

Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's
Av/Elul 5769 (August 2009) Newsletter

Words of Value?

Sometimes words cannot express how we feel. In fact, I think most of us would agree that this is more often the case than not; that we express ourselves in ways that cannot capture what we think and feel only leads to misunderstanding and miscommunication of our true selves. So, why focus on our words if they do us a disservice in conveying what is in our heart and mind?

Pretty heavy thoughts . . . perhaps, but we are about to enter a pretty heavy time: the month of Elul and the period of reflection and apology before the arrival of the High Holidays.

As I think of the hundreds (if not thousands!) of pages of sermons and teachings, not to mention pastoral discussions, I have offered in the past year, I cannot help but wonder if I might have missed a point, failed to share what I had intended, or used the wrong method to reach my "audience." And that doesn't even consider my successes that were not really successes because I didn't "get it" when I was busy trying to make a difference in your lives and the lives of the many people with whom I interact.

So maybe, I am thinking, I should try a slightly different tack for this season of introspection: I am going to advocate more thought, more intention, over more words. We cannot jettison words, of course, especially since they are at the core of this season in our Jewish calendar, but we might try to increase the thoughts, the intention, behind the words we express.

In the spirit of the month of Elul and in reflection of my advocacy above, I want to express what is in my heart: To ask you for your forgiveness for anything I have said in the past year that did not sit right with you, AND for that which I did not say that I should have said. I ask this knowing that words are not enough, but perhaps, just perhaps, they are a beginning. And, after all, that is what this time in our calendar is for: renewal.

I leave you with a singular piece of advice. Do not allow this Elul and High Holy Day season pass without serious introspection on who you are, how you live, and what you intend in your daily life. It is only this work – and let's face it, it will likely feel like work – that can lead us to the right words AND deeds to make right the broken or simply damaged relationships that are too common in our lives. Words are wonderful, but they must come from and carefully express the inner workings of our intentions, our thoughts, and our feelings.

May the same courage you display in reflecting upon your life embolden you for an especially rich and rewarding year to follow, filled with good health, good relationships, and a wonderful unfolding path to a you that is even more you!

Rabbi Gerald R. Fox