

Dvar Parshat Chaya Sarah, Pittsburgh murders

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This week's parchat is Chaya Sarah, it deals with the finding of a wife for Isaac and leads into the line of Ishmael and the death of Sarah and Rebecca becoming the matriarch that kept things together. It is a beautiful story and illustrates wonderfully the very concept that has kept Judaism alive and has ensured our survival no matter what. The concept is L'Dor V'dor from generation unto generation. In the face of forced exile, forced conversions, attempts at genocide, slavery, persecution, inquisition, the Holocaust, Munich, the continuing Arab assault on modern Israel from its birth right up till now. We've survived terrorism, and now hate filled and hate driven murder at a Shabbos service at a Congregation called Aytz Chaim, Tree of Life. Jews are taught who we are, where we come from, we are taught to love not hate and we are taught that no matter what no matter how we are attacked, we must survive, as a people we must survive. We are a chosen people, chosen by god to make sure his promise goes forward and that his Torah shall never be laid aside by mankind. Being chosen has meant that we have faced countless centuries of trials of assault. It has meant that each succeeding generation has had its faith tested, that too has been L'dor v'dor from generation unto generation. We have even a bigger obligation than to survive, we must survive and remain a holy people. We must remember that we cannot apply to others that which has been directed against us. We are not allowed to hate, we are not allowed to judge or deny justice, we cannot apply stereotyping nor can we apply discrimination. As Jews, as a holy people, we do not have the luxury

of saying all Moslems are terrorists we must know and remember that simply is not the truth, and we are required to remember that though some terrorists are Moslems, all terrorists and those who murder the innocent are not Moslems. Just as all Hispanic immigrants are not murderers and rapists. The slaughter that occurred in Pittsburgh was perpetrated by a Christian and the Moslem community of Pittsburgh was the first to stand up and support Aytz Chaim spiritually, financially and even offering to physically help to protect the damaged and desecrated synagogue. As a people who have been nomads for thousands of years we must also remember that just as our ancestors were seeking a better life, acceptance and peace in their wandering so do the vast majority of immigrants who seek to enter America. The promise of Emma Lazarus' poem, the New Colossus, inscribed on the Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World offers all who seek refuge a promise. The Statue of Liberty stands with a welcoming beacon in New York Harbor, inviting immigrants and telling them they are welcome and they can be at home and be safe here:

**“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”**

This welcome must remain part of the American national persona, it is a part of who we are and what America is.

Finally as Jews, and American Jews, we must always keep in our heads and hearts the words of Reverend Friedrich Gustav Emil Martin Niemöller.

The reverend's immortal words make us keenly aware that when one set of people are persecuted, endure discrimination and are the target of governmental abuse and scapegoating, all people are in danger of the same. Here are Reverend Niemoller's words:

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a communist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

As Jews and as Americans we must understand when we say never again, we cannot just apply it to ourselves, we must not let the abuse, the attacks , the assaults go uncondemned regardless of who they are directed against. As the evil that befell our brothers and sisters of Aytz Chaim sitting at prayer, as we were last Shabbos when this was happening, feeling safe and secure as we were last Saturday when this was happening, looking forward to a little Kiddush nosh as we were last Saturday, as this evil proves if we allow it to happen to others, if we allow hate and scapegoating to be acceptable, we must realize we can be the next victims, it could have been us. That is not just a dramatic statement, it is a fact but for the grace of God.

God bless the 11 victims of hate in Pittsburgh, grant peace to their families and help our nation to understand that hate is not the way, that discrimination is not the way and that fear of those that are different, those to whom America provides hope is not who we are. Good Shabbos to all of you, treasure each Shabbos in remembrance of those 11 innocents in Pittsburgh who gave their lives simply because they were Jews following God's commandment to remember the sabbath and keep it holy.