

Rosh Hashanah 5777 – Day 1 – Rabbi Paul Drazen

Hayom har'at olam - Today the world was created. Imagine what it must have been like to be around at the very beginning of time. There was nothing. Absolutely nothing. Philosophers call that *creatio ex nihilo*, the ultimate starting from scratch. That is the classic description of the way creation took place. From zero, with a capital "ZERO", to full world in 6 days.

Of course, one could accept the Kabbalistic notion that the term *tohu va'avohu*, which describes the world at the start of the first creation story to the *leftovers* from God's previous attempts at creation. God started from a pile of stuff by the celestial wastebasket, the remains of earlier creation attempts. For our world, God didn't start at nothing, rather God slapped together the world from the stuff which was laying around, *tohu va'avohu*, stuff but nothing that we would recognize as being the world in which we live. But the world has to start somewhere.

Hayom har'at olam - Today marks the creation of the world. We say that three times during the musaf service after the shofar is sounded.

What if today was the day the world was created? If creation were starting today I'd suggest a few changes. I could do without mosquitoes. I **could** do okay with weather like San Diego, okay, one snow storm per year just to remember.

In any case, there is no question that the world we would make would not be the creation of 5777 years ago. As well, a world we create today would be unlike one which created in a hundred years into the future. Those worlds would differ because creation responds to life as it is, not simply to life as it was.

Hayom har'at olam - Today the world was created. Today we, in this synagogue, and millions of Jews around the world, celebrate creation. We usher in a period of contemplation and personal renewal, that is a *personal re-creation*. That brought a question to mind, "If we were creating a new synagogue today, what would it be like? If we were starting anew, what kind of place of worship would we design?"

I know it would be different than a synagogue created over a century ago. The concept of what a Jewish place of worship is, and should be, has changed as the world has changed ... as it should.

Let's consider the question of creating a synagogue for today for few moments. How different is the world now than it was when Adath Yeshurun began? Neither Syracuse, nor TAY, are not what they were when TAY was founded. Neither Syracuse, nor TAY, are what they were *when this building was built* as the congregation's third home, decades after the congregation began. Life is not the same as it was when a group of men from Neustadt formed a new congregation.

Hayom har'at olam - Today the world was created. When this congregation began, it was a time of creativity, of setting plans and goals. That's what we need to do as we look to a new year.

The task of trying to picture what a renewed Temple Adath Yeshurun should be must include every member. Not just staff, not just the board, everyone must consider *what would it mean to create a new congregation* if we were to start today. That's the process that we need to follow in order to *recreate* this congregation. We must look with new eyes and determine *what does a 5777 model synagogue need?* A 5777 model won't be the same as a 5687 version. A 5777 model won't be the same as a 5733 congregation. We need to ask ourselves: what will TAY members need from this congregation in the year 5800? That's not far off, just a generation!

Why am I raising this today? Because when I came to TAY just over a year ago, a major part of what I was asked to do was to help guide TAY through change. The leadership realized that after two generations, things would be different with a new rabbi. They would be, if for no other reason than a different rabbi would do things differently, because different people doing the same thing will do them differently. Change is standard, even when trying to maintain the *status quo*. Of course deliberate changes, certainly is a change. And yes, some things have changed.

A few concrete changes in the past year.

Coming in. The entry sequence, as architects say, is new. We have marked crosswalks, making it safer to get to the building from the parking lot. The entryway look is new due to new landscaping, kudos to Barbara Simon, our Executive Director. Our building has a new face as we arrive. Once inside we now have signs to direct us, thanks to Sonali Wijesuriya, our Media and Public Relations coordinator who set up and maintains

the display, coming in the main entrance you saw, no doubt, a screen with information. Today, anyone who comes in, can know where to go. The building is no longer a secret.

Etz Hayim – In January 2016 we began using what has been the *humash* of conservative movement since it was published in **2001**. Now we read Torah with modern translation and modern commentaries. That allows to better appreciate the classic text of Torah. Dedications are still available.

Aliyot and honors. We now allow group aliyot, as you have likely noticed this morning. We have opened the bimah; more people can come forward for an honor. Children can come forward with parents. Today, anyone can take any aliyah because though we recognize the historic nature of the Kohen and Levi tribal references and their role for assigning aliyot, we no longer limit honors based on historic tribal lineage. Again, so more people can participate.

Hebrew names are important. We have been gathering Hebrew names, *because for far too many people in this congregation we simply do not have a Hebrew name on record*. That becomes especially difficult as we do funeral preparations. And please remember that a Hebrew name should include mother's names. We started life with a father and a mother – it's time to give mom her due.

This has been an egalitarian congregation for years. Egalitarian does not mean "pick and choose." Egalitarian means women *have the same ritual obligations as men*. Just as men have traditionally worshipped with covered heads, women should as well. Just as men have traditionally worshipped with a tallit, women should as well. As we do so, the young women of Temple Adath Yeshurun will come to see kippah, tallit and even tefillin as a part of the way women worship as well as men.

Pikuakh nefesh, saving of lives. Despite last winter, I've been told the weather can get bad here. We will now cancel daily services in bad weather. We established a policy to guide a decision if we will hold services or not. No guessing and no taking one's life in hand only to drive to a building and find out too few others have made the dangerous trip.

We are taking deliberate steps to increase participation in leading services. Jewish worship is not a spectator event. There are more Torah readers and those who chant Haftarah. Ba'alat Tefillah Esa Jaffe has both taught and put out the welcome mat. The list of those who participate has grown, but we have room for many more. We will continue to find ways to grow the number of people who lead portions of our services each day, from daily services to Shabbat services. Jewish worship is not a spectator event.

Our daily services are now the Syracuse Conservative daily services, officially co-sponsored with CBS-CS. Members of both shules are welcome in these daily egalitarian services where yahrzeit names of both congregations are read each day, on the day of the yahrzeit.

We have taken deliberate steps to be a better partner within the greater Syracuse Jewish community. No shule is an island; we work with others. The Syracuse Rabbinic Council is alive, well and meets regularly. One example of the partnership was a book sent to the entire Jewish community, *A Guide to Jewish Funeral and Mourning Customs*. Will be having a review session for that book on next Sunday morning, here, before the annual cemetery service. We are part of the Syracuse Community Hebrew school, starting its second year. We do not stand alone. As a part of the community, we strengthen the Syracuse Jewish community and we strengthen TAY.

Perhaps the most important change was our being chosen as a Ruderman inclusion synagogue, one of just 18 in North America. We have defined - as a core value - what it means to be a congregation which states that *all Jews* can be part of who we are, including worship and learning. Jews come in all shapes, sizes, colors, abilities, disabilities, gender identity and sexual preference. And we welcome all. To be a part of TAY no longer requires knowing a secret code, handshake, special jargon or inside knowledge and language. We have done much, we will continue to be sure that all are welcome and included here.

This congregation came into being because a *group of people*, as reflected in our name – an edah, Adath, means a **group** of people, joined together. This edah *group* formed to strive to be y'sharim a righteous group. That's what the name of the congregation means: Adat Yeshurun, a group of people striving to righteousness.

5777 is the year to move forward:

Time to do, not watch. Share your ideas and reactions, with us, not just in the parking lot.

Things will change. With a focus on *inclusion – of all*, a readiness to learn and do.

Today we need to focus, not on who we have been, but **who we can be**.

To build a recreated TAY will take effort and time and energy, and dedication. And thought. And money.

How many Jews does it take to change a lightbulb? Change it? My grandfather gave that lightbulb! ... Yet we must be ready to allow change to take place. No matter who gave the lightbulb.

We need to *rethink* everything. This building is older than the Carrier Dome. It was built when energy was cheap - in an era when Dad drove Mom, and sometimes the kids, up to the synagogue door, dropped them off and then parked the car. How we use a synagogue today is different.

This year is the year we will begin, in earnest, a complete review of who we are, what we do and how we do it. During this year, during our Pause Button Shabbatot, we will study Conservative Judaism, a religion with a philosophy, standards and mitzvot. So we know who we are.

There are hard questions to ask, hard questions to deal with. We must work to re-create this congregation because the stark reality is we cannot simply continue doing *what we have been doing, as we have been doing* it. Neither people nor organizations can remain static. Life is dynamic and we must grow.

Today the world was created. The world is not random. It was created with determination and forethought. Nor is the world the same as it was. We adapt; that is how the world has survived.

That's how we will *revive*, how we will *survive*, how we will *thrive*. Together, as an edah, we can do. I cannot do it *for you*. But I will work with you; guide you, chide you; rethink but not retreat; fall, but not fail. And when we fall, we'll dust off and try again. We will build and grow. Together. Because Hayom har'at olam - Today the world is created.