

## A National Day of Mourning

The first nine days of the Hebrew month of Av, and also the morning of the tenth, are days of acute mourning for the destruction of the First and Second Holy Temples in Jerusalem. The Sages teach that the Temples were destroyed due to the sin of *Sinas Chinam*; baseless hatred of one another. This comes from a Gemara in *Yoma* (9b) which says so explicitly.

In the nine days preceding the destruction, it is customary not to drink wine and to refrain from other celebratory rights. The day of *Tisha B'Av*, always postponed for the Sabbath, is a fast day. So strict is the fast that for almost 26 hours nothing is eaten or consumed, not even water. The day of mourning typically comes during the summer months in North America and therefore, although certain kinds of work may be performed, it can be very difficult to fast on a hot day.

It occurred to me that in antiquity, fasting was a typical response to the belief that society was so degenerated that something dramatic needed to be done. Fasting in many cultures was intended to placate the Deity who rained destruction on the people for their copious quantity of sins. Fasting, in the Jewish tradition, has often accompanied national danger, such as when Queen Esther asked the people to fast as part of a supplication for deliverance from enemies who intended their destruction.

Yom Kippur is considered to be a fast of joy. When the Temples stood in Jerusalem, Yom Kippur was not regarded as dour or a struggle to endure but rather the celebratory highlight of the year. The High Priest confessed the sins of the people on the scapegoat which was sent into the wilderness. The people rejoiced at being forgiven for their sins. The Torah explicitly and without reservation commands the people on Yom Kippur to "afflict their souls" which was clearly understood as the fast.

How is that afflicting one's souls related to fasting? The short answer is that when our spirits are in danger or have been challenged by the mean-spirited secular world, we should deprive ourselves of materiality in order to appreciate what really matters.

Anyone today who would suggest fasting as a response to the slaughter that has occurred to American innocence over the last few years would be considered a lunatic. However, it is reasonable to suggest that we should turn inward; that each of us should examine our own souls and fast in solidarity with those who appreciate that baseless hatred is destroying the fabric of American society. The proverb that, "the more things change, the more they stay the same" sometimes attributed to Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr certainly seems to fit. We deal every day with baseless, indescribable and senseless hatred. Hatred and intolerance frequently turns to violence, road rage, and simply crude behavior. It seems as though a national consensus is needed in order to move this country out of its current political gridlock and into a more productive modality.

Recently, in dealing with the rights of the Amish and the local township, I was struck by a sign outside of Elimsport urging residents to “take their town back,” and accompanied by six skull and crossbones: three on either side of the large sign. To his credit, the solicitor of the Township condemned the sign in view of the recent carnage that we have all witnessed. However, condemning obviously is not good enough.

There is no question that as a society we need to take action against gun violence, access to dangerous weapons by unstable individuals, emotional illnesses, poverty and a variety of other problems. We will continue to argue about the priorities and the real cause of the disturbing healthcare crisis that we are facing as manifested by access to and the use of weapons.

In the popular song Revolution, the Beatles suggested:

“You say you’ll change the Constitution,  
Well, you know,  
we all want to change your head.”

One group says that the problem is the National Rifle Association. President Trump claims that we need to address mental illness. The truth is that everyone is right. The problem is indeed easy access to weapons, the political power of certain special interests over others, mental illness and a lack of a connection with the Divine. The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society, written in 1967, was a report by the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. Chairman Nicholas de B. Katzenbach outlined the “urgency” of the Nation’s crime problem. This was a time of LBJ’s Great Society which crumbled under the weight of the Vietnam War.

Crime and violence against minorities was prevalent in the United States cities dating back to the first wave of European immigration to this country after the American Civil War. The problem is not new and many of the solutions have been hashed out in the public previously.

Dealing with many civil rights issues over the years, and indeed defending such cases as well, it is evident to me that fear of the unknown, intolerance and blatantly ignoring Leviticus 18 and 19, not to hold a grudge and to love (or at least respect) one’s neighbor as much as one’s self, are at the forefront of the horrors we are witnessing today. A report was written by several Department of Treasury lawyers in 1944 entitled, “Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews.” The report makes for fascinating reading. It is clear, as others have written subsequently, that the Allies not only were fully aware of Hitler’s plan to kill every Jew in Europe but in fact gave him the green light. The Roosevelt Administration should be condemned for its actions for eternity.

I will be fasting on Sunday, August 11<sup>th</sup>, starting Saturday night at 8:05 p.m. to 8:33 p.m. August 11<sup>th</sup>; no food and no drink. During that time, I will spend the morning

and perhaps part of the afternoon in Synagogue reading and thinking about the cause and solution to the problem of baseless hatred. I suggest that others take a day, deprive themselves of corporal existence, and think about what we can do for ourselves and our society to eliminate the causes of baseless hatred.

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