

Rosh Hashanah 5776
The Number 'One'
by Rabbi Arnold Saltzman

Today, we celebrate the birthday of the world. In spiritual and biblical counting devised by the rabbis we are beginning 5776 years since the biblical telling of the Creation. Most Jewish people do not believe that 5776 is the age of the world, and I do not teach that in Religious School. Nevertheless, those years represent a time of God's entrance into history, and hopefully without an exit.

The primary prayer in Judaism is the Sh'ma, and we could add the Amidah, the 18 or 19 prayers said daily and assembled by rabbinic tradition and discourse. The Sh'ma is Torah, while the Amidah is rabbinic. The Sh'ma consists of: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord, is one! In Hebrew the prayer consists of six words: Sh'ma...

What does 'one' mean? That everything is part of God, that there is no other God, that we are one with God. It also implies that we need to be one community in order to be strong. We are required to sing/pray this one prayer twice a day, every day.

Sh'ma means listen, however, it also means 'pay attention' to what I am telling you. 'Adonai is our God' now don't go off somewhere doing something else. 'Adonai is one'.

The 'one' is a reminder of something positive. The prayer does not say God is infinite, although that is what we believe, instead we say 'one', first, primary. Everything emanates from the 'One' - the beginning, and the birthday of the world has great consequences for humanity.

Using that number, I want you, all of us to think of it so that we can begin today, this year with one thing, one mitzvah, one Jewish action or idea to make our lives and year a continuous Jewish experience.

"Rabbi, don't get too Jewish on us!"
I am a rabbi, what do you expect?
Is one Jewish thing a day, too much?

A number of years ago the Jewish Museum put together an exhibit called: 'Too Jewish?'

The idea behind this exhibit was to challenge us as to whether we are in our comfort zone with regard to Judaism: For example - putting a menorah in the window on Hanukkah. Do we worry about the consequences or do we observe the holiday?

Are we over worried about this type of thing, like someone seeing us with a kippah on our heads, or having to explain, or over-explain what it is we believe or do in Temple? Too Jewish? Love Israel - Too Jewish?

Years ago, when our sons, Josh and Michael, were students at Duke Ellington School for the Arts, I think it was Josh who said he felt like an ambassador from the Jewish Community. Michael, who was a Theater major, found himself playing both an 'angry rabbi' and Rev. Al Sharpton. To prepare for the show, 'Fires in the Mirror', Carol and I brought a Sabbath dinner to the class during the time of rehearsal and explained how to make the Sabbath. The class also came to Friday evening services, and followed the service well, making comments during the discussion of the biblical and prophetic readings. They knew their books of the bible.

Are you more respected if you are who you are? Or are you less respected for your beliefs if everyone knows that you are Jewish?

If we can agree that these are difficult questions, and for many the circumstance they are in may dictate in what way they celebrate being Jewish: Publicly or Privately, or both. The great rabbi, Maimonides, even allowed conversion under duress, if it meant that your life was in danger, rather than Martyrdom. He was not too popular with the other rabbis of his time.

So here are some of the things which make Jewish identity and prayer, which you can consider doing without becoming a martyr this year:

1. The Sh'ma - knowing that you and millions of others are reciting that basic statement of faith every day is an affirmation of your faith and community. It takes about 10 seconds 2X a day.
2. HaMotzee Lechem Min Ha'aretz - thanking God for the food we eat, for being partners in the process of the natural growth and water cycle, to

the planting, nurturing and harvesting, followed by the creative use of what grows into what we enjoy on our tables. **This is the idea of being grateful.**

3. Tzedakah - a pushke, a piggy bank, to remind us every day of the needs of others: Food Banks, Shelters, Wounded Warriors, Jewish Federation which supports the Hebrew Home with 30% non-Jewish residents,
4. Commit to attending at least one service and gather with the community. How can we have a community without you?
Will you be here when you need us if you keep your distance all year?
5. Recite the full kiddush or at least Borei P'ri Hagafen - raise the cup of wine to toast the holiness of life! Lchayim!
6. Light candles or buy electronic ones, or have a picture of them on your wall.
7. Make a Jewish delicacy from a recipe - Mazah Ball Soup, Kugel - **and invite the rabbi to try it!**
8. Read an article about Israel - It keeps us very busy!
9. Subscribe to a Jewish newspaper Washington Jewish Week, or online - Ha'aretz
10. Support an organization in Israel: JNF, Table to Table which harvests food for kitchens which provide one hot meal a day for 20% of all Israelis. Hagar - which has nursery schools where Israeli Jews and Arabs go to school together.
11. Buy Jewish Religious symbols for your home: A mezuzah, frame your ketubah, a beautiful new menorah, a framed quote in Hebrew and English calligraphy, photos of beautiful locations in Israel, not just the Temple mount.
12. Read a Jewish Novel or story -
13. Study some Jewish Theology: Basic Judaism by Milton Steinberg, A.J. Heschel, Mordechai Kaplan
14. Read history: by Simon Schama, Elie Wiesel, **Martin Gilbert**
15. Go to a concert of Jewish Music or an Art exhibit:
16. Visit the Holocaust Museum, the US Holocaust Mem. Museum, Yad Vashem in Israel...
17. Remember that we are funny - its a survival technique!
18. Research your family - begin a genealogy chart

DO ONE JEWISH THING A DAY AND MAKE THIS A MEMORABLE YEAR OF GROWTH -

Judaism has so much to offer - including finding out what your name means or who your ancestors were, and where they are from. Finally know where the Pale of Settlement was. Talk to a rabbi, or study with one!

In our world which has so much that is negative, find out what makes us positive:

Study Hebrew Language

Know what these words mean: Do you know?

Klutz

Kuggle

Knish

What's a Jewish Charity? All of them!

God is one and we must find a way, the way to be one with our God and with Judaism. One Jewish day at a time, Tishre 1, 5776 - that is today, we begin that journey.

May we all affirm our religious and cultural heritage through our daily doing something Jewish. In doing this, it will bring us closer to understanding the meaning of 'One' in our statement of faith, the Sh'ma, and it will bring us closer to being a united Jewish community that can respond to our prayers with Amen. So be it!

Shana Tova!