

Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's
Adar/Nisan 5769 (March 2009) Newsletter

Making Happiness?

“Where have all the flowers gone?” the Seeger-Hickerson song questions. A shade of the same question is what we are asking ourselves in these troubling times. Though we are commanded to be happy as the month of Adar arrives, we are hesitant to bring ourselves a greater weight by ignoring our and our neighbor's troubles. We are told that our happiness should come from the joy and faith spouted from our recollection of the survival against great odds of our ancestors as we read the Book of Esther. And yet, in this, our generation's greatest challenge, it would be disingenuous to ignore the damper these tough times place upon the groggers and merrymaking. Indeed, our minds are occupied by the far more mundane when we think about the joy of Adar and Purim. We wonder how we got to this place; we wonder how we will be without worry again; we wonder how and when our lives will be filled with joy.

In all of the Book of Esther, God's name is not mentioned once. This does not mean that the Sages did not consider this book a holy book – on the contrary, they included it in the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps its holiness, however, may rest in our recognition that God's role is not to pull the strings of a maturing people but rather to meet each Human act of Godliness by stepping aside for that act to gain purchase, to play itself out. Perhaps, therefore, the lesson of Purim is that each of us is and always will be the one chosen by lot, by the “*Pur*.” Our People's stepping forward to save themselves in the Book of Esther is a stark reminder, as we face this time of angst and uncertainty, that we must find our happiness by making our happiness.

So, how can we? While a fuller discussion of this question might be better suited for a place that allows for more exploration than the newsletter (certainly you can hear some of my answers in the coming weeks and months in my sermons), I can say that this is the time to head back to basics, with a few added twists. For example, surely we can begin making our own happiness by sharing meaningful moments with our families, with our neighbors, and with fellow Jews; first we might attend services more often – while attendance has been on the increase lately, you are always welcome to join in finding solid ground in your rich heritage. Also, surely we can share a meal or simply dessert and coffee/tea with a neighbor or a fellow congregant; or perhaps develop new bonds with others through volunteering in our community, whether on the Island or in the Jewish community. In the end, however, let us not lose sight of what is real: Our happiness hinges upon a simple truth yet fully realized . . . we need more community, we need more connections, we need more of each other in our lives.

To that end, I have a wonderful way for you to make your own happiness: Let's join together in a weekend of programming that I put together with Rabbi Weis of Congregation Beth Israel in Northfield and Rabbi Gaber of Congregation Beth Judah in Ventnor. Our congregation, with the help of Federation, and theirs are bringing the Musician, Storyteller, and Jewish Educator, Rabbi Micah Becker-Klein, to the area for a weekend of events. Temple Beth Shalom's involvement will center around Rabbi Becker-Klein leading his signature Friday evening service, “Shabbat in the Groove,” a service of Music, Mussar, and the Mystical,” and his lecture and discussion at a free light Sunday brunch (please RSVP for food) on the issue of keeping Kosher and our expression of Jewish ethics. These events are open to the entire Jewish community in the area as is his Havdallah service and concert at Congregation Beth Israel on Saturday evening. He will also hold a family education program for the religious school at Congregation Beth Judah. Please check the shul's newsletter and our website's (www.seashul.org) calendar for further details and late-breaking information.

And so there you have it – here's a way to bring happiness into your life, without much cost or complaint. Simply come to these events to practice your feelings of joy and I promise that you'll remember where all the flowers have gone – each of us carries one of our own; it is when we come together that we create the sweetest smelling of bouquets.

May you find joy in the month of Adar and may that joy propel you toward a happier future each day, each moment, of your life.

Rabbi Gerald R. Fox

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