

## MESSAGE FROM RABBI GRUBER Three Days A Year

Our experiences shape our religious imagination. How we observe holidays can be an integral part of shaping our sensibilities regarding other observances. We just celebrated the High Holy Days of *Rosh haShana* and *Yom Kippur* and the festival of *Sukkot-Simhat Torah*. Our experiences with these holy days, the rites and rituals, and quite importantly their moods and tone make a world of difference in how we think about and understand our Jewish



lives and identities.

The themes of *Rosh haShana* and *Yom Kippur* are serious and solemn. Yes, we say that *Rosh haShana* is the birthday of the world and we sing happy birthday after the children's service, but this is not the experience of most of our congregants. When we take the themes of the High Holy Days to heart, we commit to some serious work. We review and reflect on our lives and relationships of the year just passed. We make amends with others and we resolve to do better. Sometimes we focus on the **big** questions like "What is the meaning of life?" We enjoy family and community gatherings, but a certain weightiness hangs about these Days of Awe.

If I were to attend religious services only three times during the year, I would not choose the High Holy Days. Yet, something about these draws our people together. I am thankful for the tug our people feel. If we will not see you at services until next *Rosh haShana*, I suggest you consider skipping the High Holy Days next year. I want you to try three other services. My presumption is that you will have an experience that might draw you back to communal worship more than three times during the year.

Other observances have a different character. For example, one of the primary *mitzvot* of *Sukkot* is to rejoice and be happy. Of course when we take to heart the holiday's theme of thanksgiving, we experience a feeling of satisfaction for our blessings and we feel joy. At the end of *Sukkot* we delight in an exuberant celebration on *Simhat Torah*. We dance with our scrolls. This year we finished reading the final chapter of Deuteronomy and unrolled the Torah scroll to the great delight of the adults and many children in the sanctuary. We rolled the scroll to the beginning and started reading the Torah for the new year. The mood was ebullient.

Perhaps a less dramatic, but also uplifting, celebration is more your style. Try observing *Shavu'ot*. One tradition for *Shavu'ot* is to study all night; another custom is to eat dairy. We have modified and combined these two practices in our *tikkun le'il Shavu'ot* Central Synagogue-Beth Emeth style. We divide our evening (not all night) into six segments, courses, if you will. Each of our clergy offers a course for Torah learning;

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- 1 -Welcome and lesson 1.
- 2 - *Blessed Blintzes*- dessert 1.
- 3 - Lesson 2.
- 4 - *Classic Cheesecake* - dessert 2.
- 5 - Lesson 3.
- 6 - *Sinai Sundaes* - dessert 3.

How could such an evening be anything but delightful, even if you need to precede the festivities with a *portion* of Lactaid?

You need not wait seven months to try a celebration with a different feel. We gather for *Shabbat* festivities every week. On Friday evenings we often offer two parallel experiences. The mood for our *Shabbat* celebration is uplifting. Regulars view each week's observance with a relaxed anticipation, not found for other holy days. The mood is light and joyous. We try to establish a flow with the events of the week that is current. We enjoy a feeling of ease.

On *Shabbat* morning our service and Torah study continues the spirit of *erev Shabbat*, Friday evening. One element is always present and precious. I believe that our *Shabbat* morning discussion is one place in my life wherein I consistently enjoy meaningful conversation. Of course this discussion is punctuated by gregarious laughter.

Please join us three times during this year aside from the High Holy Days. Your only risk is that you may find yourself enjoying your congregation and coming even more frequently.

With blessing - *B'vrakha* - בברכה,

Rabbi Marc A. Gruber