

Rabbi Lewis' Message for September, 2010

When I went to Israel in February of 2009, I kept thinking: “Wouldn’t the congregation love this. Wouldn’t it be fun if they were here with me. I wish they could see Jerusalem at sunset.”

So I paid special attention this spring when I read about the upcoming [ARZA](#) / [CCAR](#) tour to Israel: *Israel and Your Community: A Leadership Trip – Israel for New Rabbis*. Since I was interested in this trip, I worried: Who counts as a “new rabbi”? The brochure answered the question: “Anyone ordained within the past ten years” – uh oh, I thought, but then read on - “and others who are hoping to learn how to develop a group trip with congregants or community members.” I actually count as three new rabbis if you add up the years since I was ordained, although that isn’t the point. The point is that I am “new” relative to learning how to develop a group trip with congregants to Israel. And so I plan to go on this whirlwind weeklong tour to Israel the first week in November. I plan to learn everything I can about how to bring you to Israel with me.

But ever since I signed up for the trip, I have been stuck on this term “new rabbi.” If I am not a “new” rabbi, what does that make me? I prefer “experienced rabbi” to “old rabbi.” The truth is, no matter how many years it has been since my ordination, I still feel like a “new” rabbi in many ways. I feel lucky to be in a congregation from which I continue to learn new things. I feel lucky to work with student cantors from whom I continue to learn new things.

Better than “new rabbi” is the term “renewed rabbi.” When I return from vacation at the end of the summer, I come back refreshed and with renewed purpose. The month of Elul is for all of us a time of renewal as we approach the new year. Each day is an opportunity for reflection as we evaluate the past year. It is a month of spiritual opportunity. A colleague of mine says that he gradually gives up caffeine in the month of Elul as spiritual preparation for the high holy days. I wrote and asked him more about this.

This is what he replied:

Spirituality to me is about 3 types of relationships: 1) with God/Higher Power/Creator; 2) people places and things around me; and 3) with myself. Thus, the elimination of caffeine during Elul is both about the first and third. Getting in touch with my body and preparing it for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur leads directly to a better relationship with God. If you want a good Rosh Hashanah sermon, talk about

this practice and suggest it to people during the 10 days and then ask them to provide feedback at the end of Yom Kippur.

Spiritual preparation doesn't have to be giving up caffeine. The idea is that doing something small each day can add up to significant preparation. Don't delay your preparation until you walk into the sanctuary on Rosh Hashanah. That won't give you enough time for personal renewal. Start now. And then let me know what you have chosen as your spiritual preparation.

May the new year be one of renewal for us all.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis