

Rosh Hashanah 5770

Rabbi Karen L. Fox

Wilshire Boulevard Temple, First Day Rosh HaShanah, Magnin Sanctuary at 8:30am

September 16, 2009

In this City-- Be an Angel in this Year of Years

Los Angeles looks very different now than in years past. I grew up here, and returned 26 years ago, and this is the first year in those 26, that so many windows reflect open spaces, not retail business or restaurants. On Wilshire Boulevard, new residences sit empty. Up and down Robertson, east and west on Pico- prime locations stand vacant and rental signs clamor for attention. Regular panhandlers open their hands at Olympic and La Cienega, Doheny and Sunset, and Wilshire and Rodeo Drive. This is the year, in which we see people sleeping in their cars on Barrington or carrying a sleeping bag to the park behind Roxbury Drive. The lines at food pantries are long, the wait at emergency rooms longer.

This year of downturn—has affected our congregational community as well. Families have shared challenges of lost jobs, closed business, reduced salaries and foreclosed homes....This downturn is not out there--- ***it is right here.***

I'm reminded of a story:

The inspiring Chasidic rabbi, the Baal Shem Tov interpreted a prayer (the Kedusha) that is the pivot point of our daily service which reads:

“ the angels called to each other, turning to the right and then, turning to the left —saying, recognize the angels to your right and your left.”

The Baal Shem Tov taught, these angels accompany you, every single day. And then he instructed his students, turn to your right and turn to your left, and meet the angels who surround you:

And now, I ask you: at this very moment, turn to **your right**—look across the entire aisle and turn to **your left**—all the way left. Meet these beloved angels that accompany you through life...

You might be wondering....**Jews and Angels?** When I ask, “*do Jews believe in angels?*”, many of you may laugh or even shudder. However, if I ask—“do you **you believe** in angels?” , I may see more nods, more confirming eyes, even a yes or two, even a story that emerges in your memory.

Angels exist in our tradition--- Michael, merciful and forbearing, the commander of the host of angels; Gavriel angel of power, Refael-angel of healing, Ra’amiel- Angel of thunder, Uriel—the angel of light. The stories of Jacob’s dream and the vision of the angels rising from earth to heaven and back to earth have been shared since childhood. Yes, our tradition is filled with angels, and demons, and dybbuks, and even an angel of death. Angels are colorful personalities, said to carry out aspects of God’s plan.

ONE angel is vital in today's Rosh HaShanah Torah reading, the Akedah. Abraham received a direct call from God. "Take your son, your beloved son to Mt. Moriah and offer him up, as a way to come close to Me." Abraham responded directly to God's request. He rushed to gather the donkey, the wood, the firestone, the knife and his son Isaac.

They stood at Mt Moriah and

"Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. The angel called to him from heaven, "**Abraham! Abraham!**" and he answered," *HENAYNI*—Here I am--*HENAYNI*". And the angel continued, "Do not raise your hand against the boy, nor do anything to him. For now I know that you are fully aware of God, since *you* have not withheld your son from me." (Genesis 22)

The Angel called to Abraham twice....First, to gather his attention to a new and different plan. The Angel called to Abraham a second time: to stay the knife.

This unnamed angel rescued Isaac. In an act of Chesed, pure loving kindness, the angel stopped Abraham **to sustain life**, family and people. When the angel cried out, the angel became Abraham's teacher, Abraham's mentor.

The Rosh HaShanah angel acted to preserve life—and now, the Torah calls to us:

Do not leave the Angel only in the Rosh Hashanah Torah...

Become the everyday angel, adding a dimension of Chesed, of loving kindness to the world, the world so in need of repair and restoration.

In this year of years, look at the world through another's eyes and see where your Chesed, your kindness is needed.

A few incredible true angel stories might inspire you today:

Sally and her husband Joe live in a great location in NYC. They are active in their local reform congregation and have traveled to Israel three times. Each time they traveled, they met technology professionals like her husband. They kept their friendship up via holiday cards and occasional emails. Then Sally got a call from Tel Aviv:

Estee, the wife called saying, "Eric has bone cancer and will face months of challenging treatment at Sloan Kettering Hospital. Can you help us find an apartment for a few months?" Sally put down the phone, cried over her friends upcoming challenge and then proposed something to her husband. "I would like to offer our apartment to Eric and Estee as a place to stay, during and after his cancer treatments."

They discussed the implication of this commitment and then they opened their home and their hearts to Eric and Estee for the three months of horrible but healing treatment. Angels, THESE angels appeared and opened *their home* in time of need.

Do you know about the Chicken Lady....

Who is the Chicken Lady? On a Friday morning, in 1971, Clara Hammer, a retired schoolteacher living in Jerusalem, noticed a young girl ahead of her in the butcher shop receiving scraps of bones and thistle. After the girl left, Clara commented: "It's so nice of you to give those scraps to that girl—she must have a

lot of pets to feed.” Replied the butcher: “It’s not for cats and dogs—it’s for her family. At least she can mix the scraps with beans and make a soup for nourishment.” Horrified, Clara immediately ordered the butcher to give the girl two chickens plus a pound of chopped meat, and to put it on her account every week. Most important, the butcher was not to tell the girl who her benefactor was.

Unfortunately, Clara had no budget for this, but she slowly spread the word of the need in the community, and donations trickled in. Now Clara feeds 711 people a week, all of it anonymously, at the same butcher shop. As she hears of new families who cannot afford meat, she adds their name to the list. And Clara, now 92 years old, continues to spread the word, writes thank-yous to every donor, and looks for more ways to spread her angel wings. (Danny Siegel, Mitzvah Heroes)

Most of us don’t have the opportunity to participate in such compelling angel stories but other narratives reveal day to day angels at work:

In June, while out to dinner with my cousins on Ventura Boulevard I saw a burly teenager on skates, putting quarters in the meter, at 7:30 in the evening. I encouraged my cousins to look at the window and wondered out loud, what was he doing? “Don’t know you know”, my cousin shouted, “you have to feed the meter, even after 6pm nowadays”I gulped, rummaged through my purse, grabbed the only three quarters I had and ran to the meter. Luckily, I didn’t need to run. That burly kid on skates had filled the meter for me. He was an angel, with no wings, just skates and an act of kindness to behold.

Our congregant Tali Hanukah, a college student, looked for a summer job and she found **Avodah**, a Chicago program that unites Jews in their twenties to meet the city's grave need for people to people social justice work. For 8 weeks, she rushed to a community pre-school and greeted the 4 year old children as their parents hurried off to work. She made breakfasts, played games, taught songs, comforted those with scuffed knees, and held little hands, reminding them that their mom would be back really soon. And Tali is a different young woman now. Yes, she is returning to college--- to seriously consider her life work as an urban social worker. As Tali responded to the crying need for social service in the inner city Tali became an angel, who will continue to spread her wings.

Some angels do their work quietly and consistently....spreading the love for years and years. For over 25 years, **every Sunday, TM Jean Petersen, Mark Benjamin and Joe Bialik have shelved**, pushed, carted and graciously handed out food packets from our WBT Food Pantry. Do you realize that over 35 Temple volunteers give away 800 bags of food each Sunday morning, yes 52 weeks a year. That is 41,600 packets and in **this year of years**, even more. Blazing heat, holiday weekend or any given Sunday our Temple volunteers extend their reach-- angels who open their hands and their hearts.

In this year of years, *you can step up and become an angel.* It may be a simple gesture--- like saying hello to an elderly person sitting alone on the park bench as you complete your afternoon jog; or by opening the door at the market for the mom with the stroller and the three kids. Every small act of kindness counts—Yes, extend yourself beyond the usual. Imagine, imagine ONE WAY you can become an angel and

make a difference for another human being. Close your eyes, envision the need and create the story; picture the way you will bring CHESED into our aching society.

At Wilshire Boulevard Temple, in the City of the Angels, we individually and collectively are in the ANGEL BUSINESS. We are angels; We facilitate the work of angels; We Model Angels and We create Angels for the generations to come. In this year of years, 5770 -- ***Take the Rosh HaShanah angel out of the Torah and into the narrative of your own life. Become an angel and Spread your wings in deep and caring ways.***

Story:

In this year of years, a dreamer believed that the homeless man at La Cienega and Olympic was actually the Messiah. The dreamer awakened and made his way to the designated place, to the man in the beggar's clothes.

"Are you the Messiah?", he asked.

"I am", the man answered.

The dreamer said: "With so much misery and pain and callousness in the world, between people, and sometimes even in our own homes, what are you waiting for? "

To which the Messiah replied: "With so much misery and pain and callousness in the world, between people, and sometimes even within our own homes, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?"

L'Shana Tova Tikatayvu--- Amen, Amen.

ANGEL OPPORTUNITIES:

Read below or look on our Wilshire Boulevard Temple Tikkun Olam website for a even larger list of Angel Opportunities: Donate blood at Cedar Sinai; sit in the hospital and give warmth and love to a homeless baby who needs holding; bring a full bag of groceries at Yom Kippur; become a Wilshire Boulevard Temple Chaver; Make a soldier smile...send upbeat letters to deployed member of the US Armed services (contact mysoldier.com) ; Protect a national treasure; Sign up for more than 175000 opportunities through the National Park Service (nps.gov/gettinginvolved); Help low income families learn to cook more nutritiously (Contact; Share our strength; strength.org); Spruce up a house (rebuildingtogether.org); Embrace your inner teacher—join other 55 plus folks and tutor struggling elementary students on reading basics (experiencecorps.org or korehla.org; become a court appointed advocate for a child (nationalcasa.org) ; welcome a refugee to America (theirc.org); share your hair (pinkheartfunds.com); look at other Tikkun Olam possibilities on the Wilshire Boulevard Temple website.