

## A MESSAGE FROM RABBI DOUG HEIFETZ

Dear Friends,

As I write this letter, I feel a sense of joyous expectation rise within me, and also a bit of trepidation.

Why the joyous expectation? I'm writing in preparation for our High Holy Days at Beit Tikvah. We'll soon celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the start of the new Jewish year of 5785. We'll greet one another with soulful good wishes.

We will hear the sound of the *shofar* - the ram's horn - which calls us to the best version of ourselves. It calls us to live as freely, fully, fruitfully and joyously as possible in the year ahead. The days that follow Rosh Hashanah, through Yom Kippur, continue these happy themes, albeit with deepening inward intensity.

Why do I also feel a bit of trepidation? A couple of reasons come to mind. First, the holidays aren't only joyous, they call us to learn from our successes and our mistakes, to stretch, and to grow. This most serious undertaking challenges each of us alike.

The state of the world around us also gives me pause and worry. Democracy is under attack in our country and much of the world. Racism, sexism, homophobia, bigotry and poverty continue to threaten far too many of us. Jews in Israel last year faced a heinous violent attack. A terrible war between Israel and Hamas now rages on, with horrible casualties for both sides and devastating consequences for the Palestinians and for all in the region.

We are truly living in troubled times. One of our central holiday prayers, though, the *U'netaneh Tokef*, beautifully combines the seriousness of our situation with the celebratory goals of the holidays. To paraphrase the prayer slightly, "Our efforts at growth, our purposeful reflection, and our acts of kindness lessen whatever hardships fate may bring." In other words, we celebrate not in spite of the troubles in our lives and our society, but rather because our purposeful celebration, our deep reflection and our earnest efforts to grow lift us up, and bring measures of healing to our community and our troubled world.

I look forward to sharing the High Holy Days and the rest of the year with you.

L'shanah tovah - best wishes for a sweet new year of 5785,

Rabbi Doug Heifetz