

SHANA TOVA – GUT YUNTIF – GUT YOHR

SO, A QUESTION - WHO LOOKED AT THEIR HOROSCOPE TODAY?

SHOW OF HANDS! WHO READS IT EVERYDAY? WHY DO WE DO

THAT? ARE WE JUST CURIOUS? IS IT A FORM OF

ENTERTAINMENT? IS THERE SOMETHING DEEPER?

YOU DO KNOW THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO CONSULT AN

ASTROLOGER BEFORE MAKING ANY MAJOR DECISION. WHY IS

THAT? DO THEY BELIEVE THE STARS REALLY DO CONTROL THEIR

LIVES? (BY THE WAY, IN TRADITIONAL JUDAISM WE DON'T BELIEVE

THAT)

IT MAY HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH OUR CURIOSITY ABOUT THE

FUTURE – MAYBE A PREOCCUPATION WITH THE FUTURE. DEEP

DOWN I THINK WE ALL WANT TO KNOW – WHAT IS COMING NEXT?

AND I THINK WE ALL BELIEVE, AT SOME LEVEL, THAT OUR FUTURE

MAY VALIDATE OUR PRESENT – IT MAKES THE LIVES WE ARE

LIVING MORE MEANINGFUL. PARTICULARLY, IF WE CAN SEE OUR

CULTURE, OUR VALUES, OUR TRADITIONS CARRYING ON

THROUGH OUR DESCENDANTS OR THROUGH INSTITUTIONS WE

HAVE DEVELOPED OR INFLUENCED.

I IMAGINE THESE CONCERNS WERE ON ABRAHAM'S MIND IN THE TORAH READING WE READ THIS MORNING.

FOR MOST OF HIS ADULT LIFE, ABRAHAM WAS CHILDLESS. HE EVEN LAMENTED HIS SITUATION TO GOD. AND THEN TWO THINGS HAPPENED. FIRST, ISHMAEL WAS BORN TO HAGAR AND THEN A CHILD WAS PROMISED TO SARAH. AND NOW THAT CHILD, NAMED ISAAC, HAS ARRIVED. FOR THIRTEEN YEARS, ABRAHAM WAS MOST LIKELY SATISFIED THAT ISHMAEL WOULD SUCCEED HIM. BUT THE ARRIVAL OF ISAAC CHANGES EVERYTHING. NOW THERE ARE TWO SONS – WHICH ONE IS ABRAHAM'S FUTURE. WHICH ONE IS MOST LIKELY TO CARRY ON AND FULFILL THE PROMISE MADE TO ABRAHAM THAT HIS DESCENDANTS WOULD BE AS NUMEROUS AS THE SAND OF THE SEAS AND THE STARS OF THE SKY!! SO ABRAHAM WANTS TO PEER INTO THE FUTURE – HE WANTS TO KNOW WHICH SON IS THE CHOSEN ONE!

THE TEXT SUGGESTS THAT HE OBSERVES THEIR BEHAVIOR TOGETHER – PLAYING. BUT SO DOES SARAH AND IN THEIR 'PLAYING' SHE SEES SOMETHING SHE DOES NOT LIKE. SHE DEMANDS THAT ABRAHAM EXPEL HAGAR AND ISHMAEL FROM THE HOUSEHOLD. ABRAHAM IS TORN AND JUSTIFIABLY SO. HOW CAN

HE EXPEL ISHMAEL IF ISHMAEL, HIS FIRST BORN IS DESTINED TO BE HIS HEIR. AND THEN GOD INTERVENES. ABRAHAM, YOU DON'T GET IT. ISAAC IS YOUR LEGACY, YOUR FUTURE. THROUGH ISAAC YOUR PROGENY SHALL BE NAMED! FOR ABRAHAM, THE FUTURE IS RESOLVED. AND FOR GOOD MEASURE, GOD PROMISES THAT ISHMAEL WILL ALSO BECOME A GREAT NATION BECAUSE HIS IS ABRAHAM'S SON. WIN-WIN. GREAT. FOR US, THE FUTURE IS NOT SO EASILY DETERMINED.

IN A LITTLE WHILE, WE WILL RECITE THE UNETANEH TOKEF PRAYER. THIS PRAYER IS ABOUT OUR IMMEDIATE FUTURE – THE COMING YEAR! WHO WILL LIVE, WHO WILL DIE? WHO WILL PROSPER, WHO NOT? WHO WILL BE HEALTHY, WHO WILL BE ILL? THESE ARE REASONABLE CONCERNS FOR EACH OF US AS WE FACE THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE COMING YEAR. MANY OF US ARE DEALING WITH ISSUES THAT ARE CAUSE FOR CONCERN ABOUT OUR FUTURE. OTHERS OF US ARE COPING WITH THE GENERAL ANXIETY THAT ACCOMPANIES THE UNKNOWN IN OUR LIVES. IF POSSIBLE, WE WANT TO KNOW AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE ABOUT OUR FUTURE. BARRING SOLID INFORMATION, WE HOPE FOR ASSURANCE THAT EVERYTHING WILL BE OK. THE PRAYER

CANNOT GIVE US INFORMATION, BUT THE PRAYER ENDS BY ASSURING US THAT WE CAN INFLUENCE OUR FUTURE – THROUGH PRAYER, REPENTANCE AND TZEDAKAH – WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO HAVE A GOOD YEAR AFTER ALL! BUT, THE ESSENCE OF THIS PRAYER IS THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES – WE REALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR EACH US IN THE COMING YEAR. SO WHERE ARE WE WITH REGARD TO THE FUTURE? SINCE WE DON'T REALLY KNOW, ALL WE CAN DO IS CHOOSE OUR ATTITUDE. LET ME SUGGEST THAT WE CHOOSE TO BE OPTIMISTIC AND HOPEFUL, BUT IN OUR ACTIONS, WE STILL NEED TO BE CAREFUL AND CAUTIOUS!

FOR SOME TIME NOW, THE LEADERS OF THIS CONGREGATION HAVE BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE SYNAGOGUE. WE HAVE GOOD REASON FOR CONCERN. OUR NEIGHBORHOOD IS NO LONGER BUSTLING WITH JEWS CLAMORING TO BECOME OUR MEMBERS. OUR CONGREGANTS ARE AGING AND NOT BEING REPLACED BY AN EQUAL NUMBER OF YOUNGER MEMBERS. IF NOTHING ELSE, THE EMPTY SEATS IN THE SANCTUARY THAT ONCE WERE OVERFILLED, GIVES US CAUSE FOR CONCERN.

BUT IN SPIITE OF THE UNETANEH TOKEF PRAYER, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT PRAYING OR REPENTING IS GOING TO BE SUFFICIENT TO INFLUENCE THE FUTURE OF THE SYNAGOGUE. (ALTHOUGH SOME PRAYER WOULDN'T HURT – ALONG WITH MORE TZEDAKAH). SO WE APPLIED FOR A PROGRAM OFFERED BY UNITED SYNAGOGUE – SULAM FOR STRATEGIC PLANNERS – A SEMINAR AND SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR HELPING US ADDRESS OUR FUTURE!

THE CONCEPT OF THIS PROGRAM IS THAT WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE OUR FUTURE THROUGH CAREFUL CONSIDERATION OF OUR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES AND THOUGHTFUL DELIBERATION ABOUT REALISTIC OPTIONS.

SO FAR, WE HAVE FORMED A COMMITTEE, OF COURSE, AND HAVE RECEIVED SOME TRAINING THROUGH UNITED SYNAGOGUE. AND WE ARE BEGINNING TO GATHER INFORMATION THAT MAY BE USEFUL. ONE MAJOR SOURCE OF INFORMATION IS YOU, THE CONGREGANTS. THERE IS A SURVEY WHICH YOU SHOULD BE HEARING ABOUT VERY SOON. THE LETTER EXPLAINS WHAT WE ARE DOING AND HOW TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY. PLEASE SO SO IN A TIMELY MANNER. AFTER THE COMMITTEE REVIEWS ALL THE INFORMATION WE ARE GATHERING, WE WILL INFORM THE

CONGREGATION ABOUT THE NEXT STEPS, WHICH AGAIN, WILL ASK SOME OF YOU TO HELP THINK THROUGH SOME OPTIONS. BEFORE ANY DECISIONS ARE MADE, THE BOARD AND THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO OFFER REACTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, HELENE FASTMAN AND JOE RICHMOND ARE THE CO-CHAIRS OF THE COMMITTEE.

WITH REGARD TO OUR PERSONAL FUTURE, I RECALL A CONGREGANT ONCE TELLING ME, AS A JOKE, THAT HE NO LONGER PURCHASED GREEN BANANAS! IN PART BECAUSE HIS CIRCUMSTANCES HAD LIMITED HIS THINKING IN TERMS OF DAYS, NOT MONTHS OR YEARS. AND SOME OF US MAY FEEL THAT WE ARE IN A SIMILAR POSITION. WE CANNOT BE WORRIED ABOUT THE NEXT TEN YEARS OR TWENTY YEARS. THE FUTURE IS GOING TO COME IN ANY CASE – HOW WE FACE THE FUTURE IS A CHOICE. WE CAN EITHER BE ANXIOUS AND CONCERNED OR CURIOUS AND HOPEFUL. WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO PREDICT OR ACCURATELY FORETELL THE FUTURE, BUT WE CAN TAKE SOME ACTION AS WE INEVITABLY MOVE FORWARD INTO IT.

I HAVE OFTEN SHARED A FAVORITE QUOTE OF MINE REGARDING TIME AND OUR ATTITUDE.

THE PAST IS HISTORY, THE FUTURE IS A MYSTERY. TODAY IS A GIFT THAT IS WHY WE CALL IT THE PRESENT. MOST OF US HERE TODAY ALREADY HAVE A LONG AND ILLUSTRIOUS PAST. OUR PAST INCLUDES MANY ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERHAPS SOME DISAPPOINTMENTS. BUT THE PAST IS OVER AND DONE. WE CANNOT CHANGE IT. THE FUTURE HAS NOT YET HAPPENED, WHICH IS WHY WE ARE CURIOUS AND ALSO CONCERNED. BUT EITHER TO LIVE IN THE PAST OR TO BROOD OVER THE FUTURE IS TO TAKE ALL THE JOY AND HAPPINESS OUT OF THE PRESENT! AND I THINK WE ALL KNOW SOME PEOPLE WHO DO THAT. THEY ALLOW UNNECESSARY CONCERNS TO INTRUDE IN THE THEIR PRESENT LIVES AND ROB THEM OF HAPPINESS AND JOY! THE BEST WAY TO INFLUENCE OUR FUTURE, IS THROUGH THE ACTION WE TAKE IN THE PRESENT! IN SOME SENSE, EVERY DAY WE ARE CREATING OUR FUTURE THROUGH WHAT WE CHOOSE TO DO ON THAT DAY! THE QUESTION WE SHOULD BE ASKING IS WHAT MUST I DO TODAY TO IMPROVE THE ODDS FOR A BETTER FUTURE?

IN OUR TORAH PORTION, ABRAHAM WAS FACED WITH A DIFFICULT CHOICE. A CHOICE WHICH HE KNEW WOULD HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT NOT ONLY ON HIS FUTURE, BUT THE FUTURE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE. WITH GOD'S HELP, HE MADE THE CHOICE AND HERE WE ARE – THE DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC. OUR CHOICES MAY NOT HAVE SUCH COSMIC SIGNIFICANCE, BUT THEY DO MATTER, IF ONLY TO US. SO LET US RESOLVE AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS NEW YEAR, THAT WE WILL THOUGHTFULLY AND DELIBERATELY TAKE THE NECESSARY ACTIONS TO ASSURE A GOOD YEAR FOR OURSELVES, FOR OUR SYNAGOGUE AND FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE. AMEN.