

January 4, 2008

Dear Friends,

Freedom is very much on our minds as we observe and participate in the political process of our democracy and listen to candidates proclaim their advocacy for liberty in our country and around the world. A recent New York Times editorial expressed a hope that honesty and decency would be more prevalent in the ways we exercise our freedom, citing actions of some government agencies that have denied rights to individuals as a departure from the spirit of liberty that our nation has preserved until now.

The Torah portion for this week, VAERA, recounts the beginning of the calls of Moses and his brother, Aaron, to Pharaoh to free the Israelites from slavery. In Exodus Chapter 6, verses 6-8, we read the promises that God made to the Israelites that serve as the basis of the four cups of wine at the Passover Seder, plus the Cup of Elijah:

- I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians
- I will deliver you from their bondage
- I will redeem you with an outstretched arm
- I will take you to be My people and I will be Your God
- I will bring you to into the land I swore to give to your ancestors

Commentators note that these verses outline a progression moving from a feeling of being a slave to a full sense of personal freedom. The EITZ HAYIM Commentary explains that the first promise, "I will free you," can refer to releasing the people from the physical burdens of slavery; "I will deliver you" - being freed from the mind-set of being in bondage which can sometimes continue even after liberation; "I will redeem you" - gaining a full perspective of oneself as free; "I will take you" - creating a special relationship based in teachings grounded in the value of freedom; and "I will bring you into the land" - creating a place where those values can be carried out. We are fortunate that, even when we can see our own freedoms challenged, we can speak our minds and make our voices heard to express how we feel our nation can better reflect the freedom upon which it was founded.

19th Century German Scholar Leopold Zunz, an advocate of modernizing the study of Jewish tradition, said in a speech in 1849, "The first step toward liberty is to miss liberty; the second, to seek it; the third, to find it."

May we continue to help one another and our fellow citizens sustain the liberty we enjoy and inspire others around the world, who are not yet free, to know freedom soon. Shabbat Shalom!

– L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

December 28, 2007

Dear Friends,

"A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph."

These familiar words from the first chapter of the book of Exodus are central to the story of the Israelites' quest for freedom from slavery. It is likely that the Haggadah that each of us uses at the Passover Seder quotes or, at least, refers to this verse from the Torah. This narrative statement about the new Pharaoh's memory represents a classic case of what was probably intentional political and cultural amnesia. Joseph began his time in Egypt as a foreign slave who was falsely imprisoned. He rose to greatness through his own insight and ingenuity which, in the Torah, Joseph ascribed to God's direction of his life's path. Pharaoh's "not knowing Joseph" might be like some Americans who, even now, are quick to forget the contributions of so many our citizens whose were born in other countries and have done so much for our national well-being.

In fact, Joseph's family's legacy - the tradition of his people - was still embodied in the Israelites who lived in Egypt. The insight of Joseph did not die, nor was his spirit of leadership totally wiped out, once a young Israelite (saved from Pharaoh's edict that first-born sons be put to death and adopted into Pharaoh's family) was moved to action by the plight of his enslaved brothers and sisters. Moses took on his greatest mantle of insight not as a resident of the palace but as an inspired yet humble individual designated to lead his people to freedom, a concept and a state of being that didn't seem to be a part of the Egyptian mindset or experience. Forgetting about Joseph led Pharaoh and Egypt to a confrontation with Moses, the Israelites and a vision of liberty that would not die.

The political challenge and tragedy of these last few days is the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan. At her funeral today, it was reported that "some wept and others chanted 'Benazir is alive.'" If what Benazir Bhutto represented to her people was a chance for establishing democracy and offering a voice for the poor and for those who feel disenfranchised in their own country, then she is, in fact, still alive in those ideals. Political forgetfulness - whether intentional or unwitting - and assassination might stop a movement for a moment, but they do not eliminate the aspirations of people yearning for freedom from oppression. History and the Torah teach us this lesson over and over again.

Let us hope that, in this new secular year about to begin, there will be more places throughout the world where people will find ways to make real their yearnings for liberty.
Shabbat Shalom!

– L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

December 21, 2007

Dear Friends,

As I was preparing to leave San Diego after several thought-provoking and enjoyable days at the Union for Reform Judaism Biennial convention, I heard the news that singer Dan Fogelberg, who lived in Maine, had died of prostate cancer. This news was likely significant to many members of the baby boom generation, and as radio stations continue to play Fogelberg's "Same Old Lang Syne" at this season of the year, this singer's passing was all the more poignant.

Noting that I had no Dan Fogelberg music on my iPod, I purchased two live performances on iTunes and imported two Fogelberg albums onto my iPod. As I listened today to live recordings of "Run for the Roses" and "Leader of the Band," I was reminded of how both of those songs had touched me so many years ago and how I still find their message so meaningful and spiritual. "Run for the Roses," which finds its way into the annual telecast of the Kentucky Derby, speaks of tradition being passed down from one generation to the next – a heritage not only of biology but also of soul. "Leader of the Band" was Fogelberg's tribute to his father Lawrence Fogelberg, who, as a high school band teacher, was among the inspirations for his son's musical career that spanned 40 years.

As I listened to these two songs about what one generation gives to the next, I heard a spiritual echo of the Torah reading for this week, in which Jacob, newly arrived in Egypt, saw, for the first time, his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons who had been born in Egypt. Jacob declared that the two Egyptian-born boys would be like his own sons, on the same level as Joseph himself. Jacob established a special connection with them by blessing them, saying that all future generations would bless their sons with the words, "May God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh," the blessing that our tradition directs parents to use to bless their sons on Shabbat evening. In this case, the "Leader of the clan," Jacob, was assuring that he would have a living legacy through his grandchildren. By creating a direct bond with them, he had passed on to them the lessons of his experiences, his struggles, and some of the essence of his very soul.

One of the sessions I attended at the biennial convention traced the cultural and historical images and events that are associated with each generation of members of our congregations. While there may be differences in the cultural references that have meaning to us based on when we were born, what we have in common is our special heritage, a desire to be part of a community, and our hope that, every day, we continue to shape a meaningful legacy for the generations with us now and those yet to come. May we thoughtfully and actively follow Dan Fogelberg's call to "join in the dance" as we make an impact on our friends, family and community through all that we do. Shabbat Shalom!

– L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

December 10, 2007

Dear Friends,

Recent reports and events related to the 2008 Presidential campaign have focused on the identity of several candidates, related to their religious heritage as well as their ethnicity. Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney's speech about what he believes, and how his beliefs should not enter into consideration as he runs for president, might not have been necessary if more people around the country personally knew members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While many Americans declare that they would be most comfortable with a candidate who professes a belief in God, a President of the United States should be able to speak a language of values that touches the lives of citizens who consider themselves religious as well as people who base their ethical decisions on universal principles of mutual respect and consideration for all humanity.

The Torah portions for last week and this week traced the rise of Joseph to the position of second-in-command to Pharaoh in Egypt, overseeing the stores of food in a time of plenty in order that the people could endure the coming years of famine. It was not his identity that enabled him to take this position. He did not seek to be Pharaoh's "Number Two," but was chosen for that task because of his ability to see what others could not – the threats to survival that Pharaoh so clearly saw in his dreams and a plan to successfully meet those challenges. Pharaoh did not ask about his origin or his beliefs; in fact, the Egyptian leader knew that he was taking this talented interpreter of dreams out of prison. Joseph was not asked from whence he came – he simply offered his thoughts on Pharaoh's (and Egypt's) predicament and offered a way out of difficulties that were sure to arise. It was his ability that counted, not his identity.

As Joseph sought to reestablish his identity by reconnecting with his brothers (although he did not let them know who he was after he first recognized them), he still had a sense that the insight that had gotten him to that position was not of his doing. Joseph retained a touch of humility that was, in actuality, untouched by the power of his position. He realized, as he told his brothers who he was, that his presence in Egypt had given them – his family – the chance to survive and even thrive in the future.

Talent, humility, insight, confidence – these are aspects of leadership that we see in Joseph that we would hope to see in the candidates at all levels of government as the 2008 campaign continues to unfold.

Have a happy remainder of Chanukah, everyone!

– L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

November 30, 2007

Dear Friends,

From time to time, we find ourselves in situations where we perceive that certain people are receiving special treatment. There may be some reason to which we are not privy that would put people in such an elevated position in relation to their peers. We may actually feel good about being shown favoritism at work or in our relationships, but we also may find that we prefer to accept such treatment when we earn it as a result of our own sincere and tireless efforts in the context of a "level playing field."

The story of Joseph and his brothers (no bursting into song here from the Weber/Rice production, although I do like that show!) illustrates what can happen when those who seem to be in the less favored position act on feelings of anger and resentment. We know from the end of this story that Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt for a good but, at the time, unknown reason: to save lives (more about that next week!). Yet, that does not justify Joseph's unabashed proclamation of his dreams without totally understanding why his dreams showed his family bowing down to him in the future, Jacob's demonstrations of his obvious preference for the children of Rachel over the others, or the jealousy of Joseph's brothers that led them to turn on him and sell him into slavery in Egypt, telling their father that Joseph had been killed by an animal. In Egypt, Joseph's fortunes alternated between preferential treatment (being put over his master's household and, later, all of Egypt) and time languishing in prison.

I believe that this story, as it unfolds, is intended to teach us that equality can emerge even out of a situation marked with favoritism, because life's circumstances and challenges have a way of "leveling the playing field" and requiring us to be supportive of each other, no matter what our status. Life may not be fair, but we can gain a sense of fairness when we see each other as brothers and sisters equally in need of support and encouragement. May this be the message we take with us into Chanukah, our celebration of an ancient victory for equality and freedom!
Shabbat Shalom!

– L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

November 20, 2007

Dear Friends,

As we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving, an American holiday with roots in the harvest festival of Sukkot, diplomats and leaders from the Middle East are preparing to participate in the Annapolis Peace conference, which is scheduled to be held next week. There have been many articles in newspapers and on the internet, as well as commentaries on news programs, that have expressed doubt about the wisdom of holding this conference at a time when the Palestinian leadership is still split between the Palestinian Authority in Judea/Samaria and Hamas in Gaza. The United States government is asking for the American Jewish community to wholeheartedly support this effort towards taking negotiations towards the "final status" level, where decisions could be made on the boundaries of two states, what land – and citizens – will be living in those political entities, and whether or not such an agreement will lead, finally, to peace.

The Torah reading for this week recounts one of the Torah's great tales of generating peace and reconciliation, the story of Jacob's and Esau's encounter after many years of separation. Although they did not remain together after their reunion, there are two elements of this episode that bear lessons for us, as well as for the negotiators at next week's meeting in Annapolis. Jacob's "wrestling match" (Genesis Chapter 32) may have been a struggle within himself as he realized that he needed to face up to the reality of his situation and his relationship with Esau. As Esau approached him with several hundred men in his entourage, and even after sending gifts to soften his brother's heart, Jacob knew he had to be able to personally greet his brother with honesty and humility after deceiving his brother so many years before. This meeting took courage on the part of both Jacob and Esau, and they did reconcile just enough to put their conflict behind them. Chapter 33 of Genesis declared that, when Jacob left this meeting to return to the city of Shechem, he was SHALEM, meaning "safe," "whole," "at peace" or "in friendship." A struggle from the past with Esau and the inner struggle of Jacob had resulted in peace between brothers and their families.

This is the type of peace that must emerge between nations and ethnic groups: a peace between people who see themselves as brothers and sisters who want to be SHALEM, living full lives and being able to approach one another with cooperation and respect. Let us hope that even some of that spirit will be engendered in Annapolis next week.

In the meantime, may we be grateful for the possibility to be SHALEM - safe, whole, and at peace - in our own lives as we join together to create a world filled with hope and SHALOM.

– L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

November 9, 2007

Dear Friends,

Tonight is the 69th anniversary of Kristallnacht. On November 9, 1938, the Nazis unleashed a wave of pogroms against Germany's Jews. In the space of a few hours, thousands of synagogues and Jewish businesses and homes were damaged or destroyed. This event came to be called Kristallnacht ("Night of Broken Glass") for the shattered store windowpanes that carpeted German streets. Remembrance of Kristallnacht reminds us of the terrible evils and injustices that have existed in the world, and how those evils can be triumphed over and, hopefully, avoided in the future. (Explanation taken from the Park Avenue Synagogue, New York, website).

Commemorating Kristallnacht, which signaled the true intentions of the Nazis regarding the Jews of Germany and Europe, should guide us to do what we can to stand up for people who are oppressed, whether in our country or halfway across the world. There is more that the nations of the world can do to end the crisis in Darfur (see www.rac.org for information about the new film, Darfur Now). We can continue to work to generate understanding among people of different backgrounds through personal conversations about celebration and faith. Through acts of tzedakah (righteous giving) or gemilut chasadim (acts of lovingkindness), we can reach out to people in our own community and in other countries and let them know we care about the entire family of humanity.

May we find new ways to turn memories of broken glass into words and actions that can bring healing and wholeness to the world. Shabbat Shalom.

– L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

November 2, 2007

Dear Friends,

If we were to list daily and even broader concerns in home and family, we would probably list items like:

- Taking care of chores and responsibilities.
- Paying bills on time.
- Maintaining communication through honesty and a willingness to compromise
- For parents, teaching children good values (such as fulfilling their responsibilities) and getting them to school and activities.
- Dealing with challenges by helping each other or seeking outside assistance.
- Doing what we can to sustain a positive attitude about work, school and life in general.

The Torah reading for this week, Chayei Sarah, recounts how Abraham dealt with the family challenges of acquiring a burial site for Sarah (and, eventually, much of his family) and finding a wife for his son, Isaac. In Abraham's negotiations for the burial plot in the village of Hebron, Ephron the Hittite approached Abraham with a business sense that incorporated sensitivity and a generosity of spirit. When Abraham sent his servant (whom the rabbis named Eliezer) to find a wife for Isaac among relatives in Abraham's previous home, the most important criterion for the proper spouse for Isaac was not who she was (or whose daughter she was) as much as how she acted. Eliezer was looking for someone who, like his master, took initiative to be welcoming, hospitable and kind. He prayed that he would find a young woman who would reflect those values. When Eliezer met Rebekah, he noted her beauty, but was taken even more by her willingness to offer him and his camels water to drink of her own accord. This was the way that Abraham had always treated his guests, and Eliezer knew that Isaac needed a wife that would carry on Abraham's and Sarah's willingness to honor the strangers that would come their way. What seemed to be a small act of kindness spoke volumes about Rebekah's personality.

There are times when routine tasks may take up much of our time and energy. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that every task is significant, and that the ways in which we deal with our responsibilities and challenges should reflect the best of our personality and our values to our family members, friends and community. Shabbat Shalom!

— L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

October 26, 2007

Dear Friends,

I remember well the morning of November 18, 1967, the Saturday when I became Bar Mitzvah. I was very prepared, but I did not anticipate the need to deal with an inevitable case of nerves. For twenty minutes, I walked all around the Temple hallways (and there were plenty of them!) to ease the stress! I did, eventually, "settle down" and join my family as we ascended onto the bimah to celebrate my own milestone of Jewish learning.

The Torah portion I read that day was from Genesis, Chapter 18, which recounts the enthusiastic hospitality with which Abraham, Sarah and their household greeted three guests who came their way. The men were, in this story, three messengers from God—angels—who were on a mission to let Abraham and Sarah know that they would soon bear a child together (Isaac). When the guests appeared, Abraham RAN to greet them. He HUMBL Y bowed to the ground, saying, "If I have found favor in your sight, do not pass your servant by." He HURRIED to the tent to ask Sarah to bake bread. He RAN to prepare the rest of the meal. Then he stood over the visitors as they reclined under a tree and ate.

One rabbinic tradition notes that Abraham's and Sarah's tent was open on all four sides to better welcome people who would pass their way, needing a brief respite from their journeys. That is what our homes can potentially be for our families, friends and neighbors. It is what a congregation can be as well. For example, our worship services (open to all of any age who would attend), study sessions, social events, dinners, programs and meetings are not offered simply for the benefit of the planners and leaders of those events. They are presented to help each of us find respite, relief, support, reassurance, affirmation—a sense of who we are as individuals and as members of a community. Within our building, prayer, song, conversation, sharing meals, counseling, discussing issues and ideas, and joining in efforts to extend a helping hand to the community make us like Abraham and Sarah. We are here for one another, and also for those of any age who seek a source of communal and spiritual nourishment. This is our task as congregants and partners who join together to make Temple Israel a haven and home.

So may we be like Abraham and Sarah, opening our homes, our congregation and our hearts on all sides to assure that those who come our way will continue to journey safely along the path of life. Shabbat Shalom!

— L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

October 19, 2007

Dear Friends,

What does it mean to "make a soul," or, put differently, "acquire a soul?"

Soul can mean a "person," or it can refer, as one religious school student put it, "the part of you inside that makes you who you are." We are probably familiar with references to this word in phrases like "stir one's soul," "don't lose your soul" or "I would sell my soul for _____."

In the Torah reading for this week, we read that Abram and his wife Sarai (their original names) left their home in Haran and journeyed to the land of Canaan, taking with them their possessions, and the "NEFESH" – the soul – that they had made in Haran.

I have always found that phrase to be puzzling and unclear. According to one very simple explanation, the Hebrew word for "soul," NEFESH, which is technically singular, can also mean "souls," or "people." In this case, it may refer to an entourage that consisted of slaves that Abram and Sarai had acquired throughout the journeys.

Yet, some commentators challenge this notion of "soul acquisition" meaning the purchase of slaves, because it would have said "the souls/people they purchased" and not "souls that they made." Rabbinic midrash, seeking to understand this phrase, asserted that "making souls" really meant what it said, but on a different level. Abram and Sarai added people to their household by making or renewing their soul, their spiritual essence, changing their belief from the worship of many gods to the monotheism that is traditionally ascribed to Abram and Sarai. As "Soul-Makers," Abram and Sarai became the spiritual parents of those who adopted this new belief in One God. This passage is one reason why a person who converts to Judaism takes a Hebrew name as "the son/daughter of Abraham and Sarah."

We can still, today, "make souls" without reference to conversion to Judaism. We may inspire each other, or our friends or family members, through something we say to them to offer comfort or support that "makes their soul" something other than it was before. We teach children (perhaps grandchildren as well!) to develop their own sense of who they are based in positive values, thus "making their souls" in such a way that they will value being a member of the family of humanity. When we come to a new understanding about the meaning of our lives, based on what we have done so far and the goals we have set for the immediate or distant future, we "make our souls" anew, preserving who we have been but adding dimensions that will guide us in a different direction than before.

Making souls, both for others and for ourselves, is one way that we respond to a call (like the one Abram received – "go forth") to move forward with our lives, to grow, and to change in ways that can deepen our reverence and zest for life. May the NEFESH we make enrich our character and lead us to greater respect for each and every NEFESH in the world. Shabbat Shalom!

– L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

October 12, 2007

Dear Friends,

The rainbow, several of which we have seen on the Seacoast in the last year (I have several photos of a double rainbow over Temple Israel!), is a fascinating phenomenon. Sometimes single, sometimes double, it appears (necessarily so) when a rainstorm ends and the "sun breaks through the clouds." Scientific explanations of this dispersion of light through raindrops give us insight into why we see this brilliant display of red-orange-yellow-green-blue-indigo violet colors in the sky from time to time. Those descriptions cannot take away from the character of the rainbow that makes us stop what we are doing and gaze, even if just for a moment.

At the end of the story of the flood in the Torah portion for this week, God designates the "rainbow set in the clouds" as the sign of a covenant between the divine and humanity that there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth and all life. The rabbis created a blessing to recite when we see a rainbow based on this passage: "Blessed are You, Eternal One, Ruler of the Universe, who remembers and is faithful to a covenant, and who keeps promises."

Following the flood story comes the tale of all humanity, speaking one language, building a tower to the sky to "make a name for themselves." God responds to the haughtiness of humanity by causing them to speak, for the first time, in many different languages.

There is a lesson of the importance of acknowledging and accepting diversity in both of these stories. Human beings who spoke one language readily developed delusions of grandeur and invincibility. Their sudden breakdown in communication would remind them to be humble and challenge them to find new ways to cooperate and to attempt to learn from each other. The sign of the rainbow, with its many colors, encourages us to recognize how humanity is like the rainbow itself, diverse but still living together, side by side, where all of our individual and collective characteristics are reflections of one source of light.

From these stories and symbols, may we remember how differences in perspective, background, expertise and ability can strengthen a community, or even an entire world.

– L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

October 5, 2007

Dear Friends,

Light is a symbol that is very familiar to us within our heritage and in our culture. We are grateful, or, perhaps, we should not take for granted, the light that comes from the sun on both cloudless and overcast days, or the lights in our homes that we can turn on (and off) due to human ingenuity and our ability to gain access to that power through the work we do every day. There are lights that distinguish the outline of cities and neighborhoods (as seen from above) and illuminate particular landmarks. Due to the presence of lights in stadiums old and new, a sporting event can begin at 8:30 pm as a matter of course, when we know it has only been possible to play a "night game" for a century or less.

The Haftarah reading for this week, from the book of Isaiah, Chapter 42, declares that we should be a "light to the nations." What does it mean to be a light to the nations? The Torah: A Modern Commentary explains that this is "generally understood to mean that God has created Israel to be a messenger of good tidings, who will lead the world to acknowledge One God and thereby guide it to unity, justice and peace." The Commentary also notes that Reform Judaism saw in the challenge to be a "light to the nations" an imperative to make the struggle for unity and peace central to our service to the community and the world.

Words like "enlighten" and "illuminate" and phrases like "shed light on..." and "bring to light" have connotations that relate not only to being able to see with our eyes, but to discern and understand in our minds and to the depths of our souls. Being a "light" to the nations can mean that each of us can contribute to the community a unique understanding of what it means to be a community, to care about each other, and to help people in need in our vicinity and around the world. Being a "light" casts each of us as teachers and students who continually seek to find new ways to lead the world closer to unity, justice and peace. May this challenge and charge be a guiding light for us every day of our lives.

– L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

September 28, 2007

Dear Friends,

The book of Ecclesiastes, which is read on the holiday of Sukkot, says that "Two are better than one, for if one falls, one person will lift up the other." It also states in that passage that three are even better than two!

The first portion in the Torah, B'raysheet (after we read the creation section for Simchat Torah Wednesday night), recounts the biblical tale of two people at the beginning (or one, and then two), telling us that the two of them were not able to keep all of the rules that had been established for them. When they had two sons, one day, perhaps due to jealousy, or some other conflict about which the text is silent, a rule - that human life is sacred - was broken. In that case, the Torah noted that God put a "mark" on Cain, who had taken the life of his brother Abel, to let all people know that, at some point, we have to stop and think about our actions (in this case, acting on anger), rather than to allow an impulse to guide our behavior in a way we will regret later. While Cain had acted on such an impulse, it was going to be the "third party," that is, every other person Cain would encounter, who would help to strengthen the integrity of community by seeing Cain as a symbol of how important it is to consider what we say and do. Two are better than one, but three are better than two, because the three (or more) make a community even stronger. May we remember that our individual presence - whether we are second, third or beyond - can serve to sustain a community as a source of hope and a guardian of peace. Shabbat Shalom!

– L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.

September 23, 2007

Dear Friends,

As I did on Yom Kippur afternoon, I want to share with you some brief commentary from our B'nei Mitzvah/Seventh Grade class on selected verses from the Yom Kippur Afternoon Torah reading from Leviticus 19. This section is known as the "Holiness Code" because it begins with the phrase, "You shall be holy, for I, your Eternal God, am holy." The commandments in this passage are central not only to the Torah but also to Judaism and essential for creating positive and productive relationships in our lives. Here are the verses and the comments from our students:

Verse 11: "You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another."

Comments:

- Be respectful of people's things and their right to knowledge.
- Fairness.
- Give, do not take.
- The basis of many laws.

Verse 18: You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against members of your people. Love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Eternal.

Comments:

- Be respectful.
- The Golden Rule.
- Have trust in yourself.
- Do not hurt others.
- Don't stay angry at other people.
- An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.

Verse 34: The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens; you shall love each one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Eternal am your God.

Comments:

- Welcome people to your land because your ancestors were once strangers.
- Have respect for new people that come along.
- You YOURSELF were a stranger once.

These comments from our Seventh Graders offer unique insights into these verses, especially in the emphasis on self-trust in "Love your neighbor as yourself" and "YOU were strangers in the land of Egypt." These verses speak to each of us when we realize how they might relate to our lives. Respect, fairness, giving, consideration for others, letting go of anger and welcoming the stranger are values that are a part of many faiths and societies, but, as pointed out by the B'nei Mitzvah class, they are among the most important teachings of our heritage.

In the spirit of these comments, may we learn from each other – and from community members of all ages – in the year to come. Best wishes to everyone for a happy and healthy 5768, and I hope to see you at our upcoming holiday celebrations!

September 14, 2007

Dear Friends,

As a sports fan who respects figures in sports who try to set a good example, news about the New England Patriots this week caught my attention. I want to highlight part of Bill Belichick's remarks on Thursday, September 13 that relate to this time of year:

"I accept full responsibility for the actions that led to tonight's ruling. Once again, I apologize to the Kraft family and every person directly or indirectly associated with the New England Patriots for the embarrassment, distraction and penalty my mistake caused."

I believe that these are the key words in Coach Belichick's statement:

- I accept full responsibility
- I apologize
- My mistake

The High Holy Days remind us that we should own our mistakes, accept full responsibility for them, and apologize to those who have been hurt by our words or actions. Once that has happened, we can begin again with a chance to do better in the future.

I am personally impressed with Coach Belichick's prompt public apology. May we, also, make our private declarations of responsibility and a determination to change during the Days of Awe and throughout the year. Shabbat Shalom and Shanah Tovah.

— L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.