

ROSH HASHANAH

5784 ■ 2023



Dear Friends,

A rabbinic colleague of mine recently wrote in an essay that this year she is having an extremely difficult time preparing her High Holy Day sermons. Between the ongoing pandemic, climate change caused tragedies resulting from massive wildfires and extreme flooding, and continued strife both here and abroad, what message of hope and inspiration can she possibly offer on Rosh HaShanah, the birthday of the world, when spiritually we begin life anew?

However, my colleague takes heart when another rabbi, her study partner, reminds her of the role that angels play in the Torah readings on Rosh HaShanah. On the first day of the New Year, we read of the angel who opens Hagar's eyes to the well of water in the wilderness which assures that both she and her son Ishmael will live. In the Torah reading on the next day of Rosh HaShanah an angel's urgent communication and intervention with Avraham results in Sarah's and his son Yitzhok's (and by extension the Jewish people's) survival as promised by God. In both cases an angel allows individual to see the larger picture amidst challenging circumstances and tests that could easily cause despair and death.

I am most grateful to my two rabbinic colleagues for sharing with us their struggles and for their focus on the malachim, the angels. The Hebrew term malachim can also translate as "messengers," a term which can readily apply to each and every one of us during these most trying times. If we serve as malachim, as messengers of God, in accompanying our fellow human beings in this difficult period by listening to their hopes and challenges and by responding with concrete ways of helping one another out of despair and to focus on the larger, more hopeful picture, then we will do our part to ensure a *Shanah Tovah u'Metukah*--A Good and Sweet New Year!

Best wishes for Shalom – Peace, Wholeness, and Well-Being – in 5784.

Shalom,
Rabbi Stephen Shulman
Director, Pastoral Services