

RABBI'S MESSAGE

FILLING THE EMPTINESS

As I write this message, it is ten days before Rosh Hashanah. Ten days of awe before *the* Ten Days of Awe. I entered the empty synagogue with a key, turned off the alarm, answered emails, answered the phone, sorted the mail and performed other ordinary tasks. Then, I went to sit in the last seat of the empty sanctuary and listened to the silence. I looked at the backs of empty chairs, seeing the room from a different perspective. I imagined what the room would look like, feel like and sound like ten days from now. Many of the chairs will be full; but probably not all of them. There will be sounds: singing, praying, chanting, whispering, music ...perhaps some surprises, like a baby crying or an outdoor car alarm or the screech of a microphone. I tried to imagine how people will be entering the sanctuary and how they will be entering a New Year. The hopes and expectations that come with a synagogue service may be similar to the hopes and expectations of all new beginnings. We want to feel comfortable and we long for the familiar. We also want the excitement of the unexpected. We worry that not all of our surprises will be pleasant. We know we will hear the loud blast of the *shofar*; we don't know exactly how it will sound this year. We know we will hear music and prayer; we don't know how it might move us to action or influence our behavior or our feelings. We know a New Year will bring mystery, and we hope we will be able to deal with that mystery well. As I sat in the emptiness, I filled the silence with prayer. I sang with a voice that had more volume than melody. I sang words that will fill the sanctuary soon: *Avinu Malkeinu – chaneinu v'a-naynu...Our Father, Our King, be gracious and answer us, for we have little merit. Treat us generously and with kindness and be our help.* All by myself, I filled the room, filled it with a prayerful plea. I repeated the prayer loudly several times, until it evolved into a whisper.

This room will be filled, I thought. It will be filled with people, unique individuals, each bringing a different prayer. Some prayers will be in Hebrew, some in English, and some will offer their own silent prayers, either meditating in the language of their birth or in the wordlessness of those things that are difficult to say. Beyond the people, the room will be filled with spirit. That spirit doesn't expire at the conclusion of the service. I invite you to take that spirit with you into your life and into the year. I invite you to use that spirit to fill.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon