

**Rosh Hashanah FAM 5772 Rabbi Karen L. Fox
Wilshire Boulevard Temple,
Family Friendly Service First Day
RH, Wiltern: Sept 25, 2011**

Letting Go

When my husband Mickey and I vacation we like to kayak. This summer we were in Great Barrington, Mass. and the Housatonic River was wide and full. As we settled into the kayak the guide asked: "Are you ready for the ride of your life? You know, the river doesn't stop!! Are you ready for the ride? Is that lifejacket tight enough? Do you have sunscreen, bug repellent, water?" As I looked at the speed of the river and the bend beyond which I couldn't see, I wasn't sure I was ready. My heart raced a mile a minute and yet, we pushed off!

An Israeli man whose daughter was badly burned in a school bus bombing was quoted as saying: "There are worse things than dying and one of them is to live in fear every hour of every day of your life. We will not live in fear! ." (Kushner, Conquering Fear.) We live in a world that has seen unparalleled natural disasters, serious economic downfall, and political strife. Yet, we let go of fears every time we step out on the stage, select a school, drop a child off at college, apply for the next job, or decide to marry. There are no guarantees in our future, fear or no fear-- we have no choice but to move forward.

We **gain inspiration for letting go of fears** from our Rosh HaShanah Torah portion, the Akeydat Yitzhak, (the Binding of Issac). God demands: “Abraham, Take your son, the one you love, Isaac to the top of Mt Moriah and bring him close to me; bring him close to me, in a special way, in a spot that I will show you”(Genesis, Parashat Vaeyra). Before the sun rose, father and son saddled the donkey, prepared the food and the wood, and left home. After walking three days in the desert, with the sweat dripping off their backs, Abraham pointed to Mt Moriah. The fears kept Abraham and Isaac silent those three days, each anticipating what might be in the future. They worried: What might occur on that mountaintop? They each imagined frightening outcomes. So, they prayed: ***God give me courage to stand strong to the unknown.***

They felt God’s presence, heard God’s voice, saw God’s signs and wonders. They took a Spiritual Giant Step and trusted that they would be ready—ready for anything and everything.

How do we living here in Los Angeles in the 21st century overcome our fears?

Step One: **Prepare**. There are moments in life when preparation is so important. For example, a Bar or Bat Mitzvah student can prepare for most of the experience —by learning the letters and

words, by hearing the chant, by studying the *parasha* and examining it with parents and teachers and rabbis. One of our own Bat Mitzvah students, Gabrielle told me that her bat mitzvah day felt like *diving off the high dive, and it was fun!* Adults can think of it this way: we see a doctor, she describes the ailment, we research the internet like crazy, seek advise from family and friends, look for all the other paths to a cure, but finally we put ourselves in another human being's trained hands, a surgeon's hands, and God's hands. We have no choice but to let go and leap.

How do we overcome fear?

Step Two: Learn from our tradition which teaches us how to live.

We hear phrase "***Al Tifchad..Don't be Afraid***" 365 times in the Bible, perhaps because we need to be reminded every single day..."***Al Tifchad...Don't be Afraid.***" Say it after me "***Al Tifchad, Al Tifchad***".

In Genesis God shouts "***Al Tifchad***" when Abraham left home to a new and different land, and when Issac received his blessing in the dark of night; God shouted ***Al Tifchad*** when Moses crossed the Red Sea and traversed into the unknown wilds of the desert (in Exodus) and when the Israelite people approached a powerful enemy (in Numbers). God called--- "***Al Tifchad***---Don't be afraid

because I am with you, I'll be there on your way, delivering strength and courage, guidance and comfort." Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah had the courage to speak truth to power and needed similar reassurances from God. "And where does the psalmist get his strength to stand against enemies?"(asks Rabbi Harold Kushner). "From God...not in a God who protects against all bad things but a God who stands with him in times of trouble and danger, never having to face those situations alone." Our Torah insists: ***Al Tifchad*** -Release fear because God is with us!

How do we let go of paralyzing fears?

How? Some people like to talk about the fear, write about the fear, even naming it is a big relief.. Others rely on friends, asking how they have come through their fears. Look at a situation from a different viewpoint, take a new perspective and perhaps that will bring strength to approach a journey without fear. Stop thinking about unpleasant outcomes of difficult situations. Don't listen to the news after 6pm; put a nightlight in the bedroom and pray for courage.

We Learn from others:

One of our WBT congregants had been an independent entrepreneur for over 25 years when his business went under this year. For the first time since the 1980s, he interviewed for positions

with technology firms. He released the fear of working for someone else. With that openness, he will find a new position to care for himself and his family.

One of my friends' children, Rachel Firestone, broke off the college and career path to try something risky and so fulfilling. She decided to volunteer in India, teaching orphaned homeless children and making a difference with every action she takes.

When we discard the **fear** of only doing the right thing, getting into the only possible school, marrying the perfect husband, racing to success, we free ourselves of old ideas that were woven into the fabric of cultural life that are no more; we should be married by 25, children by 32, grandparents by 60— now, we let go of all that. Be flexible, look for new paths and let go of fears of what might be.

We live in a world pulsing with change. This year we survived economic downturn, the Mideast strikes, the hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis and nuclear meltdowns. We feel the earth shake, we sense global anxiety. As we enter this New Year, with friends and families, our tradition and our Creator, together We pray: **God give me the courage to stand strong to the unknown!**

In a few moments we will hear the first Shofar blasts of the

New Year. They begin with a long straight blast—that's the path we hope for each year—no interruptions, no gaps, no unexpected turns, no sudden stops. Yet the shofar sounds continue with *shvarim and teruah*- a series of short staccato blasts...broken, fragmented notes. Life as we have it , with curve balls and drops and stops....The Shofar blasts end with one long solid straight note—providing the courage to leap forward into this New Year 5772.

Lshana Tova...Amen Amen

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Dedication:

This sermon is dedicated to my father and what I learned at the very end of his life. When my dad died, the doctor asked are you ready for the journey? He asked my father, he asked me his daughter, he asked my husband Mickey....."because once you steer on this river" he said, " this river called life, you don't turn back, physically or spiritually. You cry, you learn, you trust, you hope, you have faith that even if you don't like the end of the ride, you will be ok...and still able to trust and to believe." My father, Dave Fox, David ben Avrum vRyvka, let go of fear many many times and took leaps of faith....for the sake of life, hope, family and freedom and future. Zichrono L'vracha.