

Elizabeth Frederick Rosh HaShana AM 2017/5777

A person's spiritual journey lasts a lifetime. When creating a family and raising children the questions of God are no longer just a personal endeavor; rather spirituality molds itself into the traditions that a family reflects on and celebrates.

I have always been very spiritual and my journey began like any other child, following their parents. I was introduced to liberal Christian traditions as adhered to in a United Methodist sect; welcoming everyone to God's table and encouraging learning and acceptance of other religions, cultures and traditions in the eternal hope that we can all find a commonality among our soul searching. As a child, I loved seeing the family that I went to services with, singing music of praise from my heart and engaging in a community that welcomed and accepted everyone that walked through the door.

As an adult, I expanded my desire to learn about other religions and the origin of God. I took so many spiritual and ethics classes in college I found myself with enough credits for a second major in Philosophy. However, my soul searching was nowhere near whole. I made efforts to attend different churches and meet new people; always curious about what moved their hearts to that place of worship. For most, the answers were always the same, family, children and tradition.

Throughout my studies I craved to learn more about Judaism but found it to be like a jewel that required more than just mere study or observance to understand. Judaic faith required being taken in by a family and wearing it like a prized piece of jewelry to feel the depths of spiritual origin. I attended an interfaith service for Thanksgiving and felt my daughter move for the first time when her Zaide (Jon Gottlieb) in Chaverim B'Shirim welcomed everyone in song. It was at that moment I knew my family had chosen the faith that they wanted to embrace and the traditions that should be set. I began to attend Shabbat services more regularly and connected with the beauty of the sung prayers, dedicated values and traditions that empowered a family and community. I saw the traditions that I shared with my childhood family embodied and enriched within attending Shabbat followed by an Oneg that connected everyone thanking God for the blessings we are given.

The struggles I learned faced by Jewish faith speak of the dangers of shunning the origin of God. To try and forget the history of people and to vanquish the evil capabilities of humanity through God's forgiveness diminishes each soul's responsibility to be a light on the world. In my heart, I want my family to take on the blessings and lessons of God and our ancestors from the beginning. Chanting Torah has shown itself to be God's lessons to humanity. It is the Tree of Life giving my family a foundation to study and grow. I want my children to know the traditions that we hold fast to and regardless of their spiritual journey as an adult know the warmth of a Jewish home; for it encompasses the values that I have gradually learned through my own spiritual path.

God can become lost when not the forefront of study and the embodiment of action. As a family worshipping together we create closeness in our faith that can surpass struggle together guided by our hearts, which are filled by the lessons of Torah. We are all a part of each other and peace can be found in acceptance of differences and intolerance for injustice; ideals that are consistently reflected in prayers. We are not forgiven by blind faith or even repentance but redeemed by how we treat one another and preserve the gifts of God. The festivals and holidays celebrated, the traditions that such occasions invite reinforce those lessons and give way to embodying God's warmth within ourselves. It is important to have a sense of solidarity in our faith, especially amidst so much world conflict and struggle. I pray for our children to embody these lessons through their actions and can only hope to reflect the same model of being.

Remembering the history of our ancestors and honoring the traditions of faith allow learning from past mistakes and triumphs. Keeping these lessons within our hearts give us the power to surpass struggles that life inevitably brings and remember the dangers of letting evils reign. Israel is more than just a parcel of land that countries divided up to protect those who were so ruthlessly prosecuted, it is the heart of humanity trying to rectify goodness and the acceptance of God. It should be held close to our hearts because it is a reminder of sought after peace and protection. No one is safe from unreasonable attacks on faith because hate bleeds into everything that could be seen as good; we must all remember to protect and support humanities hope for peace and belief in God. There is no rhyme or reasons to evil but there is a great power in actions based on hope and faith fuelled by God's lessons.

During the temple's traditional Passover Seder I heard a poem that I feel embodied my feelings about Judaism and after repeating it as it was multiple times I molded it into my own heart s reflection.

*I am a Jew because God is the light of the world
I am a Jew because the world is God's gift
I am a Jew because my actions must protect such a gift
I am a Jew because Torah is God's guide
I am a Jew because I hold fast to its' lessons
I am a Jew because I love to sing our prayers
I am a Jew because I remember the evils of darkness
I am a Jew because I speak and act against injustice
I am a Jew because I strive to help those in need
I am a Jew because our children will learn these lessons
I am a Jew because my family will always keep God in their heart
I am a Jew because I reflect God's light*