For those of you who are worshiping with us for the first time this evening, let me explain to you a prayer exercise that we as a congregation have been undertaking every Friday night for the last few months. During our regular shabbat services we reach the point in the service of silent meditation. It is at this point that I ask the congregation to lean back in their seats, put their heads back, close their eyes and review in their mind's eye the experiences of the past week. To picture all that went on as vividly as possible, the sights, smells, colors and sounds of our daily life. I then ask the congregation to find that one thing, that one experience that made the week something special, or at least bearable. Once we have that fixed in our mind's-eye I suggest that we all, quietly and to ourselves, say thank you for that experience.

Last week when I asked the congregation to begin the exercise I expanded the scope of our reflections to include the whole year that has past, in preparation for Rosh HaShannah. In the process of reflecting on my own experiences this past year, somewhere between reviewing the year and finding that thing that made it special my thoughts were drawn away from the people I met, places I visited and things I did, and instead I started to think about the year that we have all witnessed externally, not just here at Vista or in Los Angeles, but even more globally as part of a world community.

I thought back to the headlines of the past year, and of course the first to come to my mind were those that were most gruesome and chilling. The murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman, the drowning and murder of the two Smith children. The Oklahoma City bombing and that chilling picture of the fireman holding that baby girl in his arms. Just as I thought the list of images was complete in its graphic and horrible detail there was always something else that I knew must be added, like the

shooting of that family as they took a wrong turn on one of our city streets. The list just kept piling on top of itself, and I found myself, still in this moment of silent reflection, having to stop, indeed to force my mind to see beyond the graphic and the horrible, to the good things that happened this past year, to those events that have some how made even the darkest weeks brilliant and inspiring. But it's very hard to find even in them true celebration, the Peace Process in the Middle East, is mixed with thoughts of the bus blast in Tel Aviv. Cal Ripken breaking Lou Gherig's all time record, butts up against a baseball season without playoffs or a world series. Even advances in medical science, which I know took place but can't quite recall what they were, these are juxtaposed with the Ebola Virus outbreak in Zaire.

And finally I must stop, I just can't recall in a whole year as many good things as I can in a week. In a week I give importance to the night I was able to have dinner with my wife without the phone ringing. Talking to my sister and brother both in the same evening. A week is survived because I saw a great movie, or got a good grade on a paper. It is celebrated because, I read a good book, or I got an e-mail from a friend away at college. Weeks are small and manageable, and thus what we take to symbolize what they meant to us is also small and manageable.

But why isn't the same true with years. A year is nothing more than a collection of weeks all lumped together. For each week their has been that one surviving or sustain experience that has helped me to look forward to the next, why then when I try and recall the brightest moments of the year that has past am I only drawn to the darkest headlines, to the most chilling stories?

It is because we give too much importance to what has befallen us, what has hurt us and set us back, and not enough to what inspires us and

encourages us. It is hard to see the small good things in the midst of the larger negatives but we must strive to do just that, our tradition implores us to seek out the good in people, to seek out the good in situations and encounters.

And that is my hope, as we begin this time of reflection that accompanies the New Year I pray that we will strive to see the joys life has brought to us, our families and our communities, not neglecting the challenges or the sadness, but to start our new year with a collection of memories made up of those sustaining moments in each of our lives, those moments that make whole weeks seem okay. The new year is not only about wrapping up and reflecting upon the one that has past, it is also about preparation for the one that is about to unfold. Our preparation must include the promise to take note of those life sustaining moments that will undoubtedly occur in the coming weeks. To take note of them and put in a place in mind's eye that is on quick recall, never outside of our immediate recollection. Because we are all too well aware that the graphic and chilling headlines of the day will continue to grab our eye, and shake our core, but it is my hope that just as we begin this new year with the sweetness of apples and honey we will look for the sweetness in everyday that lies ahead, so that we come together again at this time next year, we will recall happiness as well as headlines, the sweetness of life's sustaining moments. Shana Tovah.