

**“TO EVERYONE A SEASON”**  
**Part One**

**“THE LAST OF SUMMER”**  
**A Sermon for the Eve of Rosh HaShanah**  
**5772**  
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My dear friends and gentle hearts,

On this Rosh HaShanah Eve, accept all my love and prayers for each and every one of you at this High Holy Day Season. We speak and think of **seasons** in so many ways, don't we? As long as there have been poets, artists, musicians and philosophers, we humans have sought to capture the essence of nature's four seasons: Summer, Autumn, Winter, and Spring.

Our own human life span is conventionally described as a progression from the spring of youth to the winter of our advanced years.

It **is**, of course, undeniable that these seasons of nature exert a powerful influence over our Jewish calendar. Our holy days and festivals parallel the harvest moons of fall, spring and summer.

Even the major prayer of the Siddur called The Shmonah-Esrei HaT'filah – the prayer – contains a seasonal insert for either rain or dew upon the crops, acknowledging God as the Architect of the Seasons – the Meteorologist of all Meteorologists.

The very word season – z'man – is repeated hundreds of times in our sacred Scripture, often ordaining sacred remembrances and observances.

Most famously, of course, it was the purported author of the Book of Ecclesiastes, a fellow known by the name of Kohellet, who, in his third chapter exclaims:

“For everything there is a season,  
and a time for every purpose  
under heaven; . . .”

I intend to take our consideration of the **seasons** of the year in quite another direction changing but one word with Kohellet's generous permission:

“To every **one** (rather than to every thing)  
there is a season.”

I want us to think about this reality. Here's the difference.

We do not merely pass from winter to spring, or from spring to summer. The seasons of the year are readily interpretable paralleling and informing many of the moods, the melodies and the mannerisms by which you and I live our lives.

Let me show you what I mean on this Rosh HaShanah Eve in "The Last of Summer."

Yes, we have come together this sacred evening entering our sanctuary in the Jewish Year 5771. Linger here in prayer and contemplation, we will soon emerge to embrace a newly proclaimed 5772. So it is with the season of summer.

We hope it never ends but of course, it does. But unlike the other three seasons, we hardly notice summer's progression. It's a cliché is it not? The summer has gone so quickly. I had so much I wanted to do. Where has it gone? Time in the summer does not so much end as it pools and collects, and we wonder where did it go. Every season has its purpose and, my dear friends, the summer bids us be aware that though it seems endless, time passes.

One of the spiritual lessons summer imparts is to allow time to collect so that we use its days; halting in our headlong rush in order to really see what lies around us. Yes, summer demands that we acknowledge, just as does this sacred evening, that the days matter and they do not last forever.

My favorite verse from Psalms makes the case so well, and it is apt for this Rosh HaShanah Eve; Psalm 90, verse 12 instructs us:

"Teach us to number our days that  
we may get us a heart of wisdom."

Now how shall we get that heart of wisdom? How does one live one's life with larger vision and perspective? A good question to ponder at "The Last of Summer" on this Rosh HaShanah Eve.

In one of his books, Bill Moyers recollects a speech he heard many years ago in which the speaker took his text from James Thurber's short story, *The Shore and the Sea*. Thurber tells of the lemmings,

Those strange little rodents of the Nordic countries  
who are accused of suicidal propensities that  
periodically they stampede by the thousands  
into the sea. The mass frenzy begins when,  
viewing the sunset on the ocean,  
a single excited lemming starts the exodus by crying  
“Fire!” and running toward the sea.

“The world is coming to an end,” he shouts.  
And as the hurrying hundreds turn to thousands  
the reasons for their headlong flight increase by  
leaps and bounds . . . Others begin to cry out . . .  
the panic increases, the rumors multiply and  
pandemonium prevails as the lemmings by the  
thousands leap into the sea and disappear  
beneath the waves, . . .

An old, scholarly lemming watches all of the futile  
self-destruction of the mob, tears up all that  
he's written about the species, and starts  
all over again. The moral: All (people)  
should strive to learn before we die,  
what we are running **from, and to, and why?**

Doesn't it seem to you that people who can answer those three questions with integrity and clarity: What are you running FROM? TO? and WHY? are probably those who stand a better than average chance of getting for themselves a heart of wisdom?

## **I. From What Are You Running?**

Like those lemmings, no doubt sometimes we run from our imagined fears. We all do that! The world in which we live offers abundant reasons for fear and often an overwhelming sense of looming danger, economic ruin, terrorism, crime and inescapable vulnerability. From what else, though, might a person run?

Perhaps, I think somewhere along the human journey, we run away from our aging. At some point we realize, “hey, I’m closer to the end than to the beginning.”

If you have been “Keeping Up With The Kardashians,” you already know that in the upcoming season Kris Jenner has already booked a plastic surgeon, panic stricken that she “is aging by the minute.” Prior to her daughter Kim’s wedding, the evidence of the years simply must be erased. Some of us run away from our aging – others with greater vision embrace it realizing that, ultimately, we earn the faces we wear. And really, what’s the alternative?

So what else scares you regardless of age? How about failure? Are you afraid to fail. Have you ever been afraid to fail? We run away from the risk of failure, but when we do we also miss out on the best of the game.

How many of you are golfers? Raise your hands. Do you know how many muscular motions are involved in a single golf swing? One hundred and 28! And it doesn’t matter whether the swing is good or bad: 128 muscles are on the move!

Now, you can get 90% of those muscular performances exactly perfect, and still have 12 or thirteen completely and awfully incorrect. And a reasonable question might be this: Why try to perfect something so utterly imperfect in this mortal world?

Wasn’t it Winston Churchill who suggested that “Golf is a good walk spoiled.”?

Well an answer might be just this. We try to perfect the golf swing because it’s fun, it’s fascinating, it’s frustrating – but we fail in good company! And then the thought may just occur:

Could it be, I wonder,  
that I am not so crucial  
to the world after all?  
Perhaps I need to slow down  
and take a better look at the distant horizon.  
From what am I running?

Well, we ought to run away from inordinate and counterproductive fears, futile, and even imaginary threats, as well as, over our anxiety over our aging, and our paralyzing fear of failure and accept the fact that this **is** Life!

I don't have to be the best player on the field, or on the court, or in the gym, or on the golf course, or in the pool, or whatever, in order to think well of myself.

I'm out there and that's great. There is a benefit to plain, simple, playfulness. Keep the inner child alive and entertained!

## **II. To What Are You Running?**

Yet, at the "Late Summer Season", when gifted with some degree of time for meditation, we ought to ask ourselves, as James Thurber would recommend.

On this Rosh HaShanah Eve: TO WHAT SHALL I RUN? in order to get myself a heart of wisdom?

I hope that you will not be surprised that I have come this holy evening with a recommendation: RUN TO HOPE.

Listen to these words of David Rokeach who exalts:

"Glory to those who hope!  
For the future is theirs;  
Those who stand unflinching against the mountain  
Shall gain its summit."

"The Last of Summer" is the crucial time for you to refill your batteries of hope. We are not unique in facing daunting societal challenges and baffling issues of direction. So, yes we are going to need all the hope we can get. Run to embrace hope in your life. Yehuda Ha-Levi has taught us:

"To be a Jew means to be one of the – asirey tikvah –  
one of the prisoners of hope!"

And,

The great Jewish theologian and philosopher of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel reminds us:

"We are what we are by where we come from.  
We achieve what we do by what we hope for."

When threats threaten. To what do we run? We run to hope and embrace it all the more.

You know, according to ancient Jewish custom, the ceremony of K'riah that is the cutting of one's garment or a symbolic ribbon when our dearest on earth have died, is always performed while we are standing upright.

This is designed to teach us to meet all sorrows standing with resolute courage. The future may be dark, uncertain and veiled from the eye – but not the manner in which you and I are to meet it. Writes former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Joseph Hertz:

“To rail against life;  
to rebel against a destiny that has cast  
our lines in unpleasant places, is of little avail.  
We cannot lay down terms to life.  
Life must be accepted on its own terms.”

### **III. AND WHY?**

Remember how Mr Thurber ended his story advising us:

“. . . we should strive to learn before we die  
what we are running from, and to, and why?”

Let's take a look at that 3<sup>rd</sup> part: “Why.” Why do we run from and why do we run to? Well, I would suggest – in order to gain “a heart of wisdom”, as the Psalmist urges, or put it in the colloquial, in order for us to Grow Up. That's it! To be a mensch!

A sad fact: It is absolutely possible to live a long life and to witness a whole lot of years, but still fail to Grow Up! Grown ups are people who have learned how to walk gently in life; they're people who come to accept their own weaknesses, as well as the foibles in others. They have learned how to be kind. They are not strangers to forgiveness.

Many years ago, there was a woman who, upon entering a famed Boston department store, and she set off all sort of bells and buzzers upon her entering the doors. A crowd gathered as the department store officials announced over the PA system – “**We Have A Winner!**” They proceeded to shower this woman with an assortment of free appliances and even a cruise to Hawaii, and she couldn’t help screaming with joy.

The television stations of Boston covered the entire celebration and in the midst of it all, a reporter managed to get close enough to ask her, “By the way, what had you come to buy?”

“Buy”, she said, “I wasn’t going to buy anything.  
I was on my way to the complaint department.”

Our larger world has been made so harsh by the unprecedented and seemingly unsolvable challenges we face in this second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Perhaps that is what has bred such a mean-spiritedness, a coarseness, an atmosphere of wide spread incivility.

It has also, when truth be told, affected our own personal relationships which have too often been crippled from what William James called our “torn-apartness.”

We are so fast to tell everyone else how to live and just what to do.

- We are so quick to judge in our relationships
- So quick to instruct others how they should live and what to do
- So ready to come back with a sharp retort in our conversations – public and private.

But people who want to know how to Grow Up often attempt to open their eyes to a deeper understanding beyond the bubble of their own preoccupations and self-interest.

The subject of a recent Washington Forum was titled: “Making Marriage Work.” The featured speakers were two people many of us know very well, Cokie and Steve Roberts. Their emphasis was upon how one nurtures and keeps a marriage going.

As usual Cokie spoke with eloquence and wisdom, but there came a point in the discussion when Steve Roberts captivated his audience. He suddenly commented as follows:

“I think candor is vastly overvalued.  
The person who says,  
‘I just have to tell you what I think’,  
really means ‘I am going to be hurtful  
and selfish’.”

(Steve Roberts went on to note)

“The success of a marriage  
is measured by the number of tooth holes  
in the tongues of the couple that they have bitten  
to keep them from saying the wrong thing.  
A certain amount of humility is useful.”

And surely this humility is useful in most other important relationships.

Well my dear friends, “The Heart of Wisdom” depends upon our knowing before we die what we’re running from, and to, and why. And the answer to the “why” is to finally Grow Up!

For God’s sake let us grow up and for our sake too!

Let me close with this timeless story. It comes to us from antiquity, but deserves to be taken and remembered in the New Year ahead. But I must alert you for it packs a wallop of emotion and some sense of self accusation which will need no further explanation on my part. Listen:

A disciple asked a Sage:  
Where shall I look for enlightenment?  
“Here,” the wise one said.  
“When will it happen?” the disciple asked.  
“It is happening right now,” the wise one answered  
“Then why don’t I experience it?”  
“Because you don’t look.”  
“What should I look for?”  
“Nothing. Just look.”  
“Look at what?”  
“At anything your eyes light on.”  
“But must I look in a special way?”  
“No, the ordinary will do.”

“But don’t I always look in the ordinary way?”

“No, you don’t.”

“But why ever not?”

“Because to look, you must be here. And you are mostly somewhere else.”

Husbands, wives, Parents – children, Brothers – sisters, Uncles, Aunts,  
Grandparents and grandchildren, In-laws and Out-laws – Friend to Friends – old  
acquaintances and new acquaintances –

Let’s be “here” in **this** New Year! And perhaps we’ll gain us that heart of  
wisdom!

Amen!