

Rosh Hashanah Message

In our main bathroom hangs a picture of a little child doing a summersault. Next to the child is an inspirational message:

God puts each fresh morning,
each new chance of life,
into our hands as a gift,
to see what we will do with it.

We've had this picture hanging in our bathroom since we moved into the house 19 years ago. I recently asked our daughter how this affected her growing up, seeing the picture every morning. Her predictive response, "Hmm, I never noticed it." But I've reflected on it on occasion, and I think there are some takeaways that we can explore. Now obviously this message is meant to be a *daily* uplift, but I think it applies to this New Year we're just beginning.

First off, it begins with "God" – in the same way, we come here at the very beginning of the year to acknowledge, praise, and thank God for this New Year. There are several ways that the message could have been written, such as "Nature has put...", "By random chance...", or even a totally passive "You've been given...." No, just as we do when we recite the morning blessings, this message begins by acknowledging that it is *God* who sets before us each fresh morning, or in this case, year.

And it is fresh – we don't need to carry the baggage from previous years. We've just gone through the month of Elul, which I hope for you was a time of reflection, and a time to forgive others and to ask forgiveness from them. We can now resume our relationships afresh, with the goal of being more loving, more caring; of listening more and talking less; of building each other up, instead of tearing each other down.

That's a difficult thing to do! I don't know about you, but I'm a creature of habit. It's easier to remain in my old ways, to continue "business as normal." But maybe, just maybe, if I set my will to it, I will, with the help of the Divine, make this a better year for myself and for those around me.

The New Year is a new chance for life. We need to live the life we've been given, not sit around and watch life happening around us. That means actively taking part in activities, sharing commonly with others' living of life, and doing what we can to foster *tikkun olam* in our lives, our families, our communities, and our world as a whole.

The time we've been given is placed into our hands. It's not time to "Be still, and know that I am God." (Ps. 46:11) God has gifted us with this time. And what's the proper response to a valuable gift? To thank the giver and then put it into a drawer to be ignored? No, of course not!

Have you ever held a door open for someone, only to have them just walk through it without a glimmer of recognition? Or my favorite is when they look at you and say, "I could have gotten it." Makes you wish you'd just slammed the door in their face!

No, the proper response is to first thank the giver for the gift, and then use that gift for good, thereby bringing honor to the one who gave it to us. And a new year is a gift; it is not an entitlement that we deserve, nor a payment for something we may have done in the past.

And finally, the inscription says that God wants to see what we will do with this gift. Now I'm going to avoid discussion of omnipotence, or even free will versus predestination, but I will remind you of the words of the voice in the burning bush, wherein

God says: “I have surely **seen** the affliction of my people... and have **heard** their cry... for I **know** their sufferings.” These are anthropomorphic terms that the Torah uses to describe God in ways that we can relate to. But regardless of whether God *knows in advance* what choices we will or won't make, the decisions are still ours to make. I urge you this year to choose life and good; even more so, choose to choose life and good.

Shana Tova!