



Beth Isaiah Congregation

P.O. Box 1552, Stn. Main Guelph, Ontario N1H 6N9

www.guelphsynagogue.ca • 519.822.8487

Visit us at 47 Surrey Street West

Rabbi's message

Shana Tova

When we wish each other Shana Tova, or Good Year, we think of the Hebrew word shana, or year, and extend greetings for a good year.

But the Hebrew root shin, nun, heh has a few meanings. It comes from the verb le'shanot, to change. It also denotes repetition (as in the name of the fifth book of the Torah, "Mishne Torah") as the word Mishna, the Rabbinic literature that was studied over and over again, and also "lishnot," which means to study.

In other words, "Shana Tova" means a good year, a year of changes, of doing things differently and better. It also means a year of repetition, of relearning all the old lessons that our tradition of truth and wisdom has taught us for many centuries. And and we continue to study these lessons.

What do we mean by a good year? Is it a year of pleasure and success, parties and travelling? All that may suggest a year in which your time is filled with activities, but not necessarily a year of quality. A good year is a year of doing good for others, supporting worthy causes and when our connection to our Jewish community and Israel is strengthened. Having a good year suggests working on our own goodness, and improving our lives as Jews and human beings by respecting each other . . . working together to enhance the lives of all members of our community.

On Rosh Hashana we are required to study and to examine our past year's actions. That's so we don't repeat mistakes, but rather to repeat good deeds and enhance them.

Our sages say: “Hachacham einav brosho” – “The wise man, his eyes are on his head.” What does it mean? After all, all of us have eyes on our head. The answer is that the wise man has a vision. Before he/she acts they can see their effect and consequence. We have to act in our personal life, as well as in our communal life, like the “chacham”.

In “Pirkei Avot,” Ethics of our Fathers, we read that the great sage Rabban Yochana ben Zakai, who witnessed the destruction of the Holy Temple and Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 of the Common Era, did not lose hope. He built a Jewish centre of learning in the city of Yavne in Israel and kept Jewish life alive and flourishing in spite of the destruction and expulsion. Among his disciples he had five very special students. The Mishna brings us their study.

He said to them: Go forth and see which is the right path to which a human being should adhere? Rabbi Eliezer said, “a good eye” (a person should be content with what he has and rejoice in the blessings of others).

Rabbi Yehoshua said, “a good companion” – (true friendship with one’s companion breeds cordial relations with society in general).

Rabbi Yosse said, “a good neighbour.” (Let a man be on good terms with his neighbours and thereby train himself to be kind to all who come in contact with him. As a result he will love mankind and be loved).

Rabbi Shimon said, “one who foresees what will be” (who weighs everything thoughtfully and anticipates the outcome of an action he is about to take).

Rabbi Elazar said, “a good heart.” (The source of all human qualities is a noble heart, which ensures the total integrity of a human being).

May we have the wisdom to emulate their teachings that characterize their personalities.

This year, when you wish Shana Tova or you are greeted with one, think about the real meaning of this greeting: Leshana tova tikatevu. It means may you be inscribed for a good year. Think about the extra “goodness” you can add this year.

When each of us adds at least one more good deed this year our world will be much better. Our lives improve and our community and the world benefit.

We were privileged to see a growth in the goodness in our community this year. There were more committed members who participated in the variety of activities that our shul offers. More new members took an active role in the shul's life. We are happy to see good attendance for our Shabbat and holidays services. We hope more of our community will attend and take an active role in the services. Members read the haftara and led the Shachrit and Musaf services. Our kiddush following the service creates good bonding and ambiance. Hopefully more members will join us and donate to the kiddush fund, celebrating life-cycle occasions such as births, birthdays, weddings, anniversaries and other special occasions.

Let me conclude with the prayer from our liturgy – a prayer from Shabbat morning service, to all those who occupy themselves in making our congregation a place of Beit Tefila, or House of Worship. They also make it a Beit Midrash, or House of Learning and Beit Knesset, House of Assembly, where we assemble for social, cultural and religious events, for joyous and sometimes sad occasions.

“And to all who those who faithfully occupy themselves with the needs of the community may the Holy One, Blessed be He, grant them their reward, remove from them every affliction, keep them in good health and forgive every iniquity. May He bless and prosper their work along with all Israel, and let us say Amen.”

Shana is a unique word. May the new shana be a unique year; one in which there will be both repetition of the old and a change for the better.

May Hashem, the Almighty G-d, grant us a good year; a year of goodness, of good health, a year in which we will enrich our lives through learning of our Jewish heritage and occupy ourselves doing maasim tovim (good deeds).

Techiya and I wish you ktiva va'chatima tova l'altar, l'chayim tovim.

May you be inscribed and sealed soon in the book of good life.