

***What does the future hold for us - the Jewish people, the Jewish community, and Israel?***

**Yom Kippur Afternoon**

**September 28, 2009 ~ 10 Tishrei 5770**

**Marla Shwartz**

Thank you Rabbi Briskin. It is a privilege and honor to be on this *bimah* and share with you, my Temple Beth El family, some of my thoughts about the words we have just read in our liturgy about rebirth and redemption in the context of the future for the Jewish people, the Jewish community, and Israel. For just a few minutes I hope you will sense the energy I feel when I am most cognizant of the Jewish journey that we are traveling.

This day of fasting, praying, seeking forgiveness, and working toward not repeating our transgressions again, provides us with precious moments to acknowledge our future and what is forthcoming for the generations.

I find it so fascinating that as we look forward to a new year, we Jews continue to look backward and remember those who have died and those events in our past that we don't want repeated. You know when we guide the walking of the very young and the very old, we are apt to tell them "eyes front, look where you're going, be careful." But today our eyes turn inward, our thoughts are focused on the past year, and our memories are of what is far behind us. Yet, we continue to move forward on this very special Jewish journey.

When I had the incredible experience to visit Israel in December of 2007 with Rabbi Briskin and our Temple Beth El family I found that I began to understand better what it means to have a hand in the future, what it means to be responsible for the future's ultimate existence. I saw an Israel that was conceived in the harshness of a desert terrain, so small in comparison to its neighbors, and yet so remarkably lush and verdant, productive and populated with G-d's people, with Jews who were, before my eyes, creating a homeland in the present focused on the future with eyes clearly on the past. A land where people take unbelievable pains to preserve and protect the past so a future can exist for the Jewish people. I saw all of this in the agriculture of the land, in the schools of higher education, in the scientific milieu, and in the sacred homage to those whose lives we remember.

You know, when we just read about Ezekiel who was asked by G-d to prophesy about the dry bones that were given breath, life, by G-d, I could not help but recall all the dead bones you and I have seen in the photographs from the Holocaust, from the *Shoah*, as revealed in the Holocaust Museums of Los Angeles, the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., and in *Yad Vashem* in Jerusalem. How often I have turned my eyes downward and away from the horrific sight in front of me until I internalized the reason to remember the past and to not let it happen again.

I get it now. I understand our unwavering look to the past to inspire the Jewish people, the Jewish community, and Israel to move forward even and especially in the midst of chaos, anti-Semitism, torture, and death.

We, Jews, endure. This is our future. We are capable of unlimited hope as Rabbi Briskin told us in his sermon on *Erev Rosh HaShanah* and as we listened that same night to Cantor Davidson sing the song that told us to have no fear, to not be afraid.

I get it. At every Bar and Bat Mitzvah Rabbi Briskin tells us the personal history of the special *Torah* from which the children read or chant. He tells us about its past, its journey from chaos in the Czech Republic to be hidden in obscurity, and to its present home here in our sanctuary where it is loved, cherished, and honored, and it touches our children on their Jewish journey. This *Torah* is our look backward as our Jewish children travel forward into the future of the Jewish people, the Jewish community, and Israel. We do more than maintain our Jewish heritage, we all participate in the on-going rebirth of our people. We validate our Jewish rebirth every time we honor the *Torah* during the *hakafah*, the *Torah's* journey amidst our Temple Beth El community during services.

The gift of Torah. The gift that keeps on giving for sure. To study, to remember, to learn from our past, to ask for forgiveness, and to forgive so that when we look back perhaps at the photographs, to look back at the bones, we can lead as we move forward. We are responsible and we are truly blessed to make a difference in the world, to make it a better place, to ensure the on-going homeland for the Jewish people and for all those who also choose to be a part of *Eretz Yisra'el*.

We are indeed lucky right now to feel rather sleepy, more than a little hungry, and perhaps very thirsty because we know that we will resolve our immediate needs shortly, and as we look at the past year we move forward, our rebirth, to seek G-d's wisdom and forgiveness, to be written into the Book of Life, to continue this improbable and remarkable Jewish journey with and for one another and the future. Amen.

*G'mar Hatimah Tovah.*