

BCC, October 13, 2000
Erev Sukkot
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This is definitely a year of transition for me. It might be my recent milestone birthday, but it seems to be more than that. I feel a new self-confidence or maybe even the stirrings of wisdom. About a month or so ago Rabbi Lisa showed me a book of Jewish wisdom, which intrigued me since I tend to prefer short anthologies. It has quotes and saying on almost every topic from the Biblical period to the modern day. While I have not read all the quotations, I would like to start off with a quote from Abraham Joshua Heschel a great Rabbi of the Twentieth Century. He said, "The Sabbath is an oasis in time". Not only is tonight the beginning of another Shabbat but also erev Sukkot, the harvest Festival of booths which reminds of us a distant time when most Israelites were farmers who built and dwelt in a Sukkah, a temporary hut or shelter. They needed to be close to the land because farmers are in constant struggle with their land to produce a bountiful harvest. Tonight, perhaps, we can struggle with our souls to produce meaningful prayer because one of the Hebrew verbs for prayer is l'hitpalel which also means to struggle. It seems fitting to me because without struggle and growth, one cannot truly rest.

This year many Chagim fall on Shabbat. In respect for the Sabbath, many congregations will rest from doing certain rituals. During Rosh Ha'Shanah we did not blow shofarim on the first day because it also fell on Shabbat. Tonight I would encourage the congregation to remember the scent of the etrog and the rustling of the lulav out of respect for the Sabbath. The ritual committee has wrestled at length with these controversial decisions. Thankfully, the committee can soon let this struggle rest for a few years.

Tonight, I wanted to talk about everything under the Sun, but the waning daylight encourages me to keep this drash short. Autumn is approaching quickly. The leaves in the Northeast will soon be turning bright shades of red and orange. You should understand that leaves turning color and falling off their branches just does not seem like a natural phenomenon for me growing up as I did in South Florida. In fact, the first time I saw these changing leaves was at fourteen for my Grandfather's funeral in New York not far from the City. It was such an odd feeling to see the brilliant colors in the midst of such grief. I felt like a stranger in a strange land. My tongue stumbled over the Mourner's Kaddish. Tears filled my eyes as we all said our final farewell. I wondered if there was closure with each scoop of shoveled dirt. I felt little comfort from these confusing rituals. Many years later, the pain and confusion has lessened with time even as the joy of experiencing the bright leaves has grown clearer. These days, the Kaddish flows from my mouth. Each word is clearly spoken, as if to embrace those happy memories and to dispell those old doubts and pains as if they were falling leaves. I think the faded memory of a long distant pain is how newlyweds must feel as they crush a glass on their happy day. The couple is under the chupah a Sukkat Shlomecha, a shelter of peace, encircled by their family and friends, yet we all remember the sorrow and pain from Mitzrayim, Egypt, in the midst of our joy.

It seems like this is the time for many powerful harvests in history, both good and bad. Yesterday was the anniversary of the passing of Matthew Shepard. How many people here attended the vigil to honor his memory last night? Last week we saw radical change in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia. A demoralized land now comes much closer to the reality of a free, democratic

society. It has also been ten years since the reunification of Germany for better and for worse. Their celebration of wholeness and reunification was dampened by Neo-Nazi outbreaks of violence against Synagogues and Jewish Cemeteries. In Israel violence has again broken out. It pains our hearts to see the strife and bloodshed in the State of Israel. I can remember my first trip during high school to Israel—Yom Kippur in the Old City of Jerusalem can be inspiring, especially when you are seventeen. We spent Sukkot eating in the campus sukkah practicing songs for Simchat Torah, which would be our next visit to Jerusalem. They taught us many joyous songs, so when you hear us simon tov u'mazel tov at our next Simchah, just imagine me dancing in the streets of the Old City. Still the thought of our safety weighed on our young minds not too mention the sexy young soldiers with their Uzis. I was not afraid of the soldiers or their weapons, but it was poignantly clear that danger *could* be lurking around the corner be it rocks or tear gas. The night before I left Israel for the first time our teachers took us to the Kotel. It was already briskly cold outside, but the Roman era stones were strangely warm. I felt a sense of awe and the words "L'Shanah Ha'Bah B'Yerushalayim" came into my head. Suddenly those stones were tangible. The Temple was tangible. My Hope for the future was tangible in that moment in my adolescence. Have you ever felt that presence of spirit?

On the second day of Rosh Ha'Shanah, right here, Josh Wayser asked if G-d were to speak to us, who would listen? How would we know it was G-d? What if Rabbi Lisa said G-d spoke to her, would we think she had gone mad? Personally, I wouldn't think she was mad unless she left without her books. Maybe she would take a Tanach, some Mishnah, or even Gamarah. Fran would definitely take sheet music. I choose to see G-d through the people and the world around me. Did you feel the Shechinah when Fran sang at Kol Nidre? Did her voice pierce the soul of your being? Do you sense the wisdom of Ha'Shem when you study with Rabbi Lisa? At choir practice we learned to blend our voices, expressing our joy to be among our sisters and brothers. My hope is that we provided a sukkat shlomechah, a tent of peace, with our song and prayer, especially for Rabbi Lappee after sharing with us on Rosh Ha'Shanah morning, her brave struggle and well earned freedom from the closet. At these moments I am kvelling and grateful to be a part of Beth Chayim Chadashim because it gives each of us a hopeful glimpse into a future as bright as those autumnal New England leaves before the trees begin their own season of rest.

Next week we will celebrate Simchas Torah. It will be a joyous celebration. When I see the smiles on the women and men and children carrying the Torah scrolls. That is the smile of the Shechinah. When I hear the readers chanting from the Torah, I hear G-d's voice in their strength. When I see someone draw the Torah close to themselves as an intimate, it reminds me of my struggle to understand the omnipresence of G-d, but for right now –this moment--this is the season of our joy, Z'man Simchateinu. Torah tells us that on this holy day, "You shall have only Joy!" [Deut. 16:15] I can already smell the sweet aroma of the Etrog, I hope you do, too. Shabbat Shalom and a Chag Sameach!