

Good Yuntif!

As we gathered to start this year's High Holy Day season, there is change and upheaval in the world around us:

- revolutionary change in governments that impact both US and Israeli dealings on the world stage

- earthquakes, in Baltimore of all places!!! Not to mention a hurricane and tropical storm, all in less than 1 month

- brewing political dialogue in preparation for upcoming elections

- and even changes in the fall lineup of some of our favorite TV shows!

Yet, we make the time to come together as Jews precisely because in all of the change and upheaval, we care about being Jewish. We might come to seek God's presence, and we might come because we need to hear from our clergy how "being Jewish" speaks to us in our daily lives. We gather here at the synagogue as we have for countless generations because we want to be part of this community of fellow Jews.

My grandparents, immigrants from somewhere in Russia, instilled in me a love of Judaism. As a young boy, I listened to the stories of my grandparents...what it

meant to them to live their lives as Jews and of the realities that drove them on their Jewish journey to America. Later on after their passing, I attended a production of “Fiddler on the Roof,” and I had my “Ah Ha” moment! It hit like a ton of bricks: I descended from a place like Anatevka!

Past generations sought to build great Jewish institutions, synagogues, and community centers. They were built and they proudly said “here we are... we are American Jews...and we are here to stay.” And stay we did. Never before in the history of our people have we Jews lived as well and as free as we enjoy life in America today.

It is both a great honor and a humbling responsibility to stand before you today as president of Har Sinai Congregation. I recently visited the American Jewish Museum in Philadelphia, which is, quite symbolically, directly across from the liberty bell, (talk about location)and I was awestruck seeing the American Jewish experience laid out in the beautiful 25,000 sq ft building. Within its walls is the powerful history of American Judaism, and our Congregation, yes, Har Sinai Congregation, is part of the permanent display showing our prominence in the early years of the American Jewish Journey.

For 169 years at Har Sinai Congregation, members, clergy, and staff have labored together to breathe in the value system of our faith and our way of life, to educate our children, to comfort the bereaved and to celebrate with the bride and groom. We have carried the heritage of our ancestors as proudly as we have carried our Torahs. We have taught and learned that our people have come down through history with a unique identity. Judaism stands for justice, learning, and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). These are values perpetuated in our covenant with God. And we are obligated by this covenant to pass and impart these values to our children and our children's children.

I don't know about you, but my Jewish pride is as simple as our Rabbi's theme this year, which is "Simply Jewish" and as complex as the emotions I feel when I look into the eyes of my grandchildren and see the innocence and beauty in their souls.

So why have I shared these thoughts and feelings with you today? Because, I hope to inspire you to find your Jewish soul every day. To honor your mothers and fathers and grandparents and all who came before you by exploring and

breathing in the wonders of Judaism that have sustained our people through thousands of years on an exhausting yet exhilarating journey.

Come to a “Pray ‘N Stay”, bring your own bottle of wine, enjoy services and a casual dinner, participate in a book club, social action event, have breakfast and hear a community speaker provide insight about current issues. Take a temple-Sponsored trip to Philadelphia and see the American Jewish Museum with your own eyes. It is not necessary to have had a traditional Jewish upbringing, and no one is disqualified for not having strong enough faith...you might doubt the very existence of God. You just have to walk in and soak it all up.

In a sacred text called “*Pirkei Avot*,” which means “the sayings of our fathers,” it says, “Do not separate yourself from the community.” Har Sinai Congregation **IS Your Community**...in these times of change and upheaval, breathe in the meaning of being and living as Jews not just during these High Holy Days, but throughout the year. Your Jewish Journey can be life altering! L’Shannah Tovah.

Rosh Hashanah September 29, 2011