

## **Rabbi Lewis' Message for October, 2008**

On September 11, 2001, I was not in my usual Tuesday location in my Greenwich Village office. I would have been there but I had stayed home to write High Holiday sermons. My sister called me and said, "Turn on the TV." Along with countless others, I watched the events unfold in "real" time.

I am writing as I sit on my usual train heading into Penn Station, NY. There is nothing notable about this day except that it is September 11, seven years later. I left my house before the New York Times was thrown onto my driveway, so I haven't seen the headlines yet. Is it my imagination, or is the train quieter than usual?

One of my New York patients canceled her appointment today because she didn't want to ride the subway on 9/11. Another didn't schedule an appointment for her daughter because she felt "superstitious" about 9/11. Logically there is nothing that can happen today that couldn't have happened yesterday or might not happen tomorrow. But when things feel out of control, we try to protect ourselves in ways that often seem illogical. We skirt ladders on the sidewalk and avoid walking behind a black cat. We construct our lives as a defense against chaos.

The truth is hard to accept, that the world is a dangerous place. Yes, there are things we can do to make the world safer, but no one and nothing can protect us from living in that precarious space between life and death. These holidays remind us every year that unpredictable events will befall us. "Who shall live and who shall die?" asks the Unetaneh tokef, "Who by fire and who by water?"

The headlines every year seem to anticipate this prayer. This week, we see hurricanes in Texas. Next week, it will be something else. Our prayers also tell us: Repent one day before your death. You ask: How do I know when it is one day before my death? And the answer is, you don't. And so you are told by inference to live each day as if it were your last on earth. Live fully and love fully, because this day is the only day you have.

As I write, the man across the aisle has begun talking on his cell phone. Normally, I would feel annoyed. Today on 9/11/08, I find it oddly comforting to see that he is conducting business as usual. And as I leave the train, the conductor makes one brief announcement: "Remember, today is 9/11," he says: "Have a nice day." That is the right thing to say, I muse; remember and go on.

As we enter 5769 together, we pray for renewed strength to face what the year will bring and renewed inspiration to live life to its fullest. May you all be inscribed and sealed for a good year.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis