

Mercy Matters

Thought for the Day

Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)

Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 18 September 2009

Tonight is the Jewish New Year, and because Judaism and Islam share a calendar as well as so much else, it is also Eid al Fitr, so I wish *Eid Mubarak* as well as *Shanah Tovah* to you all!

Rosh HaShanah, the Jewish New Year, is a time of contemplation, not conviviality. It is like a collective human resource appraisal and development programme: we look back at the past year and assess our own behaviour; we try to identify our failings and seek forgiveness from those we have wronged; we resolve to improve and pray to be given the chance to do better.

Rosh Hashanah is called the Day of Judgement, but we contrast the justice we deserve with the mercy we pray for – a contrast with which Scots have become very familiar of late! You don't have to agree with the decision to release Megrahi to be proud to live in a country where mercy matters.

According to tradition, Rosh HaShanah is the birthday of humanity – and isn't it very telling that we use the same word both for mercy and for the human race? So it is an occasion to reflect that, however different we may be from people of other cultures and colours and creeds, we share more than divides us, and we all deserve the same respect.

I spoke last week of my friend, the Rev Ernest Levy, who recently passed away. He survived the worst inhumanity in the Holocaust to preach a message of tolerance and inclusiveness here in our community and throughout Scotland. For me, tonight will be all the more poignant because Ernest is no longer with us to lead our prayers, but he can have no better memorial than his vision that :

"Each person must be part of society, without giving up his identity, values and traditions. Each human being is unique, and ... there is a fundamental human right to be as different from each other as we please."

I wish you all a *shanah tovah*, a year only of goodness and blessings.

Ephraim Borowski

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