

New Year Message

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THE UNIVERSALITY OF ROSH HASHANA

By Rabbi Ezra Boyarsky

On close examination of the major Jewish holidays, it becomes apparent that each festival carries with it a dual significance -- an historical and an agricultural character -- both aspects reposing in a bedrock of Jewish laws and germane rituals. Rosh Hashana, while also Torah derived, uniquely differs from the others, in that it commemorates no historic event nor is it reminiscent of Israel's agrarian past. Furthermore, Rosh Hashana is not actually restricted to the "Jewish World" but circumscribes all of mankind; it is universal in its embrace and global in its scope.

Rosh Hashana, which according to Jewish tradition marks the anniversary of the creation of the world (Talmud Bavli R.H. 119), provides the Jew with a vastly wider horizon and broader ambience than had he confined himself to the "four cubits" of his own microcosm. The universal character of the Jewish New Year endows him with an "extra territorial" outlook -- a worldliness and a solicitude for the rest of mankind for whose munificence G-d had fashioned this planet.

The notoriously heinous Balaam who was commissioned by the Moabite king, Balak, to curse the Children of Israel but was impelled to bless them instead, had fundamentally erred when he declared: "Lo the people (Israel) shall dwell solitary and nor reckon itself among the nations" (Numbers 23:9). This myopic forecast of the isolationist character of the Jewish people was wantonly utilized, with the passage of time, as a convenient take off for political and religious prejudice against them and become the shibboleth of anti-Semitism.

Jewish social thought and action vigorously countermands this misconceived and misleading characterization. Copious and compelling past and contemporary historical evidence can be adduced as testimony to the contrary. Even a cursory perusal of the thundering and passionate exhortations of the Hebrew prophets will quickly reveal that these great teachers of Israel have not addressed themselves exclusively to domestic issues but have dwelled on those of their neighboring nations.

Grasping upon the social and religious aberrations that had wormed their way into Judean and Israeli societies (when the country was partitioned), the seers of Israel because of their concern and compassion for all of humanity, were wont to prescribe such corrective programs that would redound not only to the welfare of the Jewish people but to the general well-being of all mankind.

This liberal, altruistic attitude, has become in the course of time assimilated into the Jewish psyche and has found its way eventually into the leitmotif of Rosh Hashana.

We find this universalist outlook majestically epitomized in the following passage of the High Holidays' Musaf devotional service: "And therefore, O Lord our G-d, let Your awe be manifest in all Your works, and a reverence fill all that You have created so that all Your creatures may know You and all Mankind bow down to acknowledge You. May all your children

unite in one fellowship to do Your will with a perfect heart."

The world whose 5,736th "birthday" we are about to mark is speedily shrinking -- distance and communicationwise -- due to the galloping advances that are being made in the physical branches of science and in technology. Peoples of diverse race, color and creed from far-flung regions are coming into closer contact more than ever before in the history of modern civilization. As a result of this progress, the bounties of scientific and medical research have become increasingly more accessible to larger and more numerous segments of the world's population.

However, by the same token, we are inescapably becoming more vulnerable to the potential danger of nuclear warfare growing out of the refractory ideological differences sharply dividing the Eastern and Western political alignments.

Therefore when we gather in our synagogues on Rosh Hashana we shall remember to pray (The Day of Remembrance is synonymous with R.H.) not only for ourselves and for the State of Israel but for the entire human race for according to Jewish tradition they too stand in judgement on this day... (Talmud Bavli R.H. 16a).

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by Jack D. Weiler
Chairman, Amer. Jewish Joint Dist. Comm.

Rosh Hashanah is a period of reflection and rededication, the turning of a page in time and a renewal of the spirit. For the Joint Distribution Committee it is a time for reviewing and assessing our work of the year just passed and preparing for the tasks that still lie before

us. Rosh Hashanah is also a time of moral commitment for the future. For more than six decades the Joint Distribution Committee has brought lifesaving aid to over 2 million Jews in 75 countries overseas, sustaining them not only with material aid but also with hope.

In the year ahead the JDC will mobilize its resources to aid over 400,000 Jews overseas, including Israel, the Moslem countries and Eastern and Western Europe; to feed the hungry, care for the aged, educate the children, and to enable the Jewish communities to observe their religious rites without lack or hindrance.

We are thankful that the past year has been relatively peaceful for Israel. We join with fellow Jews everywhere in prayers for a lasting peace in the Holy Land for an uninterrupted period of growth and prosperity.

For those who are still trapped in hostile Arab lands and in Eastern Europe we pray for their safety, their welfare, and their early liberation.

In the name of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who look to the JDC for continued support we send New Year's greetings to the Jews of America and Canada whose generosity through their federation and welfare fund campaigns and through their efforts on behalf of the United Jewish Appeal continue to make our work possible. In behalf of the American Jewish community we extend to our fellow Jews abroad our best wishes for peace, good health, and prosperity in the year ahead.

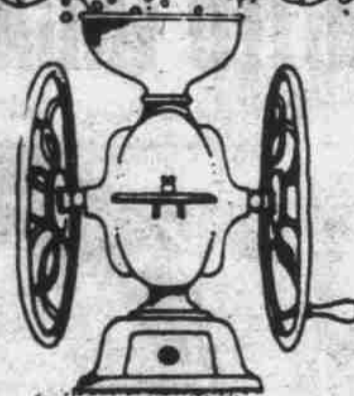
JERUSALEM (WNS) -- All Heider, the 47-year-old deputy head of the Ministry of Education's Arab Education Department, has been named the first Arab to serve as a full member of the Israeli delegation to the United Nations.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

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