

*Shanah Tovah.* Happy New Year. It is so wonderful to come together once again as a community at this time of the year; to see so many of us gathered here for Rosh Hashanah.

There once was a young Jewish couple who suffered great persecution in the country where they lived. They never knew what it meant to feel secure because they were Jewish. They came to America, they had a son. They told him, “You are chosen for great things. Strive for success. Get the best education. Then as a Jew, you just might feel secure.”

He strove for success; he got the best education and was admitted to his chosen medical school. As a reward, his parents sent him on a trip to Japan. He met a guru who said, “You are happy because you overshadow your classmates: you get an A, someone else gets a B. You will choose a mate and marry to win the woman everyone else wants. You are defined by: competition. Stay, stay in the ashram. It is different: no one competes. We are happy.”

He stayed and six months later, he wrote his parents: “I am happy and at peace. There is no strife. We share and we love each other. This is so much in harmony with the essence of my soul that in only six months I have become the number 2 disciple and Mom, I think I can be number 1 by June.”

Many of you have heard of the book, Battle Hymn of The Tiger Mother by Amy Chua. In this book, Chua writes about raising successful children with high academic achievement – the Tiger Mom way.

The Tiger Mom way, in case anyone hasn't heard, makes the feared Jewish mother look like a pussy cat.

In a follow up book, The Triple Package, Chua and her husband Jeffrey Rubenstein examine Jews and other cultural groups to learn how they succeed in the U.S. It turns out that that a sense of insecurity and a sense of chosenness propel these groups to great success. A sense of insecurity and a sense of chosenness. . .

Now we Jews have always come from a place of insecurity. More than thirty times in the Torah, we are told: you were slaves in the land of Egypt: slavery, oppression and near annihilation –by the Greeks, the Romans, the Crusaders, and yes, the Nazis. We are not a secure people. We have had to fight for 5000 years for the right to exist.

And yet we Jews have been told that we are the chosen people.

So what exactly are we chosen for? We are chosen to take action. We were chosen to repair the world - a great responsibility.

This extraordinary combination of insecurity and chosenness produced dazzling success in America.

We are .02% of the world population, but one-fifth of Nobel Laureates.

Three US Supreme Court justices are Jewish. Three of the current leading opinion writers for the NY Times are Jewish. About half of the wealthiest Americans are Jewish.

And we didn't even touch on the arts, Hollywood . . . or that 29% of all American psychiatrists are Jewish.

So first, insecurity and second, a sense of choseness and now the third pillar of the Chua Rubenstein triple package: perhaps our greatest contemporary philosophers, the Rolling Stones said it best: You can't always get what you want. That's right: impulse control.

Judaism has impulse control in a big way: the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment - "You shall not commit adultery," the laws of keeping kosher, the warning against *lashon ha ra*, evil speech: all examples of impulse control and delayed gratification, Jewish style. And last but not least, in just ten days from now, our Yom Kippur fast. Talk about impulse control.

Insecurity, a sense of choseness and impulse control: the triple threat has ensured our great success in America along with other groups such as the Mormons, Nigerians, and the Indians. However, we, the Jewish people have been so successful, so accepted, and have achieved so much, that we risk losing our Jewish identity completely.

First, we are no longer insecure. We enjoy the highest degree of physical security in the world. Here at Kol Shofar in Marin, we are practically in the middle of the Garden of Eden; physically safe and secure in this beautiful place.

Second, our chosenness is significantly challenged both internally and externally. We pride ourselves on a lack of particularism. We are uncomfortable being chosen, or feeling different from anyone else. Diversity is our ideal, pluralism our mantra.

Third, we live in a society that is antithetical to impulse control. Instant gratification is our society's goal. We want what we want, and we want it now. Online, at the mall, you shouldn't have to wait for anything.

We've lost our insecurity. We've put away our chosenness. We've tampered with our impulse control. We're losing our Jewish identity.

One unfortunate antidote to this challenge is the rise of world-wide anti-Semitism. It has unified us once again. Three months after the onset of war in Israel, old and familiar anti-Semitism has reared its ugly and poisonous head again. Jews trapped inside their own synagogues in France, crowds chanting violent slogans in Germany. Kosher products ransacked on grocery shelves in London. Anti-Israel protestors calling us pigs in our nation's capitol. And the list goes on.

But Anti-Semitism is a poor way of bringing us together and ensuring our survival and growth. We Jews will not assimilate and disappear because of American security and affluence and the now society. We choose Judaism because Judaism matters to us. Because being Jewish is life-giving. Because being Jewish matters to the world. I believe we need to embrace insecurity, embrace chosenness and embrace impulse control.

The Torah tells us, it is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens. It is not across the sea. No, this thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart. (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

We must remember: We were slaves in the land of Egypt and God freed us. Do not forget.

Here in Marin, we e join the yacht clubs we want, work where we want. Children are no longer kept out of the best colleges because of Jewish quotas. As a people, it is easy to forget: slavery disappears from our reality. Why should we dwell on it? We strived for ages for freedom and security. Should we feel guilty now that we have it?

No, enjoy it all, but remember: none of it is really ours. Remember we came from Egypt.

And secondly, let us not confuse the value of diversity with all of us being alike. Being distinct as Jews is a gift to the world, not because we are

better, but because we have a unique role to play in this world, in complement with others. .

Remembering where we came from and remembering the responsibility of being chosen, we also remember we can't always get what we want. Here Judaism goes against the grain of contemporary culture, but being Jewish has always meant being a rebel, being counter-cultural. Shabbat has kept us Jewish. Keeping kosher has kept us Jewish. Yes, when we observe these *mitzvot*, we are keenly aware of how we diverge from contemporary culture. In some ways, we are still rebels, still outsiders because we live with disciplined spiritual practice, together.

I believe through living Judaism, doing Jewish, we will not fall, just to become another cultural group that has come and gone. Rather, we will flourish in communities of joy and meaning, sure of foot in our mission and with the tools in hand we need to keep Judaism a vibrant and continuous life force.

There once was a young Jewish couple who lived in great freedom, yet remained humble and remembered where they came from. They knew they were God's partners in making the world a better place. They lived a Jewish life – they said *kiddush* each week, chanting the words to their son, "We went forth from Egypt and God chose us for service." They told him, "With our Jewish community, we are stronger. This is your legacy."

Before the son went off to college, the parents sent him on a trip to Japan. He met a guru who said, "You are humble. You remember where you came from. You have Jewish discipline in what you eat. You know sacred time and you do not become a slave to your work. You understand community. Go back home to your beautiful Jewish community. That is where you belong."

He wrote his parents: "I like the ashram, but I miss being with other Jews. I miss Shabbat. I am glad I came to Japan, but I am really glad I'm coming home."

On this New Year, I wish you the blessing of insecurity, the blessing of chosenness, and the blessing of impulse control. And most of all: the true blessing that you find your home and find it here in our Jewish community. *Shanah Tovah*. Happy New Year.