wanting to move to the region. The wisdom, support, and generosity of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte and the agencies housed at Shalom Park have helped facilitate the rapid development of the Jewish community at the Lake.

At the beginning of this year, it is easy to find something to be



grateful for and the members of Temple Kol Tikvah and the wider Lake Norman Jewish Community say a prayer of thanks to God and to the Shalom Park community for the blessings we have received. We see our Greater Charlotte Jewish world through thankful eyes.

The path that we have traveled has had some twists and turns but now we find ourselves as a single congregation serving the Lake Norman region. Jewish families in all of their forms from Davidson, Cornelius, Huntersville, Mooresville, Concord, University, and Denver are more connected to the Jewish community than ever before. Temple Kol Tikvah is a vibrant community focused synagogue and Jewish connection point for Jews and their families on the north side of the city.

As the New Year is set to begin, Temple Kol Tikvah wanted to share three of our core values:

1) "*Kol Yisrael Aravim Zeh B'zeh*" – Mutual Responsibility

We like to say that we will "Make great mistakes together." While we do not seek out mistakes, this mantra reflects our deep sense of responsibility to each other as we take up this community building endeavor. We face challenges together boldly, knowing that our fellow members will be there to celebrate successes but also to correct and learn from missteps. By relying on each other and our collective wisdom we marshal our resources to good communal ends.

2) Every Tradition Was Once a New Idea

We welcome tradition and the adaptation of beautiful customs

and ideas from other places, but we also believe strongly that new ideas can come from anyone – young, "young at heart," and everyone in between. Every individual has the potential to help us be radically innovative when the need arises. We need "all hands on deck," and welcome new voices to join our chorus and sit with us at our shared table. "We are not your grandmother's congregation," but we love grandma and all that she can teach us.

3) *Im tirzu ein zo agadah* – "If you will it, it is no longer a dream."

With all the pieces (people) we have, and all the ones we will add in the months and years to come, we can be dreamers. We can envision the community we want and make that dream a reality. This is a sacred responsibility and an empowering and meaningful way to engage in Judaism. There is great excitement that comes with being part of a young community. Every individual is a piece of our communal puzzle.

This is an exciting time to be Jewish in the Charlotte region. In addition to the established and vibrant bastion of Shalom Park, the Greater Charlotte Jewish community can also claim the dynamic and spirited northern community based in Davidson as a vibrant center for Jewish communal and religious engagement.

As we prepare to hearken to the call of the shofar, I know we will be trumpeting out a message of gratitude to the Greater Charlotte Jewish community. Temple Kol Tikvah of Lake Norman (Voice of Hope) wishes all a Shanah Tovah. ✧