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## A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday August 30, 2024 ~ Parsha: Re'eh

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

### The Question That Deserves an Answer

I've explained to the congregation how in a very real sense, the day after *Tisha B'Av*, the fast day of the Ninth of Av, is a good time to start thinking about the High Holidays. But we don't. But now is different. This coming Tuesday and Wednesday, right after the Labor Day weekend is *Rosh Chodesh Elul*. When the new Hebrew month begins, we are thirty days from Rosh Hashanah. Our Rabbis wanted us to remember that and think about what that means. So, they instituted several rituals and observances to ensure that, ready or not, willing or not, we start thinking about the great ideas of the High Holiday period, and how they apply to our lives. They literally force us to do so.

When Elul begins, we add the 27<sup>th</sup> [Psalm](#) to the daily liturgy each morning and evening. This Psalm is added to help us focus on some of the great themes of the High Holiday season in a way that our regular Shabbat and daily prayers do not. We need to focus differently at least for a few minutes during this season of the year, so when Rosh Hashanah actually arrives, we will be ready.

We also add the blowing of the [Shofar](#) during this month as well (except on Shabbat!). I do not think that I need to impress upon those are reading this Shabbat message what the sound of the *shofar* means to the Jewish people. When we hear it, we pay attention, we are awakened and hopefully we are motivated to make the changes and improvements to our lives that this season demands.

This is the season for what our Rabbis called *Chesbon Hanefesh*, the honest evaluation and appraisal of our lives. Now is the time to consider how we go about the business of living our lives, the good, the bad and everything in between. What does the record of our deeds say about us.

*Chesbon Hanefesh* is a hard thing to do. So, I want to give you an easy way to begin to frame the experience. I call it the *Question that Deserves an Answer*. Let me introduce it by way of a story told by John Gardner, founding chairman of Common Cause.

*A cheerful old man asks a fascinating question of just about everybody he meets for the first time. Once they exchange names and they get to the part where one is sure to ask the other where they work or what they do for a living, he turns the conversation in a different direction. He asks his new acquaintance an unusual question. He asks a big question – an important one. He asks, “What have you done that you believe in and you are proud of?”*

The question is direct and a little unsettling. It is not as easy to answer as, “What do you do for a living?” It requires some thought. When asked why he likes to pose that question, the old man responds that he doesn't care how they answer. He just wants to put the thought into their minds. He thinks everyone should live their lives in such a way that they can have a good answer.

"What have you done that you believe in and are proud of?"

What goes through your mind if you were asked that question? Family? Children? What else have I done that I believe in and I'm proud of? Career? Community involvement? Working for the synagogue, or the Jewish community? Hobbies and activities? Publications? Charity work?

It is an excellent question.

As I was writing this Shabbat message, I was reminded of the classic words of Angus Young, the iconic lead guitar player for [AC/DC](#), one of music's biggest and most popular bands over the past 40 years. Some years ago, he said to a reporter:

*“I'm sick to death of people saying we've made 11 albums that sound exactly the same. In fact, we've made 12 albums that sound exactly the same.”*

Angus Young was making a strong statement of what he was proud of, and what he wanted to continue in the future.

So how would you answer that intriguing question? It may not be a big thing. Perhaps it's something that nobody but you cares about. But it you're invested in it. It means something to you. You probably will never be awarded a Nobel Prize for your accomplishment, but it was important enough to do.

Every year as we begin prepare for the High Holidays, I think of this question. I think this can be one of the most powerful questions we can ever ask ourselves. It will challenge us to look deep inside and, encourage us to live our lives in such a way that we can have a good answer.

Now it's your turn. You may want to close your eyes and give it some thought. What have you done that you believe in and are proud of?

Answering the question now may just hold the key to unlocking the potential of the upcoming High Holidays.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner