

YOM KIPPUR MORNING 5770

**LEHMAN BROTHERS, FAILED BANKS, UNEMPLOYMENT, CITIBANK,
ALLEN STANFORD, AIG, MARC DREIER, THE SEC,
BEAR STEARNS, BAIL OUTS, BANKRUPTCIES, UNEMPLOYMENT,
JAMES NICHOLSON, DELAYED RETIREMENTS, BANK OF AMERICA, UBS.**

**BERNIE MADOFF, GREED IS GOOD, FINANCIAL MELTDOWN, MERRILL LYNCH,
SUB-PRIME MORTGAGE LOANS, CALIFORNIA GOING BROKE.**

**NON-PROFITS GOING BROKE, 401K's DISAPPEARING,
WALL STREET, TARP AND GREED, INVESTMENT BANKING IS ALL WE NEED.**

**ECONOMY IN A FREEFALL, ECONOMY IN NEAR COLLAPSE,
SUICIDE AND HEDGE FUNDS, PLUNGING HOME VALUES. THE IRS**

**BANK FAILURES, DELAYED RETIREMENT, GM STOCK SELLING FOR A
DOLLAR,
STIMULUS PACKAGE, JOBS DISAPPEARING, COLLEGE ENDOWMENT FUNDS
ARE SLASHED**

**FRANK DIPASCALI, PONZI SCHEMES, CHURCH PONZI SCHEMES, AFRICAN
PONZI SCHEMES, JEWISH PONZI SCHEMES, PONZI, PONZI, PONZI, BERNIE
MADOFF**

My son David will tell you that the wildest roller coaster rides in the country are at Cedar Point Amusement Park in Sandusky, Ohio. However, looking at the American economy these past two years, we know that there have been some pretty wild rides here as well and, unlike the amusement park, these rides don't end after two minutes.

The last year and a half of the Bush Administration was a terrifying freefall. Not necessarily because of the wrong decisions being made; it just seemed that no one was in charge. No one spoke up. No one acted. No one took responsibility and the economy seemed to careen closer to the edge of the cliff with every passing day. The only real option for whoever won the Presidential election was to actually do something.

Our congregants and our community, like most other congregations and communities, have been deeply affected by the events of the past two years. We didn't start the fire, but the economic sins of others have deeply affected us and we are limited in what we can do to control their effect upon us and our loved ones.

However, we remember that we are in this together. We are a community. As a temple, we do our best to assist those in legitimate need. Hopefully, as individuals, we will do no less. All of us are obligated to give tzedakah. We are taught that even the one who receives tzedakah is obligated to give tzedakah.

The darkest parts of the economic cloud seem to be passing. I can't tell you that it won't come back or that happy days are here again. What I do know is that I don't go to sleep with a sense of fear and dread like I was doing until November. Important steps had to be taken to correct an economy that was in freefall. While people can and will disagree about the specific steps that were ultimately taken, the crisis called for leadership and action. While some situations seem to be out of our capacity to influence, this was one where people could analyze the situation, come up with a plan and then put it into action.

On the other hand, those living in the State of Israel do not always enjoy that option. Though Israel is an independent, sovereign nation, it always has to consider its many hostile neighbors and the implications of its actions upon its few friends in the world.

Remember back twenty eight years ago when Israel bombed the Iraqi nuclear reactor. Israel was condemned worldwide and only later did the world realize the implications of Saddam Hussein's Iraq with nuclear weapons.

Not long ago, Israel was again condemned worldwide for bombing a developing nuclear facility in Syria. Is there any doubt that Israel would love to destroy the nuclear facilities which Iran's leaders are racing to develop? Yet Israel has to weigh its needs and wishes against the possible ramifications of military action.

The very real psychological and physically tangible effects of unemployment and financial stress can be most traumatic. So can waking up to the sound of sirens telling you that you have fifteen seconds to find shelter before a missile comes flying by your home, if you are lucky, or into your home, if you are not.

Today's State of Israel is an incredible oasis in the midst of a sea of hatred. That is not to say that the people, the conditions and the policies of Israel are always beyond criticism. However, our friends and family in Israel live in the midst of nations whose condition for even beginning peace negotiations is the dismantling of the Jewish state. The citizens of Israel go to sleep every night knowing that they are surrounded by nations and wannabee nations sworn to their death and destruction.

As serious as our economic crisis was in America, few of us felt that our physical existence was in danger. As individuals and as a nation, we felt free to take whatever steps were needed to impact our economic condition. On the other hand, the citizens and government of Israel are not usually free to act as they wish. Israel and Israelis understand that while they live in a bad neighborhood and that they are part of a world community. Despite being surrounded by terrorists, Holocaust deniers, barbarians and murderers, Israel struggles to maintain its humanity and its values while taking life a day at a time.

I know that if you only watch the news, you usually hear only negativity about Israel. If that is all that you know about Israel, I wish that you knew the Israel that I and so many others in this congregation know. We know the Israel that continues to treat Arab citizens and even combatants with the same medical staff and facilities which Israel offers its Jewish citizens. We know the Israel which is constantly seeking peace, while strengthening itself against those who would destroy it. We know the Israel whose goal is to build and beautify the world, rather than to destroy and debase it.

Israel truly is a living miracle, seven million people in the midst of almost two hundred million sworn to its destruction. While Israel can control some of what comes its way, there are many factors outside of its control. To me, the State of Israel is the clearest example of a nation which needs to pray as if everything depends on God, but act as if everything depends on their actions.

Ultimately, we have to wonder, who is in control? With the American economy, I have to believe that our government and all who influence it have the power to help bring about change. With Israel, I believe that the Israeli government and all who influence have the power to help bring about change. Yet, I would argue that the continued existence and vitality of the State of Israel, against all of the odds stacked against it, point to the existence of a higher power.

Ultimately, who is in control? This question came up recently on the Reform Rabbis' listserv, where many colleagues were sounding off on their belief that, in the end, there is no one out there but ourselves to hear the prayers we offer for healing and other purposes. The rabbis posting claimed that while there were various benefits to be derived from the process of prayer, they did not believe in the existence of a separate being who actually hears our prayers and has the potential to respond to them.

This is anything but a revolutionary concept. Last night, you heard me speak about Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan and how his belief in Judaism without supernaturalism helped to create the Reconstructionist movement of Judaism. However, having heard online only from colleagues who did not believe in a supernatural God, I posed the question: "Am I the only colleague who actually believes in a God who can interfere with the course of human events? "

I wrote that "it sounds as if most, if not all of the colleagues posting do not believe in a God who responds to prayer. If that is one's belief, fine. However, if so, are all of these services Reform rabbis are leading only efforts in group psychology? Is it all an act? What should we call the effort to lead people in words that are not believed in by those mouthing them, except in a metaphorical or poetic context?

The poetic explanation only goes so far, in my opinion. Do we believe in God or was Sherwin Wine really the prophet of the modern Reform rabbinate when he founded Humanistic Judaism not far from my Southfield, Michigan home?

Wine was a brilliant man and a fascinating speaker, but I didn't buy his premise then and I don't now. However, all of these postings make it sound like our colleagues do not believe in a God who has the power and/or the desire to heal or to do much of anything tangible other than to provide a psychological benefit for the believers. Frankly, unless we are honest with our congregants about these feelings, it sounds like many of us are being hypocritical, telling the people what they want to hear while not believing it ourselves.”

I am happy to report that I received at least a dozen responses agreeing completely or mostly with my perspective in the past few days. Of course, the past two weeks has been a very busy time for rabbis and many have probably either skipped the discussion or chosen not to respond. However, I feel it is important that this congregation knows, on this Yom Kippur, that when I lead worship services, whether on Yom Kippur, Shabbat, at a wedding or a funeral, I believe that there is a greater power than my conscience who may be listening. I believe that there is a God who exists separate and apart from humanity. I don't accept every action and dialogue in the Torah as literally how it happened, but I do believe that there is someone in charge besides us.

I don't mind if your belief in God is different from mine. We are a community of diverse beliefs and actions. However, as the religious leader of this community, I feel that with many Reform rabbis out there not actually believing in a supernatural God, it may be useful to you to know that this Reform rabbi does.

To me, as difficult as it is to make sense of this world with God, it is far more difficult to make sense of it without God. Does this answer all of life's questions for me and should it for you? Not in the least. However, my belief in God helps me to know that I am not alone, we are not alone.

When we are enduring a national crisis or a personal crisis, we need to act to try to resolve it, if we can. However, we should also know that there is help potentially available to us from a source our ancestors relied on for centuries and millenia.

I believe in praying as if everything depended on God, but acting as if everything depended on us." On this Yom Kippur, let us remember the importance of taking personal responsibility for our actions and our inactions. Let us not forget the consequences of our words and our deeds, both those we speak and perform and those we choose not to speak and perform. Whether it involves our kids, our government, our schools or our temple, there is an impact from all that we say and do and all that we decide not to say and to do.

The Bush Administration did little to stop our nation's economy from crumbling and the nuclear ambitions of Iran from advancing. Though the Obama Administration has acted decisively with the economy, we face a far greater threat if Iran begins to threaten Israel, America and the rest of the world with nuclear weapons. Words have value and diplomacy should be the first resort, but not the only resort.

Our prayers say that on Rosh Hashana we hope to have our names written in the Book of Life and on Yom Kippur, we hope that those same names are sealed in the Book of Life. Whether viewed literally or metaphorically, it is clear that our relationship with God is that of a partner. Our actions, including our inaction, of the past year, elicit a reaction from God.

No one wants to take the blame for personal or national shortcomings, but it doesn't matter. Maybe we didn't start the fire, but the responsibility to respond to it is ours. Whether we caused it or not, it is our responsibility to see the problems around us and to respond to them in meaningful and effective ways.

Some can pray as if it all depends on God, others can act as if it all depends on us. Some can do both, but if we truly care, we dare not do neither. AMEN