

The World is Yours

Shana Tovah,

On Rosh Hashanah we take another big step forward in time as we look ahead and plan for the future. So on this first night of 5780, it is my honor to speak directly to the future! Yes you! We are one step closer to a world which will be led by you!

When the Israelites were gathered together at Mt. Sinai, getting ready to receive the Torah, God said to them, “before I hand over this sacred, treasured scroll – what promise do I have that you will live by the rules and values within it? Who will be your guarantors? Who will promise that you will honor the teachings of Torah?”

The Israelites shouted out, “our ancestors!”, but God responded “no, that’s not good enough, they have already come and gone”.

The Israelites tried “our prophets!”, but God said “no, they are too exclusive a group, my Torah will be a blessing for all peoples”.

Finally, the Israelites offered, “our children”, and God said – “Yes! Your children will be guarantors of this covenant between us, and their children to follow”. And with that promise in place, God shared Torah with the Israelites and we still read it and pass it down to our children today!¹

This is a little crazy right? This is like having your baby sister sign your permission slip for something at school. “She might be a baby now, but I know she’ll be a responsible person...some day”. This story from Sinai comes with A LOT of responsibility. Parents in the room - can you imagine putting your kids up as collateral in any situation? You would A. need to make sure that you were prepared to uphold your end of the bargain, and B. would need to make sure to prepare your children so that they too could carry out the agreement moving forward.

Children in the room - You might have heard that your parents think the world of you, well this story really drives that home doesn’t it? They think so very highly of you, that they entrust you with the future. How does it feel to be given a huge responsibility that you did not sign up for? How does it feel to know that the fate of the future is in your hands? It could be a little intimidating, but also - it’s kind of exciting, isn’t it?

That last bit was maybe a trick question right? Because we are *all* somebody's children, right? Parents and grandparents in the room – this is your, “when I was your age moment”. When you were *their* age, what type of world did you inherit? What was wonderful? What was challenging? And as you think about this, think also about the path you are preparing for your

¹ Song of Songs Rabbah 1:4

children. Given how the world looks now, what do you want to carry forward, and what do you want to change for the better?

Same questions for the young people in the room – How do you see the world today?

What is wonderful? What is challenging? What excites you?

Rosh Hashanah is known as *Ha Yom Harat Olam*, the day the world was created.

So I ask you this, what is the world you want to create for the future? Take a few moments with your family now, share your responses, and answer this:

What can you do to transform your world, and to make a difference in the year to come? This is an important conversation that deserves much more time, but I'm glad we're getting the New Year started this way.

Perhaps we can find some inspiration from some of our biblical heroes on different approaches to making an impact in our world. Here's a story about our forefather Abraham. When he was a young boy. He worked in his father's idol shop, where people would come in and buy statues to pray to. Abraham, he was Avram at the time, took a look at this idol worshipping practice and decided it was wrong. So he took a club or an ax, and he smashed every idol in the shop to smithereens. And as the story goes, this is the moment God took notice of young Avram, and decided that he could be the father of a great nation. In his ability to not settle with what was, and to break down what existed, God saw his ability to be a great builder².

Our world is full of structures which have already been built. Some of them are great – like this synagogue, or some schools, or wonderful charities. But some things in our society are like the idol shop, and they need to be dismantled. But we can't just smash them, that's only half the story. We need to be ready to build something new in its place. Maybe you will take part in a student protest, or find yourself asking tough questions to politicians. Never in my life have I seen students more active, and invested in bettering the world. The opportunities are there to make a huge impact. No dream is too big!

Or maybe you want to be more like our matriarch Rebekah. Rebekah is first celebrated because of her incredible kindness. At her local well, Rebekah noticed a man and his camels were suffering with thirst. She not only gave water to the man, but water to the camels as well³. That's kindness that goes the extra mile. We live in a world where a lot of people are thirsty, hungry, cold, in danger. And sometimes we look around, and there is nobody there trying to help them. And in those moments, we need to be like Rebekah, and rise to the occasion to do the good thing for those in need. As Pirkei Avot teaches us: In a place where there are no good people, be a good person⁴! Maybe you will help children who are in the hospital, or find ways to feed the hungry and house the homeless. No act of care is too small!

Mahatma Ghandi said, "be the change you want to see in the world". Theodore Herzl, who helped form the modern state of Israel said, "if you will it, it is no dream". Rabbi Elaine Zecher says, "trust your crazy big idea". We here at Temple Israel truly value and celebrate your voice as the voice of the future! We want you to share your ideas on how to make this world a better

² Genesis Rabbah 38:13

³ Genesis 24:10-21

⁴ Pirke Avot 2:5

place, and we want to be a part of making it happen! If you have ideas about how TI, your school, Boston, or the whole world can change for the better, please tell me or the other clergy, teachers, and staff, we are here to listen and help!

We trust you,
We believe in you,
We're proud of you,
We're excited for you!

- Put your hands on your head - may this be a new year of creative new ideas to improve our world
- Put your hands on your heart - may you spend this new year treating everyone with kindness and compassion
- Now flex your muscles - may you know that in this new year, you have the strength to build the future you want to live in

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