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## September 2004

The following excerpts from the Lamp are available for your review:

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### From the Desk of Rabbi David E. Fass *Sermon Themes: Jewish Spirituality*

Many people have come to find coldly rational religiosity less than satisfying. Spirituality – a more direct connection with God and a more profound personal religious experience – has become more and more important to more and more people. That the adult education course I taught on Jewish Mysticism drew the greatest response of anything taught all year is an indication that this is indeed the case.

This year's sermons attempt to respond to this growing interest in spirituality, mysticism and Kabbalah, not just in terms of theory, but in practice as well.

If you'd like a copy of the sermons, please contact the Temple office or download them from the Temple website: [www.templebethsholom.info](http://www.templebethsholom.info). They will be published on the website subsequent to the High Holy Days.

*Rosh Hashanah Eve —*

#### **Spiritual Work: Meditation**

The path to spirituality in Jewish tradition as well as in others, is meditation. To “do” Kabbalah is to begin with the practice of meditation. We will try to experience some guided meditation as well as learn some of what the Jewish mystical tradition teaches about this central spiritual discipline.

*Rosh Hashanah Morning —*

#### **Spirituality: One With Everything**

Spirituality – so many of us use the word but are unclear about what it really means. We will seek a clearer understanding by exploring the concept of spirituality itself and of the

main ideas associated with it.

*Second Morning of Rosh Hashanah —*

### **The Spirit of Good and Evil**

Are good and evil powerful forces loose in our universe? Are terrorism and tyranny immutable aspects of the world? Jewish mysticism reads the Torah through a unique lens that tries to explain the more difficult aspects of our experience. We will look at some of those explanations through the eyes of our mystical tradition.

*Yom Kippur Eve —*

### **Kabbalah, Madonna, and Me (and you)**

What's with Kabbalah anyway? Why do rock stars and other members of the glitterati seek out such esoteric religious disciplines? How does Jewish mysticism fit into spirituality in general? We will explore the specific forms of Jewish mysticism that emerge from the study of the kabbalistic writings and from the examples of some of its adepts.

*Yom Kippur Morning —*

### **Practical Mysticism: Fixing a Broken World**

By means of a discussion of my recent trip to Cuba I hope to demonstrate that the goal of Jewish spirituality not sitting alone in quiet contemplation. It is of little use unless it prepares us and inspires us to take what we have learned into the concrete world around us.

*Yizkor —*

### **Eldering**

We do almost anything to be young. But the passage of time will not be denied. We will explore a spiritual approach to growing older, something that happens to everyone, every day. Filling our days with meaning and cherishing the memory of those who have completed their allotted years is what we will explore together.

***From our house to yours, Marian and I and our whole family wish each and every one of you and all your loved ones, a New Year of health and blessing, peace and prosperity, blessing and love. May this year see a true and lasting peace in the Middle East, and among our people as well.***

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## **Cantor's Notes**

There are two beginnings of the Jewish calendar year, Nissan and Tishri, reflecting the dual nature of the Jewish calendar, lunar and solar, respectively. Nissan is the month of the Exodus from Egypt and Tishri is the month of the Creation. While Nissan is declared in the Bible to be the first month of the year, Tishri has come to be regarded as the beginning of the civil year, for this was the month of Creation. It was in this month that the jubilee year commenced. Slaves were freed and all property was restored to its original owners. The concept of the New Year as "Yom Hadin" or "the Day of Judgment," when all mankind is judged by its Creator and the fate of each individual finds his place in the Book of Life, is of rabbinic origin, based upon the following verses: "Blow the horn at the new moon, At the full moon of our feast-day. For it is a statute of Israel, A (day of) judgment of the God of Jacob.

"Everything goes after the beginning." This statement of medieval sages contains hidden depth. Rosh Hashanah presents us with a special opportunity to start fresh as we set our sights on fulfilling our unique mission. The Jewish year is an organic entity. Its conception takes place on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. That is why we are so extremely careful about trying to live correctly on Rosh Hashana and the subsequent

days. Our sages taught that the way one begins the year will determine how the rest of the year reveals itself. The Rambam, one of the leading medieval sages, states that on Rosh Hashana the righteous are sealed for life immediately, the evil are sealed for the opposite immediately, and those who are intermediate, neither righteous nor evil, hang in the balance until Yom Kippur. The Rambam says that these are people whose mitzvot (good deeds) exactly equal their aveirot (sins). (Not necessarily in number, quality counts.) Rambam goes on to say that most people are in this third category that is exactly balanced between good and bad. What is meant is that most people are trees planted midway between good and bad soil -- available for good and positive actions when the opportunity arises, when inspiration occurs, but unfortunately, available for selfishness and negativity when tempted.

Rosh Hashanah is a time for change. While it represents the end of one year, it also signals the beginning of a new one. Rosh Hashanah is a time for introspection. It is a time when we must examine our lives and make necessary improvements, consciously choosing a positive direction, setting a spiritual goal and beginning movement in its direction. Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment, has arrived. It is an awesome day. In the Unetane Tokef ("We will celebrate the holiness of this awesome day"), one of the day's most important prayers that discusses the themes of this Day of Judgment, we say "kee hu nora v'ayom - for it is awesome and frightening." Even the angels tremble as the Eternal opens the book of remembrance for each of us and decides our fate. Unetane Tokef concludes with the well-known phrase, "But penitence, prayer and charity avert the evil decree."

Leshanah Tovah Tikatev Vetihatem , May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year.

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