

# FROM THE HAZZAN'S DESK

## Of Lifecycles, New Beginnings and Renewal : *Chadesh Yameinu K'Kedem*

At the end of every Shabbat and Festival Torah service, upon returning the Torah to the ark, we sing a prayer that includes the following passage:

...Ki lekach tov natati lahem

Torati al ta'azovu

Aitz chaim he

Lamachazikim ba

V'tom'echecha meushar

Derachecha darchei noam

V'kol nitevotcha shalom

Hashivenu adoshem

Elecha v'nashuva

*Chadesh yameinu k'kedem*

The passage is italics, *Chadesh yameinu k'kedem*, is traditionally translated as 'Renew our days as of old'. On the surface of things, this sounds contradictory. How can we renew our days, that is, be future directed, whilst referring back to what was, that is, the past? Inherent in this paradox is the crux of our contemporary Jewish experience, relived in every generation by Jews for millennia. What I believe the author of this text is referring to here are the new understandings that come with embracing our '*Aitz chaim he*', Torah as a 'Tree of Life', a living conveyance of lessons about how to get along with each other and ourselves as we traverse life's journey. The stories and lessons of our collective Jewish past as described in the Torah provide insights into our Jewish present, whatever the era, and renew us as a people, as well as individuals.

There are two beautiful and emotional melodies we sing as a congregation when we put the Torah back into the ark. The powerful text combined with the melodies, both of

which are quite plaintive, fix in our memories this message of the meaning of Torah. This is for me one of the most poignant moments of our services and an example of the highest art our Jewish poets and musicians have achieved in the service of prayer and God, the perfect marriage of text and music.

As we begin a new secular year, we are reminded that human experience, like the Torah, is a cyclical one. Not only do seasons change, but the stages of human life, like the seasons and months, have new chapters and changes. In late December, I commemorated the end of the eleven-month *shiva* period for my mother with an unveiling of a gravestone in her memory. It was a sad occasion at the gravesite as family members and close friends gathered in community to share a moment of remembrance of my mother, a true *Eyshet Chayil*. I knew that with both my parents now gone to their eternal rest, I had become a different person and was entering a new phase. My period of reciting *Kaddish* for my mother had come to an end. In late January, I shall mark her first *Yahrzeit*. In this respect, *Chadesh Yameinu K'kedem* has a deeply personal resonance in addition to a communal one. This is the beauty of Torah: we can apply its lessons to both the community and ourselves.

Of course, on a lighter note, there are the ultra-contemporary interpretations of Torah, some with a bit of levity, always welcome during the dark days of winter. I close my column this month with an upbeat contemporary gloss of life lessons from Noah's ark:

## **What I Learned From Noah**

**Everything I need to know, I learned from Noah's Ark...**

**(or 10 Lessons for the secular New Year!)**

ONE: Don't miss the boat.

TWO: Remember that we are all in the same boat.

THREE: Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.

FOUR: Stay fit. When you're 60 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big.

FIVE: Don't listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.

SIX: Build your future on high ground.

SEVEN: For safety's sake, travel in pairs.

EIGHT: Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.

NINE: When you're stressed, float awhile.

TEN: Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.

A happy and healthy (secular) New Year to all!

*Hazzan Dubrow*