

From the Rabbi's Desk

September 2018

Dear Chaverim,

We are in the Hebrew month of *Elul* and closing in quickly on the High Holy Days, the *Yamim Noraim*, the Days of Awe. Where have we come since this time last year? Are we in a better place, worse off, or just about the same? Where could we be now had we been a little more directed, a little more focused, a little more in tune with our tradition, our collective wisdom, our Source? Could fewer people be hungry, homeless, victims of senseless hatred? Could a few less have suffered needlessly from disease or self-inflicted ills? Could our planet's natural resources have been less consumed, its rivers and seas less polluted, its beauty more preserved? No doubt, there are many good works that have been done by many of you. However, if we are to take an honest assessment, I think we must conclude that as a collective society, we are far from peace, far from resolving hunger and disease, far from setting aside selfishness and hostility, far from calling ourselves collective conservators of land and oceans. There is much for which we should be collectively penitent. The piercing call of the shofar reminds us that the world cries out in pain.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the Chief Rabbi of Palestine in the early part of the 20th century, said, "The perception of truth is the basis of penitence." The idea of truth is so easily trampled upon. There is a war being waged in every form of media over the idea of truth. Claims are made to the possession of truth, accusations of fake. How do we sort through the tangle of indictments and outright lies? It is seemingly impossible, and perhaps in the end pointless to try. I suggest to you that we must make a turn. We must make *tshuvah*. In order to make this turn, we must ask, what is the truth we are seeking? We must turn from empty truth that seeks to enrich some while impoverishing others, empty truth that builds mansions while burning forests, empty truth that silos grain while tables lay bare, empty truth that creates open spaces for a few while confining others behind imprisoning walls and borders, empty truth that addicts us to meaningless things and pointless pursuits. We must turn instead toward a truth that directs our material, intellectual and spiritual power toward noble ends.

Our mystical tradition reminds us that the word *Elul* is numerically equivalent to the word *binah* – understanding. Rationally, this simplistic play of numbers and letters has little or no meaning except that we can use it to remind ourselves that the more noble truth we seek can come only with understanding. May we seek to understand ourselves while not invalidating others. May we understand how to meet our present needs while not laying waste to our inherited earth. May we seek to tear down walls erected with intolerance and replace them with bridges built on foundations of love and understanding. As we approach Rosh Hashanah, may the call of the shofar arouse us and inspire us to use our traditions to nourish our souls, prime our bodies, and teach our minds, such that we have the strength of will to make a turn toward this higher Truth.

L'shana Tovah,
Rabbi Marc Ekstrand