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August 31, 2012

## Elul Drash #2

Last week we entered the Hebrew month of Elul, the month of introspection leading up to the High Holy Days. On Shabbat we asked ourselves questions regarding our most meaningful relationships: those pertaining to our friends, our loved ones, ourselves, our environment and our world. That “spiritual check-up” as I called it can be an on-going examination. In fact, I encourage all of us to look at that list of questions (which can be found on the temple website) and attempt to think about and answer just one each day until Rosh Hashanah.

I like to think of the High Holy Days as a multi-day backpacking journey. Before leaving on Day 1, there is a lot of prep work to accomplish. You’ve got to figure out what gear to take and how much of it you actually need. You need to plan out your path on a map. You inform your loved ones of your plans. And most importantly, in the weeks leading up to your trek, you condition yourself by going on shorter hikes, by jogging, by going to the gym and by breaking in your boots. There is a lot of stuff to do before setting out in the wild.

The High Holy Days are really no different than this kind of trip. These few weeks are pretty intense and the more spiritual conditioning we do beforehand, the more meaningful an experience, I think, we will have. Elul is set up as a time for us to do this prep work.

I’d like to share with you a pre-Rosh Hashanah *kavanah* written last year by the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Sir Jonathan Sacks. I hope that these words will propel us to think about the meaning of life and the role Judaism plays in it.

Here is some of what he wrote:

1. Life is short. However much life expectancy has risen, we will not, in one lifetime, be able to achieve everything we might wish to achieve.
2. Life itself, each day, every breath we take, is the gift of God. Life is not something we may take for granted.
3. We are free. Judaism is the religion of the free human being freely responding to the God of freedom.
4. Life is meaningful. We are not mere accidents of matter, generated by a universe that came into being for no reason and will one day, for no reason, cease to be.
5. Life is not easy. Judaism does not see the world through rose-tinted lenses.
6. Life may be hard, but it can still be sweet.

7. Our life is the single greatest work of art we will ever make.

8. We are what we are because of those who came before us.

I am thrilled to be going on this journey with all of you. It won't be a walk in the park, that's for sure. But with a little preparation, it has the potential to be life-changing.