

The year that has passed was five thousand, seven hundred and sixty nine years since the Creation of the World, since the beginning of Jewish historical consciousness. We are a people who live our stories through generations.

The old year is unrolled before us like a scroll. In our quest for renewal in the year ahead, let us read from the scroll of the old year and try to understand some of its lessons.

The Jewish solar cycle, a 28-year orbit around the sun, ended and began again with...what else- bagels at sunrise here at HaTikvah as the sun peeked through clouds, allowing us to say the blessing. As we review the year as a Jewish community, it is important to tell the tale not only of our own community, but of the world Jewish community- kol Yisrael arevim zeh b'zeh: for all of Israel are involved with each other.

There was some good news as the year began: Jewish representation at last year's Nobel Prizes was strong, with two of the six international prizes- one third- going to honor the contributions of Martin Chalfie and Paul Krugman, Jews who contributed to the fields of chemistry and economics; striking examples of how the Jewish values of education and service continue to positively impact the world.

It was not long after the high holidays last year when terrorism struck again- this time in India where a Chabad House was among the places targeted. The world Jewish community expressed sorrow and solidarity at the loss of Rabbi Gavriel and Rivkah Holtzberg, along with the 171 others. We also recall the foiled plot to attack Queens synagogues and honor the memory of Stephan Johns, a security guard at the Holocaust museum, who paid the ultimate price for his vigilance in defense. As the vanguard of compassion, tolerance and faith in the God in whose image humanity was created, our community must remain unified and vigilant against those who stand for hatred, intolerance and negation.

Soon afterwards came news of betrayal from within our own community as the extent of Bernard Madoff's deception and theft became known. If we are called upon to be a light to the nations, actions such as Madoff's as well as those of the Rabbis implicated in the corruption scandals of the summer must be utterly rejected by our community.

In December, responding to the over seven thousand rocket attacks into civilian areas over its southern border, Israel entered the Gaza Strip in an attempt to stop the deadly barrages. As the members of the Hamas terrorist organization launched attacks from schools, carrying the battles into populated areas, all mourned the loss of innocent life on both sides of the border. Once again the international community and many in the United States condemned Israel. The battles ended with a cease-fire in January. As members of the American Jewish community, we must continue to educate ourselves about the conflict, develop and refine our own perspective and opinions and continue to be ready to speak out against one-sided, distorted

portrayals and to emphasize and repeat the one incontrovertible fact that Israel, a pluralistic democracy wants nothing more or less than peace with its neighbors and security for its citizens, both Jewish and Arab.

The inauguration of our country's first African-American president realized the dreams of Americans dedicated to human equality and dignity from across the political spectrum. The Jewish community, advocates of racial, religious and gender equality from the moment that we arrived on these shores, shared in the sense of affirmation of the promise of America, a country founded on the principles of the Tanach: *Proclaim liberty throughout the land, to all the inhabitants thereof.* The participation of Jews in politics has always been important. The appointments of Rahm Emanuel as Chief of Staff and David Axelrod as Senior Advisor and others not only shows how Jews are being included in our country's political process, but should ensure that this there's a Minyan in the Cabinet- only for Simchas, of course!

Our country is in the midst of a great debate about health care reform. Whichever side you favor, as a Jewish community, our values, rooted in the Torah, are clear. The Halacha, Jewish law, is unequivocal- it is the obligation of each individual, and the community as a whole, to save human life. The ongoing debate therefore centers on not on the fact of the obligation, the Mitzvot, but on the how. In the heat of the debate, it is important to bear in mind the common ground of the Mitzvah as a goal toward which all sides must strive. The Talmud says, whoever can save a life but does not is considered to have shed blood, while one who saves even a single life is considered as if they have saved the whole world.

In May, Pope Benedict the 16th arrived in Israel. For over forty years, every since Vatican II, the rapprochement between the Vatican and the Jewish people has been a source of healing and relief for our people. With the Pope's failure to address the Church's inaction during the Holocaust while in Israel as well as his reinstatement of excommunicated Bishop Richard Williamson, a denier of the Holocaust, the revival of the prayer for the conversion of the Jews in the Latin Mass and a backlash in the church against the reforms of Vatican II raise grave concerns about the future of the dialogue between the faiths.

It is essential that we not over-react: two generations of developing understanding will not simply disappear. At the same time, we must not simply ignore these developments. We must continue the interfaith engagement with all religious communities. The Prophet Isaiah says, My house shall be called a House of Prayer for All Peoples. We pray and hope yet that we continue to build this House of tolerance and mutual respect with our brothers and sisters in the Catholic faith community.

In May, Israel's Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu visited President Obama. It became clear that the issue of the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem would become a point of contention between the Netanyahu and Barack administrations. While differences exist, both leaders have emphasized that

the alliance of the two democracies is basic and unaltered. Both Israeli and American societies share the common characteristic of free debate and different viewpoints that are the hallmark of free nations.

We find ourselves, on this evening of verdicts, at a historical crossroads. Over the past three days, with the revelation of Iran's secret uranium enrichment site, the world faces a growing realization that, all protestation by Iran's leadership aside, the threat of a nuclear bomb in the hands of a repressive, radical regime is becoming actual. A general threat to world peace- an existential threat to our brethren in Israel. We have learned the bitter lessons of complacency and vague resolutions and half hearted negotiations that serve only to buy time. Now, the leaders of the free nations of the world must use all of the means of diplomacy to not only bring Iran to the negotiating table, but to bring about Iran's compliance with international non-proliferation agreements swiftly and verifiably. This is not the border attacks of Hizbollah or the Kassam rockets of Hamas, as bad as they are, but something far more terrible with which there can be no accommodation.

Yes, it has been a grim year in many respects. On the positive side, an enormous reservoir of natural gas was discovered off the coast of Haifa. While it's tempting to say that this was generated by the combined efforts of UN negotiators, the Israeli Parliament and the long line of special envoys to the region who produced very little else, this natural resource could significantly impact Israel's energy economy. Israel was also named as number one in the world in water recycling, making it a leader in environmentalism.

Also on the positive side, I'm happy to announce that this year, National Football League Commissioner Roger Goodell announced that the Jets played the Tennessee Titans today at 1:00 PM, moving the game from its original start time at 4:00 PM to accommodate Jewish fans and allow them to both watch the game and make it to Kol Nidre services. The Giants started at the same time. This is the first time in history that all four New York sports teams are playing simultaneously; too bad we can't celebrate their victories with a toast: we'll have to wait until tomorrow night.

And finally, many of us from Temple HaTikvah heard Professor Elie Wiesel speak at Drew University before Pesach. His message, as always, was one of reflection, affirmation, honoring memory and of hope. When asked about the effect of the loss of his foundations assets in the Madoff scandal, he said, *What will I do? All of my life we have been rebuilding on top of ruins- the ruins of culture, the ruins of faith, the ruins of civilization. We will rebuild. We will begin again.*

And so, as the tale of the year runs out, where are we? What is our course ahead? Do we confront or do we engage? Do we move forward boldly or do we reflect deeply first? Do we lead or do we follow? What will the continuation of the story be? The answer is in the words of an old Yiddish song:

Ver Meer Zaynen zaynen Meer

Ober Yidden Zyanen Meer
Vos Meer Lernen Lernern Meer
Ober Toyrah lernern meer-

Whatever else we are we are,
But Jews we are-
Whatever else we learn, we learn
But Torah we learn-

We may be students, project managers, lawyers, homemakers, doctors and healers. Some of us are teachers, merchants, musicians, fund managers, CEO's, CFO's, But we are Jews. We are not charged to solve and fix all of the world's labors- for that is not in our hands, but neither are we to think for one minute that our unique contribution is not absolutely necessary. What is our appointed task? We must only be the Jewish people, the people that we are and we must strive to be guided by and to live the values of the Torah, our gift to humanity.

On this night of Yom Kippur, take the world into yourself- feel the fullness of life: the becoming and the being, the starting and the ending, the joy and the sorrow, the living and the dying, the renewing and the hope. On this night when the verdict is written, resolve to write in the scroll of the future a beautiful line that is yours alone.
L'shana Tova