

Gary Salas  
High Holidays 2016

The High Holiday season is a time of transition. Summer has turned to fall, the Autumn Equinox has passed and the sun has crossed the celestial equator. The days now grow shorter than the nights as we move into a new astronomical season. It is a time of going into darkness, for during the Days Of Awe we take a journey into our own dark places, and it is also a time of the harvest, the renewal of life, and of gratitude for the creative, healing potential of the earth.

Things seem to be on the brink, everything is changing. The leaves are turning colors, letting go of the trees, falling to the ground, shriveling up and returning to the earth. Life is recycling itself. And I am a part of it all and at times overwhelmed by its power and scope. So I come to Adas Yoshuron Synagogue, for sanctuary perhaps, and connection, as I try to understand what it means and my place in it.

Rabbi Alan Lew tells us that: “Teshuva is the essential gesture of the High Holiday season. It is the gesture by which we seek to heal alienation from ourselves and from each other and to find at-one-ment: to connect with God and reconcile with others, and to not be shaped and controlled by the habitual unconscious momentum of our lives”. We are called to spiritual responsibility, and as Rabbi Lew tells us, “no matter how enormous the temptation to blame external factors, no matter how rooted in fact, or reason, or history, we are called to responsibility”. We are called to ask ourselves... what is our complicity in the alienation and conflict in our lives.

Teshuva...returning. It begins with Tisha B’Av, the marking of the destruction of the Temple, and exile. It is the moment of turning. Our walls have collapsed: we are homeless, vulnerable, and lost. It is a time of change, of leaving, looking for a new home, and rebuilding. We can rebuild with walls of self – righteousness and judgement, using personal and collective narratives rooted in historical interpretations which blame and justify. Or we can rebuild with Teshuva and forgiveness, open our hearts

to each other, acknowledge our part in the hurts we have inflicted and validate the experience of those we have injured. History is created in the present, and forgiveness, it has been said, means giving up our hopes for a better past.

The Days Of Awe are a voyage from birth to death and to rebirth in ten days. It spiritually recycles us, can transform the quality of our experience in the world, and allow us to live our lives with more humanity, and with greater presence, and openheartedness. It is our death to die, and it is our life to live. If there is a willingness, we can engage the High Holidays as if it really mattered. And it does, more than we can possibly think.

And a final quote from Rabbi Lew:

This is real. This is very real.

This is absolutely inescapable.

And we are utterly unprepared.

We have nothing to offer each other but

Our broken hearts.

And this will be enough.

May this Yom Kippur bring us forgiveness, gratitude, humility, freedom, peace, and wisdom.