

Rabbi Fox's Message for Temple Beth Shalom's Heshvan/Kislev 5768 (November 2007) Newsletter

The month of Heshvan has always been a bittersweet one for me as a Jew, as a Rabbi, and, well, as just me. You see, it was early in the month of Heshvan that my father passed away. It's true, we all lose our parents at some point in our lives, but losing a parent when you haven't even come close to reaching double-digits in age creates unusual challenges. The most sustained challenges revolve around memories. With so little time shared with my father, every one of my memories have become sacred to me – making them, keeping them, and sharing them with others. Memory is, indeed, a most precious gift.

And I am not alone in this challenge: Memory is one of the most illusive parts of our being human. Good memories and bad ones create the foundation of our identity and define for us our initial responses to the world around us. One might argue that we spend much of our lives trying to hold onto or to overcome many of our memories. That is why I find my experience at Temple Beth Shalom so enriching . . . the memories we are making together are nothing short of profound.

This year, the month of Heshvan holds within it a special breadth of Torah portions – five (instead of four) of the first six in the Torah. From *Noah* (Noah) to *Toledot* (Generations), we read of the cleansing of the world by means of the great flood through Isaac's marital instructions to his son Jacob. Memories – making them and keeping them – are central to these parshiyot (Torah portions) and to this month of Heshvan. Having just left the High Holy Days and the subsequent holidays of Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah, we enter the month of Heshvan with fresh memories.

Together we have made new memories during the previous month of holidays and have vowed to make new ones in the coming year ahead. As the days grow shorter, our memory grows longer. We learn more of who we are as we help to define, each day, who we will become. Holding fast to the best of who we are and setting new patterns and uncovering meaningful moments are what help to shape our lives – both as Jews and as human beings.

With the month of Kislev so soon upon us and its promise of the light of faith at its end (Hanukkah begins on the 25th of Kislev), we move through the Autumn of the year toward Winter knowing that our memories, our past, will light the way for us moving forward. Without our memory (probably the biggest fear for most of us), we are lodged in a stasis that makes it all the more difficult to make more of ourselves than we are today.

It is the creation of memories that I hope will motivate you all, in part, to join me and your fellow congregants in prayer, in study, and in the simple act of building our community one kind word or deed, one memory, at a time. It is our sharing time together – whether raising our voices in song and prayer, hearing and learning of the memories of our ancestors, or acting on our newly made vows of self and communal betterment – that enables us to create the most joyous blessing of communal memory. In doing so, we will be blessed with the knowledge of who we are and the comfort of sharing our longings and our humor with others.

As Isaac offered his blessing to his son Jacob, so, too, do I offer you his words: “May God give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth,”

Let us continue to make memories together!

Rabbi Gerald Fox

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