

August 28, 2009

Shabbat Shalom!

As our nation mourns the death of Senator Edward Kennedy, expressions of friends, family members, and political allies and opponents alike are paying tribute to his special brand of leadership. Foster's Daily Democrat noted in its August 27 editorial, "Senator Kennedy was someone who could reach across the aisle to Republicans because he was someone to whom opposition members of the Senate would listen, someone for whom they had respect. There are few such people in Congress today." That editorial also remembered Senator Kennedy's concern for the most vulnerable members of society: "Senator Kennedy was an advocate for men and women of classes of people who had no advocates. His causes were those of the people — the causes of better and more affordable health care, better educational opportunities for all Americans, and the causes of America's working men and women."

*As I read those words, I was reminded of a central passage in this week's Torah reading, Ki Teitzei. Deuteronomy Chapter 24 presents standards which directed the Israelites to care for the most vulnerable members of their society, those who had no advocates: "When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; **it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow**-in order that the Eternal your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; **that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow**. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; **that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, the widow.**"*

The Torah reading didn't only say that forgotten sheaves, olives and grapes should be left for those in need, but it also noted that, by leaving leftover and forgotten produce, the people would be blessed in all that they do. In other words, a society that cared about those who had no advocates would bring blessing itself because of the deep sense of concern that would permeate each community and the nation as a whole. Much of Senator Kennedy's service to the United States, and the legislation that passed due to his efforts, reflected that particular biblical teaching, and it is work that others will continue in their words and deeds. May we and our nation's leaders continue to learn from Senator Edward Kennedy's legacy of advocacy and bi-partisanship, approaches that can enable us to strengthen our society and our country.

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry K.