

Rabbi Lewis' message for October 2006

We are a hopeful people. How else would we have survived all that has happened to us? And yet, when you look around you, it is hard to feel hopeful. We live in a world torn apart by war, AIDS, natural disaster, and global warming. How do we maintain hope in an age of hopelessness?

The prophet Jeremiah asked the same question. He lived in the time of the first Temple in Jerusalem, a time when Jerusalem was besieged by Babylonia. He always hoped that if he preached God's message, God's voice would be heard despite the political and social conflict of his time. But this hope, too, was taken away from him when God told him: You must tell the people the truth, but you also should know that you will fail. No matter what you say, they will be deaf to your words.

Jeremiah ended up in prison for his message. Although his fellow Jews were escaping to Egypt and he himself was to be taken there as a captive, he did something that seemed inexplicable at the time. His uncle offered to sell him a piece of land in Anatot, his home city. As a relative, Jeremiah had the redemption-right to buy the land and keep it in the family.

Despite the impending destruction of the Temple and exile of the Jewish people, Jeremiah bought the land. He knew that he would never live on it, but his act was a symbol of hope in a time of despair. It said: We still have hope of returning to our land, although we don't know when.

Even when he felt hopeless, Jeremiah acted as if he had hope. Sometimes hope grows out of our actions. We are a people who believe in miracles but we also believe: Pray as if everything depended upon God, act as if everything depended upon you.

May we live with hope in this coming new year.

May our despair not prevent us from acting as if everything depended upon us.

May our faith support us in times that look bleak.

May Jeremiah's action remind us that there is always the possibility of redemption in the world and in our lives.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis

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