

September 1, 2017

Dear BQLI Region Friends,

For many, September welcomes new beginnings. The summer is unofficially over and the new school year is set to begin, bringing with it increased road traffic and distinct foliage changes. I hope that you enjoyed a peaceful and uplifting season, whether you spent time at the beach, in the mountains or on a “staycation.”

Our secular rhythms are synched with the Jewish calendar at this time of year. By this Shabbat, we are well into the month of Elul, a time designated by our tradition for introspection and self-examination, in preparation for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This ongoing internal conversation is called *teshuvah*, or repentance.

Ki Tetzei is a parashah of laws, more than any other parashah. We could use some of these specified mitzvot as an extremely useful guide to achieving atonement. For example, the mitzvah of *hashavat aveidah*, returning a lost object, can be interpreted as a metaphor for our own journeys. Perhaps the lost objects of Elul are our true selves, trying to be discovered and returned to ahead of the High Holy Days. Additionally, this parashah asserts that we must not remain indifferent. Going back to our authentic selves is necessary and important work of this season.

In another part of Ki Tetzei we read about the importance of keeping vows. *Teshuvah* requires us to make promises to ourselves; we promise to be better versions of ourselves, to think about our past behavior and to modify and improve it. We must find a way for our words and our actions to mirror what we feel in our hearts.

Through honest self-examination and *heshbon nefesh*, accounting of the soul, we can achieve balance, or wholeness. This is what I wish for you.

B'Shalom,
Grace