

## Welcoming Remarks Rosh Hashanah 2022 (5783)

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*L'Shana Tova Tikateyvu!* Whether you are here with us in person, or joining us on zoom, whether you have come here from Camden or Damariscotta or Sri Lanka, whether you are zooming from your living room in Belfast or you're just dried off, poolside, in Silverlake, welcome, welcome to the near and the far. Welcome to our barn which has become, for the second year, our beautiful little Shtetl Shul!

As some of you know, my mother-in-law, may she rest in peace, was a somewhat lapsed Episcopalian. She had a hard time wrapping her head around the shifting dates and moods of Jewish holidays, many of which she celebrated with us over decades. One of her perennial questions as Rosh Hashanah approached was, 'Is this a happy holiday or a sad holiday?' I tried to answer what I experienced as a surprisingly complex question in the light of the full spectrum of Days of Awe Being and Becoming, and thought to myself then, as I do now, that wishing your family, friends and neighbors 'a good and sweet year' is largely not only not a sad thing, but one that goes deeper and richer than 'happy' can ever hope to express.

Frank Loesser, one of the great writers of the Classic (and surprisingly Jewish) Great American Songbook, wrote, in the opening lines of 'Guys and Dolls', a few lines that have become, for me, a kind of anthem of how to meet the 'tefillah/tshuva/tzedahhah' challenge of the High Holidays.

(don't worry, I'm not going to sing this...)

I've got the horse right here,  
his name is Paul Revere  
and here's a guy who says if the weather's clear,  
can do, can do, the guy says the horse can do,  
if he says the horse can do,  
can do, can do.

So...who's 'the guy'? what is 'the horse'? who am 'I'? And what on earth does this have to do with Rosh Hashanah, Yom Teruah (imagine the shofar blast at Belmont or Santa Anita), Hayom Harat Olam, 'the birthday of the world'?

In recalling the Creation, as we do today, in praying that we be 'renewed', 'made whole again', we remember not only that *we were created* but that God placed the whole of creation in our hands to steward, to nurture, to heal, to complete. This stewardship is our vocation not only as Jews, but as human beings. The great philosopher and theologian Martin Buber had a unique and compelling translation for the words that begin so many Jewish blessings, 'Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Hayolom...' which he rendered 'May we be a blessing to you, God', meaning 'may we, through the conduct of our lives, justify the great gift you have given us, the gift of life'. Just maybe, during these Days of Awe when we, through tefillah, tzedakkah and especially the 'turning' of teshuva, beat our breasts in recalling our many shortcomings, we also have the courage and the heart to remember that God placed a fragment of divinity within our own souls.

As a young man, my Dad was accepted into the newly formed Army Air Corps, despite having only a High School diploma. Somebody saw his potential. He was given a no-frills equivalent of a college education, trained as a bombardier and then a navigator and sent to London, the launching point for extremely dangerous missions over enemy territory. During his lifetime my Dad never tired of entertaining our family with stories of his weekend leaves, of London's nightlife, of the camaraderie that developed among his band of brother, of his affection for his B-17, but he rarely, if ever, talked about his darker experiences of the war. After he died, I found a small journal where he recorded his feelings on joining the service, on his training in New York, New Mexico and Colorado, his journey across the Atlantic on an Army transport, his discovery of the extraordinarily high attrition (which is to say death) rate of missions like his. He wrote about being an inexperienced navigator burdened with the awesome responsibility for getting his whole squadron back to England after a bombing raid. Underneath the pride, the patriotism and the bravado of youth, there was an unmistakable thread of fear. After I finished reading, I walked into our storage closet, which I've nicknamed 'the closet of memory' and found my Dad's leather flight jacket, worn and cracked nearly 80 years after he first wore it. On the left front of the jacket, just over where his heart would be, was a large patch, the color faded but the writing still clear, with just two words: Can Do.

I think my Dad 'had the horse' right *here*. And just maybe, on this birthday of the world and the ordinary miracles of every waking day, maybe we all do.

L'shana tova to everyone, a good, sweet, healthy, generous, compassionate and creative year, and a warm 'welcome home' to Rabbi David Freidenreich.