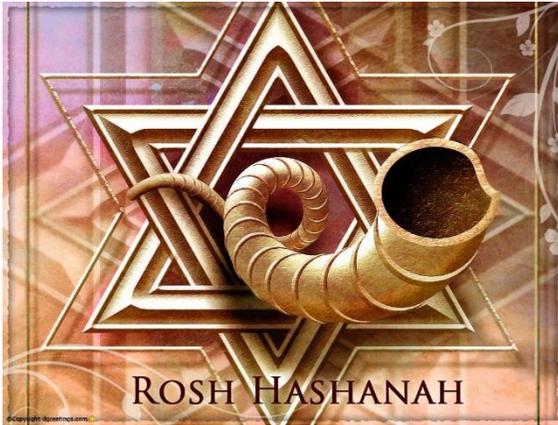


Choose Life

A horn blast reverberates through the dark reaches of the universe. The angelic hosts, drawn up in array before the throne of God, shudder at the sound. It is the Day of Judgment.



At sunset, September 29, 2019, Jews around the world will celebrate their most holy and sacred time of year: The New Year (Year 5780), **Rosh Hashanah**, followed by ten sacred days, all culminating in **Yom Kippur**, the most sacred and holy day of atonement.

I have always felt that every faith offers something of significance to all people; thus, the essence of these days is as significant to Christians as Lent should be to non-Christians.

It marks a most sacred and most holy time of year. It marks a period of honest reassessment, of deep prayer, of focused meditation; of promise, of hope, of light, and of covenant with God.

Like the Great Lenten Season, every season should mark a time of spiritual renewal and rebirth. Every season should mark the reliving of an ancient covenant between God and us spirits, as conceived through Abraham, as carried forth into written law by Moses, as nurtured and protected by the Prophets of all faiths, and as wondrously manifested by the Great Christ Spirit through the man Jesus.

Where have we succeeded; where have we failed? Where have we shown compassion; where have we been thoughtless? Where have we demonstrated humility; where have we been arrogant? Where has love guided our thoughts and our deeds; where have resentment and anger poisoned that love?

The scrolls of life eternally stand open before us. Our lives eternally stand before us in their resplendent light, as well as in their shadowy darkness. And it is time to repent. It is time for us to seek forgiveness. It is time for us to forgive. It is time for us to rebuild the shattered temples of our lives.

Consider for a few moments: **Grace** and **forgiveness** are ours. They are within our destinies, if we but seek to repent, if we but seek to forgive, if we but seek to make earnest atonement and yearn for **at-one-ment** with God.

“Father, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” These are words which Christ used when he taught people how to pray. Does God forgive us our trespasses? Of course! But **forgiveness** begins with **forgiving**.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” These are the words which Christ uttered upon the cross at Golgotha. Does God forgive us our trespasses? Of course! But **forgiveness** begins with **faith** in God’s Love.

“And it came about on the next day that Moses said to the people, ‘You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now, I am going up to the LORD. Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.’ ” And Moses did just that. He went up Mt. Sinai and spent forty days praying and atoning for the sons and daughters of Israel, and God forgave them. Does God forgive our sins? Of course! But **forgiveness** begins with **atonement**.

The *Talmud* states: ***“Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; therefore, REJOICE; forgive, and forgiveness is thine!”***

Every Scripture inspired by God and God’s Holy Spirit preaches the necessity and the wondrous power of forgiveness. Every day that we awaken from sweet slumber represents a new beginning; a new year, so to speak. Every day that we awaken, God, in His gracious mercy, gives us the blessed opportunity to see and to contemplate our errors; to repent for these errors, to pray for forgiveness; to forgive ourselves and those who may have hurt us; and to make atonement. Thus, we can begin each day with healing.

Forgiveness begins with forgiving, and forgiving begins with the realization that life is basically **good** and that we must **cherish** it, despite all that seems evil, despite the immense pain and hurt suffered by so many, despite the injuries inflicted upon us and inflicted upon others by us. Despite all that seems unjust, God created life; therefore, **life is good!**

“And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.” Not just **good**; it was **very** good. In the Twenty-Seventh Psalm, one of my favorites, it says: ***“I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD, in the land of the living.”***

Life is good! Let us never forget this.

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Ramadan, the whole of the Lenten Season, Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, Passover; these are all times of great transformation for the Human family; times where we can become transfigured, as did Christ, from the shadows of crucifixion to the luminescence of resurrection.

But (like all “but’s”, this is a BIG “but”: Rosh Hashanah doesn’t do it; Yom Kippur doesn’t do it; Palm Sunday doesn’t do it; Easter Sunday doesn’t do it; the holy month of Ramadan doesn’t do it; the spilling of the blood of Jesus Christ didn’t do it.

So, what does it? **Prayer, forgiveness, and atonement**. We cannot merely accept God’s goodness and mercy; we must become **at-one** with them. And that requires work. That requires

transformation. That requires us to live a life of harmlessness, mindfulness, and humble kindness. That requires that we all stop talking-the-talk and begin walking-the-walk.

The Book of Life opens for all of us, and we are presented with a choice. Is life good, or is life evil? Are we inscribed in the *Book of Life*, or in the *Book of Death*? I say this: no matter what life may present to us . . .

- **Life is good!** Therefore, we should treasure it, not despise it.
- **Life is good!** Therefore, we should affirm it, not deny it.
- **Life is good!** Therefore, we should have faith in it, not despair its possibilities.
- **Life is good!** Therefore, we should live it to the fullest, in all its joy and suffering, not cast it aside.
- **Life is good!** Therefore, let **your** life become a testimony to life's goodness.

In **Deuteronomy 30:15-16**, it is written: ***“See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil, in that I commanded thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances . . . therefore choose life, that thou mayest live.”***

Through repentance and atonement -- through prayer and forgiveness -- our faith and our Spiritualism remain alive, not dead; and we are borne upon the wings of grace and salvation out of death, and we are **reborn** with new hope and a new life.

It really is simple: stop the talk and begin the walk; turn your face from the shadows of death and return to that from which we are all born. Turning and **re**-turning -- **Teshuvah** in Hebrew -- are essential to mystical and magical transformation and healing.

Remembering is the first step; turning around follows; and **RE**-turning is what makes it happen. But, what is it to which we should be returning?

- **First:** we should endeavor **to do the will of God:** obey God's commands and live, not just recite, the *Law of the Prophets*.
- **Next:** we should endeavor **to reveal God's glory:** to bring out from within ourselves, from within each other, and from within our society the divine essence which God so lovingly placed within all of us, so that we may look upon our lives and marvel, as did Jacob: ***Surely the Lord is in this place!***
- **Next:** we should endeavor **to hallow God's name:** Everything -- and I mean **everything;** **our** lives, our homes, our families, our jobs, our planet, our respective houses of worship -- **everything** about the Lord deserves honor, dignity, grace, respect, and awe. If we gossip, if we engage in hateful slander, if we resent that which others have, if we judge others, if we choose not forgive, then we dishonor ourselves and we dishonor God.

- **Finally:** we should endeavor **to imitate God:** to accentuate and to manifest our origin in and our kinship to God, by bearing witness to Godly traits through our lives. An ancient sage expressed this so well by saying: ***“Let us make ourselves like Him. As He is merciful and gracious, so let us strive to be.”*** Does this mean we have to be perfect? NO. But it **does** mean that we should set high standards for ourselves, for our lives, and for our society. God deserves the very best that we can offer.

“Awake, awake, oh sleepers, from your sleep; Oh slumberers, arouse ye from your slumbers; and examine your deeds, return in repentance, and remember your Creator.”

Thus, were the words of Maimonides.

“The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

Thus, were the words of Paul to the Corinthians. Do you hear the trumpet? It’s calling us. It’s calling us all right now. Listen, my friends; listen carefully. It is calling us all. Listen and be raised! Are you inscribed in the ***Book of Life***, or the ***Book of Death?***

Peace and God Bless,
Rev. Simeon

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