



Lily pads and Life

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Lily Pads and Life: Thoughts for the New Year

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When was the last time you touched a lily pad? Can you describe the sound of water lapping against a rock? Can you recall seeing ripples in a lake make the water actually shimmer? Have you ever seen a fish suddenly jump out of the water to catch a flying insect? When was the last time you focused on the reflection of trees in the water long enough to be amazed by the deep emerald color of the leaves in the water?

Why should you care? Why should I care enough to be mentioning it? Aren't there more important matters I should be addressing as the high holy days approach?

This past summer while my son Aaron was away at overnight camp, I had the rare opportunity to get in my kayak and quietly immerse myself in nature. This was such a drastic change from the harried, sensory-bombarded, cyber-filled existence that I live during the rest of the year that it was as if someone suddenly drew back a curtain and there, before my eyes, was the world.

It forced me to realize how mesmerized I was by my growing arsenal of high tech devices and how addicted I was to my multi-tasking lifestyle. It was unsettling to realize that I was forcing my son into the same mindset. Over the past year when Aaron would join me on my "daily walk," I would get upset if he slowed down to admire something natural, because I needed to keep up the pace. If we were out doing an errand and he wanted to examine something on the ground, I would impatiently tell him that we didn't have time for that sort of thing. The name of the game is "hurry." Our goal is to get as much done as possible in the shortest period of time. The more we "do," the better we feel about ourselves at the end of the day.

What a sharp contrast to sitting back in a kayak, not moving a muscle, staring at the clouds drifting by, marveling that the only thing in a rush are stick-like bugs darting through the air and some sort of water bugs quickly zigzagging on top of the water. Every year at this time I vow not to let

myself get dragged back in to the frenetic, unnatural lifestyle our society has created. I berate myself for having separated not only myself, but my son, from the world G-d created. Why do we do this to ourselves? What's our real goal in life? What IF we didn't check our email every 30 seconds, actually turned off the computer and didn't immediately turn on the TV or ipod? What if we saved an errand until another day, or decided we didn't absolutely have to buy every object of our desire which would require hours at the mall or searching the Internet? What is it that we really want to accomplish?

Rosh Hashanah is early enough this year for us still to have the images of summer clearly in our minds. We are on the brink of resuming the crazy lifestyle of the rest of the year. This is our big chance to consider how we really want to live out our days. What is it that we'd love to change about our lives, to make them more manageable, enjoyable, fulfilling? Do we even know what our goals are? When was the last time we sat down and discussed our life's dreams with someone? In what ways would we like to help the world be a better place? Which community or world issues would we love to devote our time and energy to, if we had any left over?

The slow movement of the clouds. The gentle rhythmic movement of the water. The stillness of a rock. The gentleness of the breeze blowing through the trees. Our challenge is to give ourselves the space in time to stay connected to the world of nature for our sanity, our health, our wellbeing. No matter how lost we get in cyberspace, we are part of that world whose anniversary we are about to celebrate. This is our life. This is our children's legacy. Take a moment today to look up at the sky. Take a deep breath. L'shanah tova!

Susan Abramson has been the rabbi of [Temple Shalom Emeth](#), a reform synagogue in Burlington, Massachusetts, for more than 20 years. Rabbi Abramson is also the author of the soon-to-be published [Rabbi Rocketpower and the Mystery of the Missing Menorahs](#). She is a long-time friend of this web site's manager, who was privileged and grateful to have spent a few days with the Rabbi this past summer kayaking, walking, and enjoying nature.

