

Rabbi Goldberg's High Holy Day Message for the year 2017 – 5778

Some have asked me to be 'homier' in my New Year's message, more anecdotal and familial. They have said, "Aviva write about your family, the wonder in the eyes of your young grandchildren, the happiness you feel as you watch your students, your offspring grow in depth and maturity. Write about the pride you feel regarding the progress of our synagogue, our many social and educational new initiatives, our new active board members and volunteers. Bring all this into the forefront of your message this year. Let it be one of comradery and hope."

True there is no doubt that this is a fine type of New Year's message, and a part of me feels I should heed these requests to present a soothing, calm message. Yet the other part of me feels dishonest in enumerating what could be construed as a litany of bromides and banalities, albeit lovely and honest ones.

In my High Holy Day message of last year, I quoted the words of Elie Wiesel who said, ". . . there may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice; there must never be a time, however, when we fail to protest." His words continue to resonate today as I write this message to you five days after the events of Charlottesville Virginia, as white supremacists and neo Nazis promise to organize more such rallies in the months ahead.

Similar to Wiesel's remarks, the following written over a century ago reflects the dissonance, the unease and fear many of us are experiencing today. This is the prophetic introduction to Charles Dickens' epic novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. He wrote "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness . . . it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair".

Yes I fear that the new Jewish year 5778 will be one of the worst of times, one which forebodes political and social upheaval as violence, racism, homophobia and hatred foment world-wide. Yet there are still those who express by their actions the best and wisest of the times, those regular citizens for example, who stood and protected the Jewish members of a Charlottesville shul as they entered and left their synagogue fearful of the neo- Nazis threatening outside their doors.

Those people, Jew, Christian, Muslim, atheist, who are standing for the integral message of our tradition. That is, to honour and feel gratitude for the goodness in life, as well as to engage in pursuing justice and ethics: to actively work for *tikkun olam* through both the smallest of gestures and the greatest of movements; to give a coffee to the person on the street corner. To speak with them, if they permit you to, and learn how it is that they are homeless. To seek to understand the systemic injustices in our city, our province, our country and the world, and find the many diverse ways we all can make a difference.

Let the year 5778 be one where we follow and understand the words of the sage Rabbi Tarfon who said: "The day is short and there is much work to be done. . . you are not obliged to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it. Know that those who act righteously will be eventually rewarded."

Shana tova to you and yours,
Aviva