

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

Partners in Creation

During our services each Friday evening, we sing a portion of Psalm 96, "Let the Heavens rejoice and the Earth be glad; let the sea and all within it roar praise." This psalm and our singing the popular tune to a portion of it are simple reflections of the concrete connection that Judaism has with the natural world. While we are not always cognizant of the many layers of our prayers each time we recite, chant, or sing them, I see the knowing smiles on each of your faces when we sing this on *Erev Shabbat*.

Coming to the island of Brigantine as many of our fellow congregants do each week or each season, we experience this link between Judaism and the natural world in a most potent way. We feel the wind off of the ocean or from the mainland, we see the very ground beneath us "grow wings" as we witness the shifting of sand around the island, we feel the moisture of the water that surrounds us, and we can even taste the salt in the air we breathe. Our environment and its health is a very real concern for us as it is for any coastal community. And so, with our awareness of the fragility and preciousness of our special island home, we experience the power of such religious moments even more richly than we would in any other setting.

What a blessing it was, then, to experience the fullness of this psalm on June 12th, when our congregation was able to join together for what was the largest religious and social event in two years – our truly magical *Erev Shabbat* service on the beach. After a couple of hours of eating and schmoozing, we all walked like a minor Exodus to the promise of the beach and we experienced the joyous service with smiles and full-throated singing. I made mention of Psalm 96 during the service, and I saw the contented agreement with the special moment we all shared. Everyone present was able to experience Psalm 96 in an even more personal way.

We are blessed to share Shabbat and many holidays together on this island. And we should remember these blessings when we consider the life of the shul and our participation in its future. I was so very heartened that so many of you heeded my recent calls to become more engaged with the congregation and I was delighted to hear more than a dozen of you say to me that you intend to join, re-join, or maintain your membership and share in more of our services and activities.

Throughout our holy texts and in our liturgy (especially Shabbat services), we find the repeated message that each of us is a partner with God in the unfolding of our Creation. God may "do" for the Universe alone, but we are essential partners in the continuing act of Creation. And every Friday night, Psalm 96 reminds us that the existence of every object – living or not – is, in its own way, a potent praise of that Creation.

In thinking about this special evening and these conversations, it cannot be doubted that we are partners in the act of creating the world around us. Let it be so as we continue to participate in the life of our congregation, and as we devote a little of our appreciation toward its continued health and richness of communal spiritual life.

Rabbi Gerald R. Fox