

Notes from the Cantor – September/October 2007

***HINENI – HERE I AM***  
***EIFO ATAH – WHERE ARE YOU***

By  
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Life is a sacred pilgrimage – a sacred journey. During these High Holy Days, we join together with the Temple Sinai community, friends, family, and with Jews all over the world praying the same ancient liturgy and observing the Jewish New Year. As individuals, our sacred journey leads us to look inside ourselves to do a *chesbon hanefesh* – an accounting of the soul. It is as if God created these High Holy Days so that we have the space or permission to take the time and slow down to look within ourselves. Rosh Hashanah is also called Yom Hazikaron – the Day of Remembrance as well as Yom T’ruah – The Day of the Shofar Blast. The sounds of the Shofar awaken us to pause or stop from the mundane routine of life and also to remember our covenant with God and the Jewish people. The sounds of the Shofar remind us to act towards others and ourselves with compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and acceptance of who we are at any one moment in time. Life is change and sometimes these changes include some difficult bumps along the journey, and it is important to remember that God and our fellow human beings are here to guide us and that sometimes we need to give ourselves the permission to ask for help.

On Rosh Hashanah morning we read the Akedah – the story of the binding of Isaac. In the JPS Jewish Bible Study Guide the translation of Genesis 22:1 is: “some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, “Abraham,” and he answered, “here I am.” The actual Hebrew for “here I am” is “*hineni*” and the JPS commentary states that “there is no good English equivalent for “*hineni*”...and that “the term indicates readiness, alertness, attentiveness, and responsiveness to instructions.” In creating my own Midrash or interpretation to apply to my own life, I interpret this *hineni* to mean listening and being attentive to my own inner instructions for being true to my soul and my connection to God and humankind.

The word, "*hineni*" is also the name of a 17<sup>th</sup> century prayer-poem found in our High Holy Day Machzor, "Gates of Repentance." In Reform synagogues, this prayer is chanted at the beginning of the Erev Rosh Hashanah service and the opening word "*hineni*" is translated as behold. The essence of the prayer is that I, your cantor, have the awesome task of representing you, the community of worshippers before God and hope that these prayers find favor with God. The prayer ends with "Blessed are You, who hears prayers."

So as we begin this New Year of 5768, behold, here I am and due to a back injury, listening to my body (and my doctor), I have been told to slow down, move mindfully, patiently heal, and therefore lead some, but not all of the High Holy Day services. With the assistance of another cantor, I will "rotate" myself through the various early and late services so that I can greet and be with all of you.

May you and your families be blessed with kindness, compassion, peace, good health, abundant joy, equanimity, mindful listening, wisdom, trust, love, and acceptance of beholding where you are on this sacred pilgrimage we call life!