



Sermon Tidbits

MAY 9, 2016

Parashat Kedoshim

Honoring their Sacrifice – Yom Ha'atzmaut

You shall be holy (Leviticus 19:2)

קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ (וַיִּקְרָא יְיָ:ב)

The Israeli author Tzur Arlich published a short poem (in Hebrew) titled, “The Difference of a Week.” It is translated as follows: “The Difference of a Week/Two Remembrance Days adjacent to each other each year/For the benefit of a general calculation/How much did it cost us with a State/And how much it cost us without?” This short poem juxtaposes Yom Hashoah, when we remember the incalculable loss of six million Jewish lives, with Yom Hazikaron, the day we remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of the state of Israel. On one hand, the poem reminds us of the great blessing hidden beneath the suffering, yet despite the thousands who have given their lives to protect and defend the Jewish state, their numbers pale in comparison to those killed before Israel was born. These days also serve as an introduction to Yom Ha’atzmaut—Israel’s Independence Day—giving us a greater sense of appreciation for the gift that is Israel, while also encouraging and reminding us to defend and protect it.

We find a similar sentiment in the names of the Parshiyot that span the weeks before and after these meaningful holidays. Often in rabbinic teachings, the names of Torah portions are used to make a social commentary on how we relate to the departed. “*Achrei Mot*”—after death—“*Kedoshim, Emor*”—we only speak about people as if they were holy and pure. This teaching conveys the reality that after a person’s passing we overlook his or her shortcomings and failings. Instead, “*Kedoshim Emor*”—everyone is treated as a holy person. Yet, Rabbi Nissim Yishaya of Rechovot suggests a slightly different reading that conveys an entire different meaning: “*Achrei Mot, Kedoshim Tihuyu*”—“After the deaths, you shall be holy.” Rabbi Yishaya writes, “The departure of a person from the world awakens in those left behind thoughts about our purpose in this world...be Holy! In other words, the memory of the departed isn’t an end to itself; rather, the living should deepen their effort to strive forward.” *Achrei Mot* looks to the past, while *Kedoshim tihuyu*—“You shall be holy” is an instruction for the future.

This past week, as we honored the memories of Israel’s fallen, we must honor their sacrifice by continuing our work to support a strong state of Israel, which has defended and protected not only the people of Israel, but also served as a source of pride and strength for Jews around the world. Speaking at the Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony at Yad Vashem last week, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin said that the Holocaust demonstrated the need for the Jewish people to be in charge of its own fate, and that it should never outsource its own security, the [Jerusalem Post reported](#). He also noted that the ongoing scourge of anti-Semitism still persists, the intermingling of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, especially in Europe as a whole and the Arab world. “The state of Israel will deal with this anti-Semitism by ensuring, first and foremost, a national home and a Jewish army that protects the nation of survival,” the president declared.

This is our task and our mission: *Achrei Mot*—“After their sacrifice”—*Kedoshim Tihuyu*—“we must be holy,” and dedicate ourselves to the holy task of ensuring that the state of Israel has the support—both financial and political—from the United States to ensure that it can defend and protect the people of Israel on its own. Only if we fulfill our mission can we truly honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish nation. ■

Love, Honor and Respect

Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)

ואהבת לרעך כמוך (ויקרא יט:יח)

Following the failed recall attempt of Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin in 2012, then State Senators Tim Cullen—a Democrat and Dale Schultz—a Republican, published an op-ed article entitled “[Dignity, Respect Central to Building Bipartisanship](#),” in which they wrote that after a bitter and grueling political fight, “Both sides must acknowledge that the other political party is not the enemy. Differing perspectives and contrasting ideas are critically important to the legislative process. We need to foster a healthy marketplace of ideas to address big challenges... Neither of us has all the answers to bring our state back together after this election. But we do know this: If we all treat each other with dignity and respect, we'll get there.”

When the Sages addressed the classic Jewish commandment to “Love your neighbor as you love yourself,” they wondered: how is it possible to require that we can love others as much as we love ourselves? After all, it’s only natural that we should care first and foremost about ourselves? Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein (see *Tosefet Brachah Vayikra* p. 156), based on a teaching of Rambam, suggests that by commanding us to love our fellow man, we are enjoined to treat him with honor and respect. Rambam writes, “Each man is commanded to love each and every one of Israel as himself as the verse states, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Therefore, one should speak the praises of [others]... Whoever gains honor through the degradation of a colleague does not have a share in the world to come.” In addition, the Sages in Avot (2:13) write that, “The honor of your friend should be more dear to you than your own honor.” Based on these teachings, Rabbi Epstein writes that while it might be difficult to love others more than ourselves, “It is possible [to fulfill this commandment], with regard to respect and honor, which are dependent upon emotions actualized through actions.” He adds that great Sages, even when they disagreed strongly about important issues, disregarded their differences with respect to the honor and respect they accorded one-another. While the houses of Hillel and Shammai engaged in vigorous debate, “Nonetheless, they interacted with each-other with love, friendship and honor.”

By some measures, Democrats and Republicans are more divided now than at any time in the past two decades, and the coming election does not seem likely to soon improve the atmosphere. In today’s political climate, the command to “love our neighbor as ourselves,” and specifically the obligation to honor and respect those with whom we disagree, might be the most challenging but also the most important mitzvah facing our country. And, for the pro-Israel community, it represents the attribute most crucial to maintaining and bolstering the strong support for Israel in the halls of U.S. government.

America’s support for Israel transcends partisan politics. When it comes to strengthening the U.S.-Israel relationship, our work relies upon the support of both political parties. Today, it has never been more important to forge that kind of bipartisan support. But in order for bipartisanship to take place, we must foster an atmosphere of mutual respect critical to any good working relationship. If we continually demonize members of the “other” party who don’t agree with our political ideology, we cannot foster the atmosphere of compromise critical to creating common ground. Moreover, the notion that a strong U.S.-Israel relationship is a single party issue is not only wrong; it’s dangerous and ultimately destructive to the cause. As author Peggy Noonan writes, “What we need most right now, at this moment, is a kind of patriotic grace—a grace that takes the long view... That admits affection and respect. That encourages them. That acknowledges that the small things that divide us are not worthy of the moment; that agrees that the things that can be done to ease the stresses we feel as a nation should be encouraged, while those that encourage our cohesion as a nation should be supported.”

What we need now, more than ever, is to “Love our neighbor” and afford him or her honor, dignity and respect so sorely needed in our country today. America, and Israel, both depend on it. ■

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