

## A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

Reprinted from the February 2010 Adath Jeshurun Newsletter



It is not often that a congregant pays me the compliment of quoting extensively from a sermon I have given in another publication. So I was very moved and flattered to learn that Brian Chacker wrote an article for the October issue of the *Philadelphia Bar Reporter*, based on the sermon I gave on the first day of *Rosh HaShanah*. That sermon is available as an audio file on the AJ website, and is entitled "The Nobility of Work." I am honored to reprint Brian's article below with my gratitude both for his generosity of spirit, and for the skillful way he developed

his own message and incorporated parts of my sermon in it. I hope you enjoy the article as I did, and are as proud of him as his parents, Ed and Sheila are.

### "A Purposeful Life" by Brian Chacker



The Jewish High Holidays just passed and like every year before, I attended religious services with my family at Adath Jeshurun in Elkins Park. I really enjoy these services for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it gives me an opportunity to reflect on the past year and to take stock of my life over the course of that year.

In prior articles I have made reference to the trying times that we presently are facing as people, as a profession and as a country. So many of us are out of work and many who are employed often feel burdened and unfulfilled, and

overwhelmed with stress, frustration and disappointment.

This year, during *Rosh HaShanah*, my Rabbi, Seymour Rosenbloom, gave a sermon that I thought had a wonderful message and got me thinking about us as attorneys, our role in society and the place of work in our lives.

After speaking briefly about deceased Senator Kennedy, Rabbi Rosenbloom asked, "How many of us teach our children that work is a means to a purposeful life? Not everyone can be a United States Senator. But everyone can live a life of service and everyone can view the work they do as a way of serving others; a way of serving the greater whole. It is all in how we look at it. . . We need to know that any job, even the ones we do temporarily, can be infused with purpose and service."

"Many of us live our lives with a very cynical view of the world; that life is a competitive game, and money is king — the only measure of victory. Because of that, we do not end up doing what we love." I am sure that we all have friends and colleagues who have "abandoned their dreams, and deferred their hopes in the name of financial security and parental approval."

As my Rabbi pointed out, while most of the time we think of our work as a means to an end; the way we earn a living and pay for the necessities of life, work is more than that. Our work connects us to each other and fuels the engine of society.

"Work is noble, and every job can be noble because, through our work, each of us contributes to society. To take pride in our work and to do a good job is to express our responsibility as a member of society. It honors not only ourselves, but it honors our neighbors and our families."

In light of the rampant layoffs facing our profession, it resonated with me when the Rabbi spoke about how, when we are out of work, we feel diminished not only because of the adversity we face, but because of our inability to be part of this network of workers contributing to the welfare of society. We feel irrelevant.

Now, this may seem very philosophical and not particularly practical, but stop for a moment and think about it. I would venture that many people at one time or another, instead of seeing their work as noble, are bitter about one aspect or another of their jobs. Sometimes the bitterness is about work we perform, and sometimes it is work done by others. Other times, we feel taken advantage of either by our firms and/or our clients—underpaid, unappreciated and not respected.

Rabbi Rosenbloom noted that, "in this economy, many people who have jobs find they are doing the work of more than one person as [firms] retrench to stay in business, and they come to work each day wondering if this will be the day they get their pink slip."

This in turn leads our clients to feel frustrated and exploited, like they and their work are not receiving the attention they deserve. Where does this lead? It re-starts the cycle that makes work and workers unhappy and, at times, bitter.

Towards the end of his sermon, the Rabbi talked about our present crisis. "As individuals, as a nation, as a community, we need to view ourselves as contributing through the tiny pushes of our honest labor, our generosity, and our love, to the welfare of society. And if you say, how can I change the world? . . . You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you permitted to pull away from it."

The Redwoods of California are the tallest living species on earth. They are more than 300 feet high and 18–20 feet in diameter. Interestingly, their roots are very shallow, only four to six feet deep. The reason they stand and do not fall in a windstorm is that their roots are intertwined beneath the surface of the earth. It is as if they are holding hands underground, and this allows them to stay upright even on the windiest, rain-swept days.

As the Rabbi concluded, if we are to survive the present crisis, we need to be more like the Redwoods. We must recognize how interdependent we are on one another. We need to hold each other's hand, to invest our work with purpose and nobility, and to cherish the opportunity it gives us to contribute to society. We should respect others for the work they do, and be grateful for it because they do it for us. We have to strive to do our part, however tiny, to remake society so all are able to do work they love, and if not work they love, work that is appreciated for what it adds to the lives of others in society. When we do that we will be better individuals, and we will be a better society.

I know I am going to try to do my part and hope you will do yours. If we do, we will have a truly good year.

CONGREGATION  
ADATH JESHURUN



7763 Old York Road  
Elkins Park, PA 19027

215.635.6611

[www.adathjeshurun.info](http://www.adathjeshurun.info)