

## Why We Should Be in Synagogue *This* Rosh Hashanah

By Alan Teperow

I am writing this article during early August as missiles are raining down on Northern Israel and the world is demanding an immediate ceasefire. Having attended rallies in Brookline and Lexington, a vigil at Newton City Hall and a breakfast gathering for Israel Bonds, I am convinced more than ever that, as Jews, we need each other in these trying times.

As you read this, I hope the situation in Israel has been completely resolved, but whether that is the case or not, I want to emphasize why I think it is imperative for all Jews to be in *shul* this year on the High Holy Days. Simply put, we must come together to be comforted by collective and personal prayer, to be nurtured by our community, and to have our feelings as Jews reinforced by the beauty of the liturgy and the wisdom of our rabbis.

Some might feel that it is dangerous for so many Jews to congregate in one place. I understand this sentiment and, representing the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts, have urged our congregations to be especially vigilant about security this year. But if our sanctuaries are not filled to capacity on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we will be granting a symbolic victory to those who seek to destroy us.

When we do come together we not only make a statement to our enemies and to the media, but we allow ourselves to use the power of prayer and community to help us heal. In our sanctuaries, we feel the sense of a nurturing community gathered to mourn the loss of victims of terror and personal loved ones, and we express our oneness with the land and people of Israel. For some, we are fortunate to feel the presence of family and friends; for others we feel the presence of fellow congregants we might not even know; but for us all there is the sharing of pain and the palpable sounds of hope and optimism.

And when we grieve, according to Jewish tradition, we do so with a minyan – with a community of Jews who share our pain and with whom we can mourn as a *kehillah*. Today we grieve for the innocent civilians of Haifa, Tzefat and Nahariya and the Israeli soldiers -- teenagers, young marrieds and parents of young children – who are giving their lives to protect our homeland.

As I write this we are amidst the seven *Shabbatot* of consolation, when special *haftarot* are selected to bring us comfort after *Tisha B'Av*, commemorating the fall of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem. Again, it is our liturgy and the voices of our leaders that bring us together to feel the consolation of togetherness. Indeed, our mourning practices remind us of how important community is in helping us achieve normalcy in the face of tragedy. We need a minyan of ten people to say *kaddish*, we gather with loved ones and friends during the *shiva* week, and our congregations provide the kind of community that is always there to help us find comfort.

This year, when we enter our sanctuaries and come together as one, with disparate ideas about the efficacy of Israel's advances into Lebanon, we look to our rabbis to analyze the conflict and help us put the violence and suffering into perspective. Having heard our rabbis make sense out of the senseless on countless occasions in the past, I am confident that, once again, we will hear their words and be comforted in synagogue this year. We will also hear the soothing, mellifluous sounds of our cantors' renditions of the High Holy Day liturgy, stirring us to deeper commitment and a stronger connection to God.

And this year, as we join together in solemn prayer, we will especially pray for the peace of Israel with its neighbors in the hope that, some day soon, we will be able to live together in harmony. *Hatikva*, Israel's anthem of hope, reminds us that we are a people of hope -- and this year we will all be in synagogue praying for a time when things will be better for our beloved Israel.

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