

## **“I’m 41...Again”**

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I turned 61 this year. When one of our younger Beth Shir Shalom members was told that he said, “You’re old!” Actually, I’m really good with it. Here’s why. Thanks to all kinds of realities in 2012 that support our modern lives and because I work out (other than around the High Holy Days) and because I eat fairly healthfully (except for oatmeal raisin cookies) and because 60 is the new 40, I’m barely middle-aged! I’m 41 again. It’s not even time for a mid-life crisis, although I could use that as an excuse for when I behave badly. On Rosh haShanah, I told you about my colleague Rabbi Elliot Dorff who is one of the world’s leading experts on Jewish medical ethics. What I didn’t tell you then is that he predicts that medical technology is progressing so quickly that we will soon reach the point that doctors will be able to replace our ailing and failing body parts like a mechanic does with our cars. I’ll be 31 before I know it! This presents me with a renewed opportunity to envision what I want to do with my life.

A career change? No, I really enjoy what I do. It’s busy, extremely busy and it’s varied, no two days are ever the same. There are some great perks that come with what I do. I get a parking space that I don’t have to win at the annual auction. People tell me that what I say is interesting, as in, “That was an...interesting...sermon, Rabbi!” I fulfill one of my job requirements each year by dressing up in a pink tutu and an elephant nose.

One of the things I love most about my job, the most wonderful perk, is that being your rabbi includes the privilege of being part of your lives. For instance, when people come up to Cantor Diane and me, thanking us and telling us how much our crafting and facilitating these High Holy Days means to them, one of my frequent responses is, “It’s an honor.” I really mean that; it’s an honor to serve the members of this community as your rabbi. The most impacting component of that honor is the opportunity you give me to accompany you at those moments in life that hold the most joy and the deepest sorrow. These are essentially private moments and I never cease to be astonished and humbled that you allow me to be there.

So, now that I’m 41, again, and I have this new chance to re-access my future, on this, our holiest of days, I’m going to take advantage of my rabbinic privilege and tell you my goals from now until when I’m...31 again.

I want to do whatever I can to eliminate war as an option for international and intra-national conflict. The further I’ve grown into my

rabbinate and myself, the more I see war's wastefulness and futility. Winning a war has never translated into peace and security, even the war that was projected end all others. War is not only the defeat of an enemy, it also the killing of innocents, the destruction of infrastructure and the obliteration of countless irreplaceable pieces of people's lives. As such, war means the fomenting of resentment. War means that the victors need to be battle ready in order to defend what they believe they have "won" and that means more war.

History repeatedly demonstrates that warriors are, ultimately, the best peacemakers. Warriors are more likely to go to the negotiating table and stay there when obstinacy and recalcitrance threaten to derail possibilities for a successful outcome. They know the alternative all too well.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower wasted no time revealing what his experience as commanding general of the Allied Forces taught him about the true essence of war. A few days shy of his fourth month in office he gave a speech in which he said, "...The free world weighs one question above all others: the chance for a just peace for all peoples...No people...can be held, as a people, to be an enemy...Security...can be [only] be lastingly achieved...in effective cooperation with fellow nations...[A] nation's right to [choose] a form of government and an economic system is inalienable...[A] nation's attempt to dictate to other nations their form of government is indefensible...A nation's hope of lasting peace cannot be firmly based upon any race in armaments but rather upon just relations and honest understanding with all other nations...Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children."

Reflecting on the sad state of the world in 1953 with words that should rattle our souls in 2012, Eisenhower said that war "is not a way of life at all...It is humanity hanging from a cross of iron..." He pleaded, "Is there no other way the world may live?"

So, the old warrior proposed "a new kind of war...a...total war, not upon any human enemy" but upon "the brute forces of poverty and need." Eisenhower declared America "prepared to reaffirm...[its] readiness to help build a world in which all peoples can be productive and prosperous." He wanted all nations to donate "a substantial percentage" of the savings gained through disarmament into a fund "for world aid and reconstruction" in order "to help other peoples to develop the undeveloped areas of the world,

to stimulate profitable and fair world trade, to assist all peoples to know the blessings of productive freedom.” Listen to this: The United States, he announced, was “ready...to dedicate our strength to serving the needs, rather than the fears, of [...] the world.”

This guy could never get elected today. In his time, with the real undeniable threat of the, then, Soviet Union ever-present, his statement was even bolder then than it would be now. So, one of my goals is to be a disciple of Dwight D. Eisenhower and do as much as I am able to facilitate international disarmament and help to insure that the economic savings thereof are dedicated to creating the only thing that can prevent war – the possibility of a little bit of prosperity for all individuals and all peoples.

If you were here on Rosh haShanah, you already know that I think it’s time we get honest and real about gun control and take as many guns as we can off the streets, away from private citizens and out of their pockets, cars and homes. We need to have the most stringent laws, making it nearly impossible for a person, insane or sane, to legally purchase a gun – from a Saturday night special to an assault weapon. And, if you were here on Rosh haShanah, you already know that I think providing for basic, decent, affordable health care for everyone in this nation, or sojourning in this nation, is a fundamental responsibility of the government, clearly supported in Jewish tradition. Once we “sign up” to be Americans or be in America, we are all responsible for each other including our communal health. So you expect that I will continue to resist those who argue for the unlimited availability of guns and ammunition and to oppose those who see health care is an individualized privilege rather than an individual right and a national responsibility.

I intend to work in coalition with others to convince another car wash owner or two to provide decent working conditions, a living wage and reasonable benefits for his or her workers. The same will be true for any other industry, company, shop or restaurant that doesn’t realize, or forgot, the moral obligations that come with opening a business and the social benefits for everyone when workers are treated as human beings. It’s good business. It’s good citizenship. It’s just.

I know that some are skeptical and criticize me when I speak out about the justice component of social concerns – issues that they see as “political.” Early in my career I began to understand that it wasn’t only permissible for me to so speak, it is also my obligation, but not because I’m a rabbi, because I’m a Jew. Rabbi Israel Salanter said, “A rabbi whose community does not disagree with him is not really a rabbi and a rabbi who fears his community is not really a man.” About all of us he said, “Most men

worry about their own bellies, and other people's souls, when we all ought to be worried about our own souls, and other people's bellies."

So if you thought this sermon was about me, it was...and it wasn't. It was about each of us and all of us. It's about each of us because we each have significant life-marking years ahead. And this sermon is about all of us because we have learned as a Beth Shir Shalom community that we can and must accomplish so much more in the world acting together than we ever could alone. Several years ago I told you I was ordained three times. The first was by Rabbi Alfred Gottshalk when I graduated rabbinical school. The second ordination was a "self-ordination" when, at a certain point, I became comfortable calling myself a rabbi. The most meaningful ordination has been my ordination by all of you who have joined Beth Shir Shalom and called me your rabbi. It is a humbling honor to be in your trust and have yours in mine. There's a mutual responsibility in a relationship like that. We are in this together. You see, I'm not going to decommission war, control guns, secure health care, achieve workers' rights, enable a two-state solution for Palestine and Israel, eliminate bigotry, xenophobia, homophobia, slavery, gerrymandering, and prevent those entrusted with other's money to enrich themselves at the expense or with complete disregard for their clients. We are going to do all that and more. That is what it means for you to ordain me, for me to feel ordained by you; we have a sacred covenant. Our tradition defines our task: "You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." My colleague Rami Shapiro translates it like this: "Do not be daunted by the world's grief. Do justly now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now." Yes, now and into our future, you and me, together, walking humbly, proudly, confidently and purposefully as Beth Shir Shalom, making mercy and doing justice.