

## Rosh Hashanah 5769

*Hillel Haya Omer: Im ayn anee lee me lee – if I am not for myself, who will be? Im anee rak, l'atzmee, mah anee – if I am only for myself, then what am I? Im lo achshav, ay'matay?- If not now, when?*

This year for the very first time, a text message was sent to millions of Americans and in one moment the name of a vice presidential pick was announced. One text message was sent to millions of Blackberrys and computers. News reaches us instantaneously, yet what is news today is forgotten tomorrow. If you don't get an instant message or it doesn't come up on facebook just know that there are still messages being sent constantly. Message number 1) The world was created just for me!

Hillel would say im ain ani lee me lee (if I am not for myself who will be?) On Rosh Hashana Adam was created! Why was Adam created alone, as a singular human being? The Talmud in Sanhedrin answers this question. Adam was created alone so that no one could say, “my father is greater than yours.” No one should claim that they come from “better stock” than someone else. We\ are all created equal in G-d's eyes. The Talmud also says that Adam was created alone to teach us that people can create many coins from the same mold but every coin is exactly alike. G-d used one mold, Adam, and yet every person is different, therefore every person is obligated to say “Bishvelee nivra, haolam,” – the world was created just for me . I am the center of the universe. Once again message number 1) Rosh Hashana is all about me! The world was created for me.

The Talmud in Rosh Hashana, page 10b and 11a discusses what other great events took place on Rosh Hashana. Rabbi Eliezer says:

*B'tishrei, noldu, ha'avot – in Tishrei, the patriarchs were born. U'bRosh Hashanah, nifkadu, Sarah, Rachel v'Chana – On Rosh Hashanah, Sarah, Rachel and Chana had their prayers answered and were finally able to have children.*

In Tishrei, Rosh Hashana, the patriarchs were born. Why do the rabbis connect the birth of the patriarchs to Rosh Hashana? When G-d first calls out to Abraham, he says, “go for yourself, from your land, your relatives, your father’s home, to a land I will show you. I will make you a great nation....I will bless those who bless you...and curse those who curse you....and all of the families of the earth shall bless themselves through you.” If G-d wanted to create a special and unique nation from a special and unique person like Abraham, why didn’t he send him to an uninhabited region of the world, rich with fruits and vegetables and a perfect climate? Isolate him so he could create the perfect Garden of Eden ethical and moral society. Instead he directs Abraham to Canaan to dwell among seven powerful and established idolatrous nations. Message number 2) v'im ani rak liatzmi ma ani? If I am only for myself then what am I? Abraham’s name is really a contraction of the Hebrew “Av Hamon Goyim,” which means “father of many nations”. The first Jew was not to live in isolation, but was obligated to care about the rest of the world. When three pagan nomads/ idol worshippers, approach Abraham’s tent, he stops praying to G-d and runs to offer them food and water. From this we learn, *gedolah hachnasat orchim, m'kabalat pnei ha'shechina – it is greater to receive guests than to be in the presence of the divine.*

Abraham places his tent on the major crossroads with four doors in each direction so that no one can pass by without offering them hospitality. Abraham could have built large walls to keep foreign influences out but he realizes that his mission as a Jew is as the old coca cola commercial says, “I’d like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony”.

And G-d said, "Shall I conceal from Abraham what I do, to destroy Sodom and Gemorah, now that Abraham will become a great and mighty nation, all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him. For I have loved him, because he commanded his children and his household after him to keep the way of Hashem," *la'asot tzedakah, u'mishpat*, to do charity and justice" in order that Hashem might then bring upon Abraham that which he had spoken.

Why does G-d tell Abraham that he is going to destroy Sodom? Because he wants Abraham to complain, challenge, argue and feel the responsibility of the world upon his shoulders. When Abraham hears that Sodom is going to be destroyed, he turns to G-d and says, "anochee afar v'efer," – "I am but dust and ashes". I am nothing. I am but one lonely voice. BUT, Message number 2) *Im anee rak l'atzmi, mah anee?* If I am only for myself then what am I? After Abraham realizes that he is nothing but a speck of dust, he then turns to G-d and says, "shall the judge of all the earth not do justice? Is it possible that the innocent will die along with the wicked or the guilty? Even though G-d knows that there aren't 10 righteous people in the entire city, He wants Abraham to be pained by the cries of others and challenge G-d. Fight for the people of Sodom.

G-d says that he loves Abraham because in his household the children learn "to do righteousness and justice." Teach this to all the nations of the earth. Care for others and they shall bless you.

#### **CURRENT DARFUR STATISTICS:**

- **The death toll has reached up to 400,000 people since February 2003**
- **More than 2.5 million people have been driven from their homes**
- **More than 200,000 have fled to refugee camps in neighboring Chad**
- **As many as 1 million civilians could die in Darfur from lack of food and from disease within coming months**

- **80% of the children under five years old are suffering from severe malnutrition and many are dying each day**

Moses, exhibits the exact same quality of concern and responsibility for Jew and non Jew alike. The Torah tells us “and Moshe grew up” – the first day he saw an Egyptian beating a Jew, he could not remain silent, the next day, he saw a Jew beating another Jew, he could not remain silent. Days later he saw non Jewish shepherds abusing the daughters of Yitro. Message number 2) *Im anee rak l’atzmee , mah anee?* If I am only for myself, then what am I?

I am holding in my hand a Kassam rocket. This rocket destroyed a home in Sderot. The owner of the home gave this rocket to my wife. He said that everything he had was destroyed. He wanted to thank her for all of the work that Operation Embrace had done to help rebuild the lives of his family. He was a carpenter and the one thing he could do was to bronze this vessel of evil, hatred and destruction. He wanted to teach his children that Jews have the ability to turn even an item of hate and murder into something good and beautiful. He asked Aviva to take this back to America and use it on Shabbat to hold flowers. At first, I was repulsed by the thought of having a Kassam rocket in our home but after hearing this story, it has become one of the most beautiful and holy items in our house.

Beginning in January 2001, massive Kassam rocket attacks have been directed against Sderot and the Western Negev in Israel. Over 8000 rockets have been launched. These attacks have killed or maimed hundreds of people, left thousands suffering with trauma and destroyed millions of dollars in homes and property. How central is Israel in our thoughts? What have we done to support Jewish victims of terror? Should we at least take a moment on Rosh Hashana to think about 20 plus thousand Jews who go to synagogue in shelters on Rosh Hashana, or thousands of children who cannot play

outside, or inside, or an entire city which remains concerned about taking a shower or using the bathroom because if a Kassam is fired there are only 15 seconds to find shelter.

The Washington Times, Sept. 28, 2008

"It's a post-synagogue generation," he said of the under-35 set. "They're not frustrated with synagogue. Synagogue is not even a factor in their lives. When these kids are asked to name a Jewish organization [like B'nai Brith or the Hillel], they can't. They don't even know these organizations exist."

More than 50 % of the Jews in the Greater Washington area are unaffiliated with anything Jewish.

Our congregation is celebrating 100 years and I have been privileged to serve as your rabbi for 25 years. Beth Sholom has grown from a neighborhood shul into a major spiritual force in the Greater Washington area. We are the largest Orthodox congregation and certainly the most heterogeneous. Beth Sholom has become a home for young and old alike. It is the entry point for many Jews wishing to experience the beauty of the Torah and Jewish tradition. At Beth Sholom we offer Judaism as a way of life and not just a venue for scheduling life cycle events.

I often comment when seeing the streets lined with cars of Sabbath and Yom Tov, how wonderful it is to see so many people coming to shul. With over 90% of the Jews in the Greater Washington area not identifying with Orthodox Judaism, we must be the entry spot for anyone who wishes to explore the beauty and relevance of traditional Judaism. Most of us in this room come from non-observant homes and have found the treasure of our Torah and traditions here at Beth Sholom. We serve as a model for the nation in balancing tolerance and openness on the one hand while remaining committed to the Jewish law and its standards. Literally 100's of people have made life-changing decisions as a result of belonging to our shul community. This opportunity of reaching all

Jews is a holy calling which all of us have a responsibility to participate in. Each of us can take his or her love of Judaism and touch another *neshama* forever.

The third and final message of Rosh Hashana, “*v'im lo achshuv amatei*” and if not now when? This is not just for a rabbi, educator or outreach professional. Everyone here has this responsibility. This is the holy work of Abraham. He was born on Rosh Hashana and so should the renewed energies of each and every one of us. This year I ask each family to invite 5 different individuals or families who have not experienced the beauty of Shabbat to join you for Shabbat services and a meal. 50% unaffiliated, I would call that crisis mode. Can you imagine if just one of those 5 families actually like your singing or your food. That is how revolutions happen, one person at a time.

The great Rabbi Akiva had a horrible premonition that his daughter would die on her wedding day. Lo and behold, her wedding day arrived, she gets married and she doesn't die. The day after the wedding, Rabbi Akiva asks her, what happened at the wedding? She has no idea about this premonition of her death and she doesn't know what her father means. She thanks him for the beautiful wedding and once again he asks her if anything unusual happened at the wedding? She says, well in the middle of all the dancing and music, I thought I heard knocking at the door and I looked around and no one else seemed to hear it. So I went to the door, opened it and saw a desperately poor woman who said that she was very hungry. I invited her in, fed her and asked her to dance with us. Rabbi Akiva understood immediately. No one else heard that knock. People were too busy eating, singing, dancing and celebrating. There was too much joy in the room. No one, not the guests, not the help, not even the rabbis heard the knock on the door, no one, except his daughter. On Rosh Hashana, there's a knock on the door. It's the sound

of the shofar. When we hear it, will we be listening, listening for the knock at the door. G-d is listening! On Rosh Hashana, G-d heard the prayers of Sara, Rachel and Chana. On Rosh Hashana, G-d gave us Abraham and Jacob. On Rosh Hashana, man was created.

The Talmud in Sanhedrin on page 37a, gives a third reason why Adam was created alone as a singular human. Says the Talmud, "*hamikayem nefesh ached kielu kiyam olam maleh,*" that if we save just one life, it is as if we save the entire world.

The prophet, Micah tells us "what does G-d want from you?" Only to do justice, love chesed and walk humbly with your G-d. Rabbi Tarfon said, the day is short, there is so much to do, we are a little complacent, but the reward is very great and Hashem is insistent that we do this holy work, here in Potomac, in the Greater Washington area, throughout this country, in Israel and around the world. It is not for us to finish the work but it doesn't mean that any of us are free from doing our part. This is the holiday of Avraham, he his is our father and we are his children and it is our responsibility to hear his knock on the door, the shofar and answer it. May we all be inscribed in the book of life , with good health, peace prosperity and nachat.