



Rosh Hashanah

What Are Anniversaries For?

Every one of a certain age can remember exactly where they were 25 years ago today, when they learned of the atrocities of 9/11. Almost 3000 people of all faiths and backgrounds died on that day. It is a moment seared permanently into our memory.

Here in the UK, there is another anniversary that we are about to mark the first anniversary of the terrorist attack on the Heaton Park Synagogue in Manchester. Last year, on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, a synagogue service was desecrated. Two worshippers, Adrian Daulby and Melvin Cravitz, were murdered. Others were seriously injured. For many, the trauma of that day remains painfully present.

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, which begins this evening, is itself an anniversary. According to our tradition, on this day human life began, and Yom Kippur, which follows ten days later, marks the day on which Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Word of God.

Yet Jewish anniversaries are not primarily about marking the past. They are about the possibilities the future holds. That is why the festive season we are now entering is dedicated to what we call Teshuva, usually translated as repentance, but more precisely meaning return. It is a process that

demands not only serious introspection, but also meaningful change for the future as we seek to return becoming the people God wants us to be.

The essence of this bold idea can be found in a metaphor from the world of art when viewing Michelangelo's David. Many presume that Michelangelo's greatness was that he created David out of nothing. I prefer a different explanation. Michelangelo took a large slab of stone within which David was already there. The sculptor's gift was knowing what to remove in order to reveal him. Likewise, when we carefully chip away the negative aspects of our characters, we uncover our true selves and we become more capable of change.

In that spirit, the anniversary of 9/11 invites us to reflect not only on what happened 25 years ago, but also on our subsequent response. What more should we be doing now to remove the forces of hatred and extremism which gave rise to such evil?

And the first anniversary of Heaton Park must prompt serious societal introspection. What more must we collectively do to tackle the appalling rise in antisemitism in our country?

Most of us know where we were when acts of great evil occurred. The greater challenge is to determine where we are going next.