

## Sliding on a Hill

When we lived in Rochester our house was on a hill. Our driveway was a hill. It snows in the north country from October until May. We engaged a plowing service to plow our driveway once in the early morning and then again in the late afternoon on snowy days. Even so, there were many occasions when I found myself unable to drive uphill to our garage. At first I would simply give my mini-van more gas. Next I would back into the flat driveway of our neighbor across the street and try again with a "running start." Often I would get part way up the hill before the wheels started to spin. What else could I do? I tried salt and sand, so-so success. At last I flattened a very large cardboard box and laid it on the icy hill from my drive wheels forward. I found a solution. It worked so well I carried the cardboard in the back of my van through the winter season. It took some trial and error, but I finally found a solution, a simple and inexpensive one at that.

Why tell a winter story for the Days of Awe? This is a story about solving problems. This is a perennial challenge for the new year. As we review the year ending, we notice behaviors and conditions that we thought to correct during the last year or the year before or even three years ago. What can we do that this year will be different? Often we want to change our ways but find it more difficult than we expected to make the modification. This leaves us feeling frustrated and less than capable. Of course when we feel our confidence diminished, we are less able to successfully change our behavior.

Sometimes we find our answers by using very ordinary items, like cardboard boxes, in fresh ways. On Yom Kippur morning we will read from the Torah that our fidelity to Israel's covenant with God and the consequent benefits are achievable.

Surely, this instruction that I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens that you should say, "Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea that you should say, "Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it. See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. For I command you this day, to love the Eternal One your God, to walk in God's ways, and to keep God's commandments, God's laws, and God's rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that the Eternal One your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess.  
Deuteronomy 30: 11-16

Although the Torah speaks in the 2nd person singular, the message is addressed to us as individuals and as the collective Am Yisratel. What is true for individuals with respect to problem solving and change is often true for communities. Last year we shared our first combined worship for the Days of Awe. Some practices beloved by one of our legacy congregations are now beloved by both. Other traditions or innovations met with mixed reviews. Based on our experiences, we will improve this year's services. For the most part our changes will not be 180 degree turns but slight adjustments. Generally, I like to apply the principal that we should make the smallest changes that result in the best, most positive outcomes. We trust that you will come to services knowing that the worship will be changed from the accustomed liturgy for everyone at one time or another. Everyone includes the clergy; together we are charting

exploring what we can accomplish as a single, creative Central Synagogue - Beth Emeth. Together we can deepen and enhance our High Holy Day celebration.

Our congregation is new and developing our culture. How we solve the problems ahead of us and manage change is directly related to the success we will achieve. Change is never easy and the older we are, the harder it seems. Yet we are no longer 80 and 60, we are barely a year old. Let us support one another and enjoy the excitement and thrill of a new creative endeavor. Our strength lies in our community. As we support one another, we will dispel our fears and forge a bright, vibrant future.

What can you anticipate? First you can join us for a screening of *The Women's Balcony* prior to our Selihot service Saturday evening September 16. We will use both of our prayerbooks, Kol haNeshama and Gates of Repentance during the upcoming holidays. During the Rosh haShana morning service Rabbi Skiddeil and I will explore how progressive Jews should respond to the government of Israel regarding pluralism. I tell you that we do not have an answer; we will explore ideas. We ask you to respond to the ideas we present during the Friday evening services September 22. We will enjoy a community lunch following morning services on the first day of Rosh Hashana. This lunch is lovingly sponsored by Gene Friedman in memory of his beloved wife, Edie. Neil Hixon is organizing lay lead services for the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of Rosh haShana. At the end of Yizkor services on Yom Kippur we will offer the stone ceremony for those who wish to participate. This year we will provide better explanations and smoother flow. We conclude the ceremony together, as I noted this ritual will be a little different for everybody. Please follow our various communications to you during this High Holiday season.

As we approach the High Holy Days, I think of my relationship with God as consequential and even complicated. Working on our relationship with God, the Creator of heaven and earth, is a major focus of our seasonal reflection. Deuteronomy teaches us that the way of God and the path of Torah are accessible to us. Sometimes we make much less significant concerns, much more complex. We can reframe the behaviors we want to change in more ordinary terms and find our personal growth and development less daunting and more accessible. Frequently we believe that we need a 180-degree turn to make a change, when a slight turn will help us look at things differently and make adjustments that are effective in climbing to the top of the steep, icy hill. May each of us be blessed as we enter the year 5778 to see the world with refreshed eyes and to grow as persons who make our world a kinder place in which to live.

From our home to yours, Renee, and I wish you shana tova oometuka, a good and sweet new year.

With blessing - B'vrakha – Rabbi Marc A. Gruber