

Rabbi Lewis' Message for September, 2012

Elul is a month for spiritual reflection. During these 30 days prior to the *Yamim Noraim*, we are to turn inward and search our souls. When Rosh Hashanah at last arrives, we are ready to meet our God.

Reflection isn't restricted to the month of Elul, of course. Many of you have emailed me and said you imagine that my decision to retire from the Center is a result of much personal reflection. You are right. Many of you have said you know this decision can't be an easy one for me. You are also right. And many of you have said that you assume I think it is time. You, too, are right. I thank you for your loving responses to the news. I appreciate that, regardless of whatever mixed feelings, you have also congratulated me and wished me well.

But let me remind you, as Stephen Sondheim's music says so eloquently, "I'm still here." We have a year in which we can reflect together on what has gone before and consider what we want the future to look like. For 18 years, we have grieved and celebrated together and that will continue as you embark on a search for my successor.

Howie is right about that roller coaster the Center has been on this year. Because of our size – but perhaps not just because of our size – we know and value every member. When Charlotte Fels isn't there to read and translate *Maftir Yonah* on Yom Kippur, her absence will be felt. When Eric Edelstein doesn't ascend the bimah to blow the shofar, his absence will be felt.

And as Mike Weiner fights his battle with a brain tumor, we will step in and substitute for him (as if anyone can really substitute for Mr. Weiner) until he is ready to return. As Howie says in his message this month, that is what a community is and does.

The shofar is blown every day from the first of Elul to the day before Rosh Hashanah. Its purpose is to awaken our spirits and inspire us to begin this soul-searching. Jewish tradition knows this kind of work can be lonely, so we are also instructed to recite Psalm 27 each day:

"The Lord is my light and my rescue.

Whom should I fear?

The Lord is my life's stronghold.

Of whom should I be afraid?"

The work is easier if we have faith that we are not alone, faith that God's light will illumine our search, and faith that the divine light within us will help us strengthen each other.

May this new year be for us a *shana tova umetukah*, a good and sweet one.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis