

L'Shanah Tova!

From my family to your family: L'Shanah Tova and a Happy New Year! The Hebrew expression means "to a good year" (recognize the "tov" as in "mazel tov" meaning "good"), which is slightly different in meaning from our more common "Happy New Year" greeting.

In our secular calendar, January 1st (or, really, December 31st) signals the obligation to HAVE FUN! Dress up, go out, drink too much, eat too much, act crazy and try to make the evening live up to what your expectation of "New Year's Eve" should be. Have you ever asked yourself, what are we celebrating? That we've made it to another turn of the calendar? That we're a year older? What? It has struck me that the message is forget your worries, your troubles your obligations -- go out and party as if there was no tomorrow. Make some resolutions for the new year that you fully expect to break.

Contrast this with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. This holiday signals a time for reflection and introspection. It stimulates a review of the last year and challenges us to make the next year a good one (the understanding is that if it's a good one, it will be a happy one). It is a time for happiness, but happiness of a quieter, more peaceful variety. It's a time for families to get together and a time for renewing relationships with each other and with God.

You know there's a difference between fun and happiness. Fun is thrilling and exciting but doesn't last very long. It's great while it's happening but kind of sad when it's over. Check out parents and their children as they are leaving Disneyland (or your favorite themepark) after a day of "fun." Do the kids look happy? Do the parents look happy? Contrast this with the scene at the end of some quiet, close family time. Small children asleep in parents' or grandparents' arms. Relatives sharing stories and advice. Laughter, hugs, memories, photo albums, home movies, perhaps a tear or two with the memories, in other words happiness.

I hope you all had (or will have – I don't know exactly when the Megillah will reach you) a wonderful and happy and safe and (yes I mean it) fun New Year's Eve and New Year. But more importantly, I wish you a little bit of Shanah Tova, a year of goodness. May you all have prosperity, wisdom, joy and happiness in the year ahead and the blessings of peace and health so that you can enjoy them in happiness with your families and with your Temple Ner Ami family.