

## Reaching For the New Moon in 5774

Rabbi Michael Fel

The radiant and powerful sun  
has dipped beneath the horizon.

The faint sliver of the New  
Moon, barely detectable, hangs in the sky.

The twinkle of the Yom Tov  
candles dance back forth, lending their light to our sacred  
cause.

And we, sitting here, face the  
challenge of the High Holy Days.

Over 2000 years ago, time was not measured by calendars  
affixed to the wall.

Time was based on the occurrences in the sky, witnesses from  
around Jerusalem would enter the courtyard of our Holy  
Temple and testify that they saw the faint crescent of the new  
moon. Based on that testimony, the leaders of the Jewish  
community would declare the beginning of a new month  
which in turn defined when the holidays would begin.

For years, our ancestors looked up to the moon to signal the  
sacred times of the year. The moon was the means of moving  
forward.

Nearly 52 years ago to this day, President John F Kennedy, looked at that same moon hanging in the sky, for a similar purpose. In 1961, Kennedy stated, "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth."

Now at the time, the US's space program was trailing behind the Soviet program. The Soviets were the first to launch a satellite and they were the first to send a human into space. In choosing the moon, Kennedy hoped he had picked a goal that was so far from becoming a reality, that perhaps the United States would be able to complete it before the Russians.

Kennedy stated: We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.

The road to the moon was challenging and difficult.

But on July 16, 1969, after years of successful experiments and explosive failures, after years of spending and running over budgets, after years of inventing and then reinventing, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins blasted off from Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

3 days later, Neil Armstrong and later Buzz Aldrin emerged from the Lunar Module and set foot on the moon. It took over 8 years to accomplish Kennedy's goal. 8 years.

How many of us dream that big?

How many of us set goals that will require years to accomplish?

More importantly, how many of us let failures or doubt prevent us from completing our lofty projects? How many of us let cynicism give way to idealism?

Doubting our abilities because of previous failure is a tragedy.

The French writer, Alexandar Dumas once quipped: A person who doubts himself is like a man who would enlist in the ranks of his enemies and bear arms against himself. He makes his failure certain by himself being the first person to be convinced of it.

Rosh Hashanah comes to remind us that we all make mistakes, we all stumble, we all miss the mark.

But it is in recognizing our flaws and our shortcomings that we can recommit ourselves to success in the New Year. The wisdom of trying until we get it right is nicely expressed by George Bernard Shaw who stated: When I was young, I observed that nine out of ten things I did were failures. So I did ten times more work.

Tonight we commit ourselves to doing more work.

And so I ask,

What is your big goal?

What is your moonshot?

What is your dream that you

know you may not fully complete by this time next year?

Is it reading the entire Hebrew Bible in English?

Is it coming to minyan 36 times this year?

Is it chanting Torah for the first time since your Bar or Bat Mitzvah?

Is it looking at the person sitting next to you, and committing to saying I am sorry when I am wrong and your are forgiven when you are hurt?

Tonight, we once again turn our attention to the moon. The importance of dreaming big and accepting that failure is part of the process is nicely surmised in a rabbinic teaching:

Just as the moon disappears each month and then re-appears and renews itself for a fresh new beginning, so too the Jewish nation strengthens itself after tragedy strikes and restores itself to its former glory.

As we begin the process of the High Holy Days, we admit to our darker days, we admit to our weaker moments, in the hope that we can return, strengthen our resolve and return stronger and brighter than ever before.

Shanah Tovah