

A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

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The Survivor Tree



On the first day of *Rosh HaShanah*, I spoke about the lessons of 9/11 on the occasion of its Tenth Anniversary, and recounted some of my impressions of the Memorial at Ground Zero. Cindy and I had a special opportunity to see the Memorial before it opened because Josh had been working for the Memorial Commission for seven months, responsible for developing and constructing the access to the Memorial through the ongoing construction site.

At the end of our visit, Josh said, "I have one more thing to show you. I think this is really the most symbolic thing here."

He took us over to a tree on the plaza and said, "This is the Survivor Tree."

This is the story of the Survivor Tree.

When the site was being cleared after 9/11, a Callery Pear Tree that had been planted on the WTC Plaza was unearthed amid the rubble. It had been uprooted when the towers fell.

It was covered with black soot and debris.

But it was still alive. It was sent to a nursery where it was watched, fed, and pruned. The tree, against all odds, bloomed again.

This year, it has been replanted on the Memorial Plaza. When it was discovered it was only 8 feet high. Now it is 35 feet tall. It is a miracle of survival and rebirth.

But that is not the end of the story.

When you look at the tree, you will see rigid harnesses embracing it from all sides. The roots are still too shallow to be able to hold it steady against buffeting winds without help. If you look at the tree from one side, it looks like a typical pear tree in bloom. But go around to the other side, and it is barren, gnarled, and irreparably damaged.

It is a remarkable metaphor for life.

We are all survivors of life.

We have all been damaged in some way by the tremors of life. We bear the scars of our traumas and our failures, our foolishnesses and our misjudgements. But we can withstand them all. Not alone. Like the tree, we need the help of others. We need family and friends we are willing to lean on. We need people willing to let us lean on them so we can stand.

And when others lean on us to regain their strength, we grow in strength too. It is not a zero sum game. The more we help others, the more our capacity to help grows.

That is the message I choose to take from 9/11.

We can survive the challenges of life, and bloom again, when we lean on each other.

I hope we will take this lesson to heart in the new year. That like the Survivor Tree, we will not camouflage our weaknesses with false bravado, but be willing to seek others we can lean on for strength in times of weakness. That we who may be momentarily stronger will be willing to have others lean on us. And that when there are others in need, we will do our part to help them.

Individually, the new year brings anxiety and uncertainty. Together, we can, as a community, help each other, ease the burdens we bear, and rejoice together in new accomplishments and triumphs.

BELOW: Rabbi Rosenbloom with son Joshua in front of the Survivor Tree at Ground Zero.



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