

RABBI'S MESSAGE OCTOBER, 2013

And Now...for the Rest of the Year...

The Holidays are over...finally! Now we can get back to our lives!

What a relief, says the rabbi. Now I can present simple Shabbat teachings instead of “major” sermons and I don't have to worry about trying to remember all the names of people who I haven't seen in year.

What a relief, says the Jewish communal worker. Now I can catch up on all the phone messages and emails that have come in from people who don't realize that Jewish organizations are closed on Jewish holidays.

What a relief, says the Day School parent. Now I don't have to worry about finding child care since I have to go to work even though my children's school is closed.

What a relief, says the observant homemaker. Now I can prepare simple meals for just my own family without worrying about so many guests.

What a relief, says the professional. Now I don't have to worry about explaining to my colleagues and supervisors why I wasn't at work...OR explain to my Jewish friends why I wasn't in *shul*.

What a relief, says the teenager. Now I don't have to make excuses to my teachers...or my coaches...or my band leader...why I wasn't in class....or at practice...or at rehearsal...

Wait a minute. Are the Holy Days supposed to enhance our lives, or do we sometimes view them as an annoyance, getting in the way of ***living*** our lives?

I wanted to share with you a little bit about my recent experience during *Sukkot* weekend, as we contemplate how the holidays at the beginning of the year CAN be integrated into the rest of our lives.

Bobby Harris is a life-long friend of mine. He is director of Camp Coleman in Cleveland, Georgia, which is sponsored by the Union for Reform

Judaism. Bobby and I were born 5 weeks apart and have known each other for almost forty years. His father dated my mother when they were both teenagers. When Bobby and I were 14 years old, we gave our Hebrew school teacher fits three days a week. When we were 21, we were unit heads together at a JCC summer camp in Morgantown, West Virginia. When we were 24, we were both regional directors of competing Jewish youth groups in the same territory – Bobby was the Young Judaea director and I was director of BBYO. When we were 26, Bobby was director of a Young Judaea camp and I was Assistant Director of a Reform Movement camp; we lived six blocks away from each other in Queens, New York, took the subway together to our respective Manhattan offices, ate at a Greek diner like the Seinfeld Four and played table tennis in the neighborhood. I later became director of a camp for underprivileged children in Pittsburgh before moving to Houston to run the JCC's youth and camping departments; then became a Jewish educator and now a rabbi. Bobby stuck with the camping profession, running a JCC camp in Philadelphia before taking over Camp Coleman, where he's now been the director for over 20 years. I was an usher at his wedding and a witness on his *ketubah*.

Bobby honored me by asking me to help officiate his daughter's bat mitzvah, which was held at the camp during the Shabbat of *Sukkot*. Sophie Harris is one lucky kid. Every summer of her life, she has been able to experience camp. Her summer Shabbat has always included young, guitar-playing song-leaders. When it came time to create a d'var Torah for her *Sukkot* bat mitzvah, she looked at the *Sukkah* as it compared with camp. A *sukkah* is a temporary dwelling, but stays open to remind us of GD's presence. A summer camp experience is also temporary, but the spirit, the friendships and the learning remain with her all year. Every cabin at Camp Coleman has a plaque with the four main concepts of the camp: *Kehillah* (Community), *Kavod* (respect), *Chesed* (kindness) and *Shalom* (peace). The campers and staff know that when they live these concepts during the summer, it is just a springboard to what they take with them to their families, their schools, their friendships and all their relationships. The summer ends, and what they've gained from the summer remains with them, giving each of them the opportunity to influence others in very special ways.

While we single out certain days as *Yontiff*, or High Holidays, Shabbat maintains its status in holiness. The first time the word *Kadosh* – holy – is mentioned in the Torah is **vayivarech Elohim et yom ha-sh'vi'ee, v'y'Kadesh oto** – “...and GD blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” Shabbat is also temporary, a mere 24 hours. At the end of Shabbat, we have a *havdallah* ceremony, in which we taste the wine, smell the spices, bask in the flame of a multi-wicked candle, and bless GD, for **ha-mavdil bayn kodesh l'chol** – *Who separates the holy from the ordinary, from the secular, from the profane*. And still, even this ceremony of separation is not so finite. We sip the wine, and the joy of Shabbat lingers...we smell the spices, and the dynamic fragrance of Shabbat remains in our nostrils...we extinguish the candle and let that last glow, that last puff of smoke, keep us connected to the sacred.

The High Holidays are over ... for now. We can get back to our lives. And as we do, let's keep tasting the sweetness of *Rosh Hashana*, perhaps with some of Mrs. Dean's honeycake, and remember to be sweet to the loved ones AND the strangers in our lives. Let's take time during the year to be as introspective as we are on *Yom Kippur*. As we conjure in our memories the final blast of the *shofar* at the end of *Ni'lah*, let's make sure it doesn't symbolize the end inspirational time, but the beginning. Let's keep appreciating the temporary nature of a *Sukkah* to remind us to cherish each day; and let's find more time to sing and dance and celebrate the joy of learning as *Simchat Torah* inspires us to remember how much fun it is to learn through from our traditions and from our relationships.

Holy Days are never over when we are inspired to live the lessons we've learned. Let's keep learning together and celebrate every day!

L'shalom,

Dan Gordon