

CONGREGATION AGUDATH JACOB

JULY 2024 SIVAN / TAMMUZ 5784

Phone: 254-772-1451

Fax: 254-772-2471

Email: cajassistant@grandecom.net

Website: www.agudathjacob.org

Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner
cajrabbi@grandecom.net

President Judy Hersh
hershladylawyer@aol.com

*From the Desk of
Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner*

“3 Principles of Faith for Turbulent Times”

Like many of you, I'm sure, I spend much of my discretionary time obsessively reading or listening to the news, trying to keep up with the crazy, mind-spinning pace of the news cycle and worrying about our country, worrying about the Jewish people and particularly all the young and the older courageous and resilient men and women of the IDF (Tzahal), the Mossad, the Shin Bet, United Hatzalah and all Israeli civilians in the State of Israel, our Congregation, our Jewish community in Waco, the Jewish Community worldwide, and our planet, and also worrying about the future of human civilization on earth.

I don't have to tell you. There is a lot to worry about. The current war in Israel in the South in Gaza against Hamas, and what seems almost certain the next war in the North of Israel against Iran's proxies in Lebanon, Hezbollah, Jihad etc., basically the Middle East on fire.

Here in the U.S., the deep divides in our country, the threat of nuclear war from Iran, from North Korea, the War in Ukraine, and climate change.

I personally haven't lived through a more frightening time, when the future seemed so uncertain.

Living in these turbulent times can take a toll on our souls and bodies.

So, as we wake up in the morning each day, after reciting the "Modeh Ani", as Conservative Jews before we start to worry about our day at work, we take a time out for spiritual reflection, reconnecting our "Neshamah" our Soul with our Creator (Borei Olam) and we consider how we can be our best selves.

For me, the spiritual question of these times (and maybe of all times) is:

How to have faith in the face of so much fear? First comes to mind, I think of our Father Abraham in the Binding of his son Isaac...

How do we live with hope when the world is such a mess?

It's the same question we might ask ourselves on the personal level

when our lives are in turmoil: what does it mean to have faith in times of uncertainty?

Faith is a funny word, and it means different things in different religions.

When I hear people say, "you're of the Jewish faith," I always squirm a little and feel uncomfortable, like faith isn't really the word we'd use.

We're a people of action, of Mitzvot, of deeds; but "faith?" – that feels a bit foreign, doesn't it?

"Faith" is used in English to mean "belief in something," but the Hebrew word for faith, **Emunah**, means less "belief" and more "firmness" or "steadfastness," as in perseverance.

Jewish faith doesn't require a certain set of beliefs.

Yes, Maimonides wrote his Thirteen Principles of Faith in the 12th century, but they were not universally agreed upon, and his Principles are more theological axioms, such as: "G-d has no physical body".

With all due respect to Maimonides, one of the greatest Jewish thinkers of all time, his axioms aren't exactly going to get us to the hope-kind-of-faith that we need in these frightening times.

So, for Jews, faith is not belief in a certain dogma. Quite the contrary, what Jewish tradition loves is multiple, contradictory viewpoints - that's what all of our holy books are filled with - **Machloket**, disagreement, which we consider sacred conversation, for Heaven's sake, (LeShem Shamayim).

For Jews, faith is not certainty. So, what is it?

In the tradition of Maimonides, I'd like to lay out Three Principles of Faith, that is – [Three Principles of Faith for Turbulent Times](#).

The first is: Faith is being uncertain, maybe even being afraid, but having courage anyway. Instead of falling into despair, it is taking a step forward into the unknown, but into new possibilities. It's being in darkness but walking forward anyway. That is our Jewish story.

Our story began with Abraham (or Avram) hearing G-d's call of Lech Lecha – Go Forth, leave your land and your parent's home and everything that is familiar, and go into the unknown.

Abraham heeds this call, and in doing so, he becomes the role model for the Jewish people.

That's what we mean by faith.

Not certainty but going forward into the unknown with courage.

And for what purpose? G-d says, **V'heye Bracha** – to be a blessing to the world.

Yes, the future is uncertain, but the Jewish path since the beginning of our people, is to Lech Lecha – to go forward into that unknown future with courage and to try to be a blessing. This is exactly what so many of our immigrant ancestors did when they came to this country.

They left behind everything they knew, and with not much more than the clothes on their backs, they *lech lecha*, they went forth into the unknown,

and with courage, created new possibilities, along with all the other

immigrants from around the world who have built this great country of ours, the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.

Think about your own family's *lech lecha* journeys.

This is the first principle of Jewish faith in turbulent times: the opposite of faith is not uncertainty; the opposite of faith is despair.

Every day, our liturgy reminds us of how we crossed the sea of Reeds when we left Egypt. Imagine the moment just before the sea split.

We've fled Pharaoh and slavery, and we've got the Egyptian army behind us with their chariots and weapons, and in front of us, the sea.

There is nowhere to go. We don't have any good options.

It's the archetypal and familiar moment of being completely stuck, of being afraid; what are we going to do in this situation that seems impossible?

The Rabbis imagined that one courageous Israelite named Nachshon

led us all, and walked right into the sea, and it was only when the water was up to our noses, that the sea miraculously split.

Faith is not certainty. We were at a moment of terrifying unknowns.

But faith is walking forward anyway, with courage.

Perhaps it's feeling despair, but not letting it let it stop us from moving forward.

And it is this faith that turns an impasse into a miraculous opening.

You never know what can happen when we have the courage to *lech lecha* to go forth into new possibilities.

Which brings me to my second principle of Jewish faith in turbulent

times: What happens as we cross the sea?

We sang the Song of the Sea, and the Torah tells us that Miriam led all the women in dancing and singing with their timbrels.

Now wait a minute, where did they get timbrels from?

Tambourines?!

We just escaped slavery and didn't have time to let our bread rise! (Remember, Matzah?)

But all the women thought as they were fleeing slavery: "let me grab my tambourine" - ?!

Again, the Rabbis explain: The Israelite women had so much faith that

they packed their tambourines because they knew there would be reason to celebrate.

The second principle of faith is: Things will get better. Pack your tambourine.

That things will get better is the master narrative of the whole Torah: that is, an enslaved people's liberation and journey to the Promised Land.

When G-d shows up at the burning bush to tell Moses to go to Pharaoh

and free the Israelite slaves, Moses asks: "who shall I say sent me?"

G-d answers by saying: "**Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh**, 'I will be who I will be' –

Tell them '**Ehyeh** sent you.'" **Ehyeh**, "I will be."

G-d's not being cute or cagey here in this awesomely important moment in all of human civilization.

No, in fact, G-d is hinting at the very meaning of G-d's name, **YHVH**, which is made up of the past, present, and future forms of the Hebrew verb "To Be."

G-d is revealing G-d's essence that is central to the Exodus and indeed to all of Jewish thought and faith.

Ehyeh is the future tense of the verb "to be," meaning, this G-d is the power that can change what **IS** into **WHAT COULD BE**.

The G-d of the Torah is the Divine power of POSSIBILITY, of change, of transformation.

This is Judaism's unique offering to the world.

We may take this notion of the possibility of change for granted because it's so integrated into our thinking, but this idea comes from Torah.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l writes, "to be a Jew is to be an agent of hope

in a world serially threatened by despair".

Judaism is a sustained struggle against the world that is, in the name of the world that could be, should be, but is not yet".

So, my first two principles for faith in turbulent times are:

First, faith is not certainty, but it's having hope and courage to move forward in times of uncertainty, and second, it's believing that change is possible, and things will get better. (So, pack your tambourine)

And the third principle is:

Faith isn't waiting passively for the G-d of possibility to do something.

It's being an agent of possibility.

You know the joke about the man who is drowning and says, "G-d will save me! G-d will save me!"

Rescuers come and throw him a life preserver, and he says, "G-d will save me! G-d will save me!"

A boat comes by, and they say, "Get in!" And the drowning man says, "G-d will save me, G-d will save me!"

A helicopter flies overhead and throws him a rope, and he says, "G-d will save me! G-d will save me!"

And the man drowns and dies, and he says,

"G-d, I had faith in you, why didn't you save me?"

*G-d says, "I sent you a life preserver, and a boat, and a helicopter!"
what do you mean I didn't save you?*

Jewish faith is not "G-d will save me!" It's not passive.

Jewish faith requires us to be active *agents* of hope and faith.

There's a passage in the Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 31a) where one of our Sages, Rava, imagines the various questions that a person is asked at the Gates of Heaven: Did you study Torah?

Were you honest in your business dealings?

The kind of questions you'd expect.

But one question is a bit surprising:

before the heavenly gates, the person is also asked:

Tzipita LeYishua? Did you have faith in redemption? Or, did you have hope for the future?

Various commentators try to tease out exactly what this means, ***tzipita leyishua***.

Tzipita is a verb that means watching, vision or seeing.

Yishua is salvation, redemption, fancy words that express the idea that: The world will get better. So, *tzipita leyishua* means: did you hold the vision that the world will get better?

One commentator, Rav Kook, the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi in pre-state Palestine, explains why the word *tzipita* was used rather than the word "to hope."

It might have been more natural to say, "did you hope for salvation?"

Rav Kook explains that this faith in the future is different than passively hoping.

Tzipita leyishua, he writes, means not: did you hope for salvation?

But: Did you act in the world to bring salvation?

Did you take responsibility to make the world better?

Did you agitate others to take action too?

This is the question that we are asked.

This is what faith means – it's active hope.

It's not saying, "G-d will save me!" No, it's being the one out there with the boat and the rope and the helicopter.

It's being an agent of hope. It's activating hope and faith through our actions.

This active faith means for example: instead of despairing and "Kvetching" about the level of weekly participation in our Friday and Saturday Minyanim (plural for Minyan), do something.

Call a congregant, a friend or relative and suggest picking them up and taking them to our services. Show up at our [Men's Club](#) or [Sisterhood's](#) programs, at our monthly "**Shabbat Lunch & Learn**" starting again July 13, 2024, ([this luncheon will be sponsored by the Rebbetzin and I in honor of our Wedding Anniversary of July 3](#)), our monthly Jewish Movies, beginning in July ([watch your email inbox for the next date](#)), our monthly Book Club etc.

Active Faith means Be ACTIVE and PARTICIPATE in our Congregation's Community life. **Active Faith** means also to Be an ACTIVE Agent of hope of our Congregation out there in Waco, Temple, Belton and other surroundings. It's being part of that force that transforms what is into what could be. And also notice from these examples that active faith means mainly joining together with others to be that force. Despair and cynicism isolate and separate us, but Jewish faith involves joining together with others to be agents of hope in our Jewish Community.

The concept of faith is challenging, especially for Jews, I think, because we often misunderstand what the word means for us. People sometimes use the word "faith" to mean: not doubting, not questioning, obedience, turning off our rational minds, or believing in a certain doctrine.

Listen to me: those are *not*, in my opinion, the Jewish definitions of faith.

The root of the Hebrew word for faith, *Emunah*, is Aleph-Mem-Nun, as in: Amen.

Saying "Amen" underlies all three principles of faith in turbulent times.

It's saying Amen to life.

Affirming life and goodness and hope and possibility, even when things are a mess. (Can I get an Amen to that?)

Every day during the Days of Awe, our High Holy Days, we recite Psalm 27, and express our prayers for hope and courage in the face of fear.

At the end of the Psalm, right before we say Kaveh el Ado-nai,
There is an interesting verse about faith.

It says: *Lulei He'emanti* (note that root of "Amen")

Lirot betuv Ado-nai B'erez Hayim, which means:

Had I not had faith in seeing the goodness of G-d in the land of
the

living... (dot, dot, dot) the Psalmist's voice trails off.

It's an incomplete sentence.

Had I not had faith in the ultimate goodness of life... what?

What's the end of the sentence?

It's too unspeakable for the psalmist to mention –

Perhaps if we didn't have faith in the ultimate goodness of life,
then:

We'd just give up hope and resign ourselves to cynicism and
despair,

and that is NEVER EVER an option!

Look at Jewish history.

Our people have survived so much over the millennia,
unfathomable tragedies, losses, traumas, and many reasons to
despair, but after thousands of years, miraculously, we are still
here because we are resilient, we have continued to say Amen,
continued to affirm life, to say *L'chaim*, to keep our hope and
courage and faith, despite everything.

Our anthem is *Hatikva*, "the Hope," because we believe that things
can get better because we help make them better.

(Can I get an Amen to that too?)

This is Jewish faith, and this is the faith we assert particularly on Yom Kippur also, which is a day of profound hope, in which we envision a better version of ourselves.

Year after year, we confess our sins, again and again, and we keep affirming the faith that we can be better.

We acknowledge that we mess up, but we don't despair, we keep saying Amen to life, we affirm our faith in new possibilities.

So, the next time someone speaks of the "Jewish faith," I will not bristle.

I will think: Yes, I am of the Jewish faith!

Not because of dogma or certainty, but because even in these frighteningly turbulent times of existential fear for our Homeland the State of Israel, the world and for our future, I say **Lulei**

He'emanti Lirot betuv Ado-nai B'erez Hayim,

I affirm our faith in the power of goodness and life and the Possibility of Changing what is into What Could Be.

Because Jewish faith, *Emunah*, is:

1. Having hope and courage to move forward in times of uncertainty,
2. Believing that change is possible and that things will get better.
3. Being an active agent of possibility for our Waco Jewish Community.

TOGETHER WE STAND STRONG!!!

Can I get an "Amen"?

Ken Yehi Ratzon, so may it be.

Rabbi Ben-Zion Laxner

Rabbi and Susan would like to extend an invitation to all members to attend a Luncheon on Saturday, July 13, following services, in honor of their wedding anniversary.

July Service Schedule

<u>Friday, July 5</u>		<u>Friday, July 19</u>	
Kabbalat Shabbat	6:00 pm	Kabbalat Shabbat	6:00 pm
Candle Lighting	8:19 pm	Candle Lighting	8:15 pm
<u>Saturday, July 6</u>		<u>Saturday, July 20</u>	
Shacharit	10:00 am	Shacharit	10:00 am
Shabbat Ends	9:19 pm	Shabbat Ends	9:13 pm
<u>Friday, July 12</u>		<u>Friday, July 26</u>	
Kabbalat Shabbat	6:00 pm	Kabbalat Shabbat	6:00 pm
Candle Lighting	8:18 pm	Candle Lighting	8:11 pm
<u>Saturday, July 13</u>		<u>Saturday, July 27</u>	
Shacharit	10:00 am	Shacharit	10:00 am
Shabbat Ends	9:16 pm	Shabbat Ends	9:08 pm



July 1

Henry Hacker

July 13

Jasmine Presser

July 18

Hailee Yip

July 25

Kam Bauer

July 26

Inez Bonneville

July 30

August Pearl
Weidhorn

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY



July 3

**Rabbi & Susan
Lanxner**

July 14

**Craig & Hilary
Weidhorn**

July 28

**Jeff & Lea Levin
Hailee & Stephen
Yip**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ❖ Office will be closed Thursday, July 4.
- ❖ Shannon will be out July 18 and 25, but Rabbi will be here so the office will not be closed.

THANK YOU for your donations in **FEBRUARY!**

Shabbat

Javis Howeth
Judy Hersh
Mr & Mrs George Keller
Susan Raphael

Jeff Levin
Susan Lanxner
Michael Pesses

In Memory Of

Julius Englander
Leonard Englander
Bertha Rosen
Harry Harelík

Killian Michlowitz
Barbara Dankenbring
Dorothy Gulman
Jeff and Lea Levin

Rhua Settle
Joseph Settle

Milton Harelík
Harry Harelík

Refua Shlayma

Judy Hersh
Deborah Hersh

Special Donation

Leonard Englander

YAHREZITS

The following names of dearly departed will be read aloud by the Rabbi preceding the Mourner's Kaddish on Shabbat morning. It is fitting and customary that the nearest of kin be present in the synagogue for the recitation of this special prayer in their memory. Attendance not only honors the departed but also enhances and guarantees that a Minyan is present to recite the Kaddish.

Kaddish will be read on July 5

Sivan 29 Mary Bertha Englander*

Fannie Fogel

Sivan 30 A J Farmer

Morris Novy*

Hilda Ruttenberg*

Abe Wietzman

Tammuz 1 Joshua Nechemiah Gershon

Tammuz 3 Esther Goldie Lubin

Tammuz 4 Lt A F Englander

Tillie Goodman Goldstein

Tammuz 5 Annie Geetah

Gus Holste

Sadie Wolkoff Kaplan*

Tammuz 6

Hyman Fogel

Abe Wizig*

Morris Ben Zoblotsky*

Tammuz 7

Leslie Hoffman*

Tammuz 8

Mary Robinson

Sam Marks*

I Adams*

Dora Kleiman*

Morris Rosenberg*

Mamie Sampson

Tammuz 10

Adolph Beerman*

Isadore Dansky

Naman Lipinsky

Max Miller*

Anna Neuwirth

Tammuz 11

Israel Genecov*

Kaddish will be read on July 12

Tammuz 12 David Harris*
Mrs L Gershowitz
Harry Hoffman

Kaddish will be read on July 19

Tammuz 13 Fannye R Smith*
Tammuz 14 Nathan Neuwirth
Max Siegel*
Tammuz 15 Ben H Green*
Robert Settle
Tammuz 16 Mrs M Adams*
Phillip Koss*
Marie Solovey Wangner
Tammuz 18 Annette Fox
Eugene Gurkoff
Tammuz 19 Isaac Draiman*
Louis Ringold*

Kaddish will be read on July 26

Tammuz 20 Edwin Bernard Dreyfus

Benson Offit
John Perry
Tammuz 23 Claire Seriff
Tammuz 24 Max Israel*
Mrs M Novy*
Morris Rubinsky*
Tammuz 25 Kate Kahan
Tammuz 26 Isadore F Aronson*
Sidney Lynn*