



Rosh Hashanah 2007

“MOVING FORWARD”
by **Rabbi Peter H. Schweitzer**

This past spring, after eight remarkably successful seasons, it was curtains for *The Sopranos*. HBO's popular series depicted the inner life of a Mafia boss and his struggle to balance the requirements of his family with the demands of running a huge corporation, albeit a criminal one. Not having HBO, I remained out of the loop all these years, but one evening, at a conference I attended a few years ago, I gathered with a bunch of erudite Jewish studies professors who had to stop everything else so that they could watch that week's episode in the hospitality suite of the hotel where we were staying. When they weren't deconstructing the drama, they were hooting and hollering at what transpired on the screen.

The specifics of the final episode were, of course, kept under wraps, and viewers speculated on possible scenarios, including the violent end to Tony Soprano himself. I suppose that any ending would have been a let down for die-hard fans, and from the reviews I read, the show basically ended not with a blaze of glory but with business as usual. I gather that debate ensued afterwards about what had taken place, and fanatical fans sifted for clues to find meaning in the final episode and, I suppose, ultimately, in the series.

A month later, in July, we saw the end of another hugely successful franchise, JK Rowling's Harry Potter series. The final book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, made its grand entrance with a staggering, mind-boggling print run of 12,000,000 copies, some number of which undoubtedly made it into the hands of our own members and their kids, some of whom literally grew up with Harry Potter and his friends at Hogwarts.

Word is out now on how that series has ended, and without having to read the book you can find out everything you need to know on Wikipedia, which I did, but when I first drafted these remarks, a week before the publication, there was still lots of speculation on how Rowling would tie things up. The Times ran a variety of scenarios on its Op Ed page and even the Jewish Week ran an Opinion piece that asked the timely High Holiday question, “Who shall live and who shall die?”

On her own website, Rowling wrote that when she finished the manuscript she felt a mixture of extreme emotions, feeling simultaneously heartbroken and euphoric. She also put out a message to reassure her fans. “If it comes as any consolation,” she wrote, “I think there will be plenty to continue arguing and speculating about even after 'Deathly Hallows' comes out.”

And now it is September, and there is another long-running series, whose ending is not yet scheduled, but ought to be. It is called *The Iraq War*. Popular approval ratings have dropped dramatically and more and more financial backers – called senatorial stockholders – are ready to withdraw funding. Only the CEO seems oblivious to the dire reality of the situation and keeps thinking the series should be prolonged. One reason, apparently, is that he can't come up with a satisfactory final episode. He is right about that. There will be no tidy ending to this show. We can expect a disastrous spin-off that may re-define the horror genre. And we can also expect a whole series of post-mortem critiques that try

to distribute the blame everywhere and anywhere but where it belongs, back in the hands of the creative types who dreamt up this war in the first place.

Finally, we come, ourselves, to this gathering for our High Holiday observance. For us, individually, this moment becomes a time to assess the series of our own life personally. Another season is passed, another is about to begin. How many there will be, none of us knows. Our lives, unlike a television series, rarely have neat endings. They certainly defy scheduling. Despite our efforts to control the script, we are often victim to scripts that are imposed on us, especially those hideously written by drunk drivers. Best laid plans are scuttled, priorities are re-arranged. And it all can happen in the blink of an eye with no rhyme or reason. Just when things are going great, disaster can strike. As Rabbi Wine would have put it himself, Our lives are messy, chaotic, anything but predictable, rarely ending “happily ever after.” But even in the face of this uncertainty, he would also tell us, the only direction is forward. Grab a hold of life, live it to the fullest, look ahead.

Today, we ask ourselves these questions: How have we fared so far? How will we try to chart the days to come? How do we cope with the unexpected turn of affairs, especially with disappointment, pain and suffering? And finally, how will we be remembered, after our time is over?

Now, as we enter the New Year, let it be a year of possibility, a year of renewal, and a year of peace.

Once again, Shanah tovah. Happy New Year.