

April 23, 2010

Shabbat Shalom!

During the monthly meeting of the Strafford County Department of Corrections Spiritual Advisory Committee this week, we took a few moments to discuss religiosity, spirituality, and how we respond to the wonders of nature (an appropriate discussion the day before Earth Day!). Committee members spoke of the greatness of the divine, their awe at creation (with a reference to the highest paved road in the nation in Colorado atop Mt. Evans, which I visited with my family in 1962), and God's love of creation and all living things. I quoted the blessings for a rainbow (Blessed are You, Eternal our God, who remembers the covenant, who is faithful to the covenant and who keeps the divine word) and for the miracles around us (Blessed are You, Eternal our God, who makes the work of creation). Our discussion touched upon the possibility of universal spiritual responses, including exclamations like "AWESOME" and "WOW!" Those could also be termed, in some way, blessings at the amazing world around us. Such appreciation for the earth is often what leads us to adopt sustainable practices, even simple strategies like using compact fluorescent bulbs and recycling regularly.

We also spoke about how our respect for our diversity of belief and expression was a covenant in and of itself, as well as a recognition of the special place in creation that we represent separately and together. By the same token, concern for the environment and respect for our fellow human beings go hand in hand. If we show concern for nature, how much the more should we care about human beings and their welfare. The Torah reading for this week, Kedoshim, says that we should be holy as God is holy. And how is that holiness defined? "Don't steal; don't lie; be honest in business; don't place a stumbling block before the blind (physically or metaphorically); judge your neighbor fairly (without partiality due to one's station in life); don't spread rumors; don't seek revenge or bear a grudge; don't hate someone in your heart, and if you need to offer reproach, do so in a way that won't bring guilt upon you; love your neighbor and the stranger among you as yourself; respect your elders; honor your parents." This is a timeless list of guidelines for bringing sanctity into our lives and our community in which we can still find great wisdom and relevance.

So as we have marked Earth Day (and should throughout the year), let us also continue to remember members of the human family, whether across the earth or immediately among us, who need our care, kindness and support.

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry