

## ROSH HASHANAH 2<sup>nd</sup> DAY 5784 – COLUMBIA JEWISH CONGREGATION

[ani v'ata]

Shanah tovah! A good new year, too, to each and every one of you. We often take these words for granted, shanah tovah, not thinking much about what they really mean. It's certainly true that it means a good year, but the word for year is an interesting one. As many of you know, I love the Hebrew language because of its root system that allows us to analyze words differently than we usually do in English. While we know that the word Shanah means year, where does its root come from? Another word from the same root is also familiar to us: Sh'nayim, which means two, or Sheini if you prefer ordinal numbers. In Hebrew, two is a repetition. We talk about annual cycles because the years keep circling around. I could have chosen the song Circle Game just as well for my introduction.

Now, anyone in advertising knows that repetition is a great way to get your message across, and for people to learn (or at least memorize). How many of us know product slogans or commercial songs because of how often we hear them repeated? Not just marketers, but the rabbis also understood that repetition is a great way to learn. That's where the Mishnah gets its name, and you can hear the root in that word as well. Jewish law got learned by repetition. That makes sense when you remember that books weren't common and so most people couldn't read until the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the invention of the printing press.

There's another Hebrew word that has the same sound, and that is shinu'i, which means "change". While I'm not 100% sure of this root connection, I believe shinu'i comes from the same concept of "you can't step in the same river twice", as saying that reflects the fact that everything keeps moving forward in time, and even though we revisit things, they are never exactly the same. This is also one explanation of why the round Challahs for the days of awe are spiraled as well. A spiral goes around in a circle, but slightly higher than the last time around. And that's why I chose this lovely Hebrew song to introduce my drash. The words, which are in your supplement at the top of page 5, mean, "you and I will change the world".

Rosh Hashanah is a time for making changes. How many of you want to make a change, FOR THE WORSE?? I didn't think anyone would. So what is it that makes it so hard for us to change? Are habits, or following like sheep, part of our DNA? Are we hard wired to avoid making changes out of inertia? Some of you know that in addition to being a rabbi, I also have a Masters in Social Work. Some of the years I spent doing social work were as a therapist and trying to help people change. It wasn't easy. You may remember the old joke, "How many therapists does it take to change a light bulb?? Only one, but the light bulb has to want to change!" The sound of the shofar that we hear on these holidays is supposed to be both a **warning**, that the time for change is **now**, and like an **alarm clock**, it's supposed to wake us up and get us **out** of our ruts, our habits, our narrow places, where we can get stuck.

The Standing for Racial Justice committee had a book review event on *This Is The Fire*, by Don Lemon. As a journalist, Mr. Lemon also had a curiosity as to why it's so hard for people to change. Of course, from his perspective, he was thinking about racist attitudes and systems that have been a part of our American culture for over 400 years. He posited **four things** that he thought can create change. Anger was the **first**, the sort of righteous anger that makes you correct a wrong that you see in the world, or perhaps feel if you're the victim of injustice. **Solidarity** was his next thought, that by not having to face making the change by yourself, you'd have a higher chance of success. **Compassion** was his third way of facilitating change. When you are finally moved by compassion to insist on change, as many of us were by the murder of George Floyd over 3 years ago, you are motivated to bring about change. Lastly, Lemon cited **Vision** as an instigator of change. While any one of these four can ignite a change, certainly the **more** of them one has for a singular issue, the more likely they are to succeed.

Some of you may know of the bus our Jewish Federation sponsored to take folks from Howard County to the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary March on Washington of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. One of the slogans that was chanted there many times was Know Justice, K N O W, Know Peace, No Justice, N O, No Peace. I know it's been used many other places as well, but let me share with you an important Jewish connection.

You know that we have 613 commandments, and over half of them are negative (all the don'ts like don't murder, don't steal, etc.). But of the positive commandments, there are only two that use the Hebrew root RODEF, which means to pursue or to run after. One is Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof – Justice Justice shall you pursue; the other is Bakesh Shalom V'radfehu – seek peace and pursue it. I think it's interesting that the same two commandments using the root rodef - to pursue- are the same two values seen as in conflict in the chant I just mentioned. There's also a repetition involved in each of these special commandments. Tzedek Tzedek tirdof is the only one that repeats the work, in this case the goal – Justice. In Bakesh Shalom V'radfehu, it's the only mitzvah that uses TWO different verbs to emphasize its importance.

So my message to you this 2<sup>nd</sup> day of Rosh Hashanah 5784 is if you want change, you have to be ready to get active; you have to go out and pursue the change you want to see. It's not enough just to "be the change", you have to MAKE it happen actively. Ani v'Ata – you and I will change the world, IF we want to, and IF we're willing to work at it actively. Whatever changes you want to make in the coming year, I pray that you have the strength, the resolve, and the fortitude – the stick-to-it-tiveness – to make it happen. Ken y'hi rason, so may it be the Divine will. [Sing ani v'ata]