

Vaheim HaBaeim – Welcome

Welcome to our service. Welcome home to your synagogue. As we begin a new year. We should begin with the words Sh'hechyanu which we will repeat again, thanking God, praising God that we have reached this day. *Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech Hoalom Sh'hechyanu V'keyamonu V'higianu Lazman hazea.* With all of the challenges and all of the uncertainties of these days, we are here. And thank God most of us, if not all of us in relative good health. We are here to be able to reflect on tradition, to look at ourselves, share in moments of beauty. That is pretty nice. One of the statements of the whole High Holy Days season is so very good to be alive.

This is a difficult moment for me for in though in some ways it is the simplest of all sermons, I am just introducing the themes of these days or a particular theme of this day, and trying to create an environment for the days ahead. I want to in some way encapsulate the total meaning and yet, in some way want to create a particular message. It is challenging.

There was an event that took place last week. The event that took place last week was an event of true beauty and real connection. And I believe speaks to the essential themes of these days. After some 43 years, Paul McCartney, formally of the Beatles was invited to perform in Israel. In 196 Prime Minister Golda Meir disinvited the Beatles. The governmental leaders feared the Beatles and what they meant to popular culture and to the young people of the day. They thought that they were a corrupting influence. Although the Beatles had a profound effect on the music, it would not be good for the people.

Thursday night, September 25, 2008, Paul McCartney appeared at the Yarkon Park in Tel Aviv in front of the largest crowd ever to gather for a concert in the history of the State of Israel. And what a wonderful concert it was. He came in spite of threats from Palestinians and Radical Islamists who suggested that he would be killed if he went. He visited Palestinian territories and tourists places and the holy places of Judaism and Christianity and performed a great concert.

So, why do I speak about it now? I speak about it now because I really believe that theme that we speak about in our Machzor, the very ancient narratives that we teach can be brought to the most contemporary issues, the most contemporary problems and the most contemporary situations. I speak about it now because the concert truly represents hope and above all, we come here in this very uncertain world to gain a sense of hope about our world and the future of our world.

First of all, the concert was an experience of T'shuvah. The State of Israel, the people of Israel were saying to Paul McCartney, we made a mistake. You should have been able to come 35 years ago. We are sorry. The message of the Beatles is not a message of a

degenerate generation by any means, but rather it was a message of a generation that wanted something more than what the world was giving them. They wanted hope. They wanted to believe in peace and they wanted to be guided by love.

This T'shuvah, this act, the extension of the invitation was happily accepted by McCartney. "You say goodbye, I say hello." He was welcomed with an incredibly warm ovation as he got on the stage and he said: "Shana Tovah" Shalom in Hebrew. He said Happy New Year. And then gave greetings in Arabic to Arab Israelis who were present.

The core prayer on Rosh Hashanah is the prayer U'netane tokef and it is the most disturbing, the most powerful, and the most awesome words that could possibly be spoken. It is troublesome, it is challenging and it is also hopeful. It expresses the reality that we don't know what will be in the coming year. We don't know who will be born and we don't know who will die and we also know that we have no control. But, what we know is that we have the ability to make choices that will impact whatever will be. We have the capacity to define the nature of our year to come.

To begin our year with an act of T'shuvah, of reflection and a willingness to move our lives to a better place, a forgiving place is a powerful statement about being a human being.

We also change the nature of the year through Tefillah. The music of the Beatles was a moment the expression of Tefillah. Voices raised together, singing about love, singing "All you need is love" and the hopeful prayer of a generation, "All we are saying is give peace a chance" resonated in the hearts of all who were there. Messianic, sure, perhaps even beyond the reach of the moment, but yet they reflect a deep yearning in the heart and soul of every person and every Israeli, every Jew, every human being. The whole crowd singing "All we are saying is give peace a chance" and McCartney realized it at that moment that that is the heart of desire of every Jew and every Israeli. T'Shuvah and Tefillah.

And finally, there is no question that it was a moment of Tzedakkah. Not to overstate it, Tzedakkah is really found in our capacity to do something kind, to do something good, to reach beyond ourselves to help to raise ones spirit, to raise ones mood, to feel just a little bit hopeful that our world can change.

We are here rooted in something very old. We are here to feel a sense of connection to each other and to a tradition and to the past. McCartney said before the concert, I know that I am going to be singing to grandparents who are my age and to their children who knew the music and even to their grandchildren who are singing the music of the Beatles.

As we sit here reciting the words of not just our grandparents, but the words that were written as long as two millennium ago, we pass them on to our children and to God willing to our grandchildren knowing that which is real and that which is meaningful and that which touches the heart will stay alive forever.

A little event took place on Thursday night. In the scope of things, a major takes place this evening as we gather together again as Jews have for over two thousand years on this Erev Rosh Hashanah with the realization of life's uncertainty and yet, in the face of that a bold expression that we can make life a little better. That through T'shuvah, through Tefillah, and through Tzedakkah we will face what life has to give us and we will do that together.

Let us hope that in this world filled with despair our capacity to hope will make the world a little brighter.

Shana Tovah