

Shabbat Parashat Aḥarei Mot-K'doshim Responding to the Boston Marathon Tragedy

Not again...

Whether it happens in Israel, in a small town or in a big city in the United States or even in downtown Vancouver, how many more times are we going to need to figure out how to feel and respond to tragic and destructive events perpetrated by our fellow human beings on this earth? I find myself constantly asking how it could be that people could be so alike physiologically, yet so completely different philosophically, ideologically, and theologically. It is true that our differences are what make the human species so unique, creative, and special on earth. However, do we need to be so different that some of us devalue human life itself and overvalue death? This is the essential question that I find so difficult, that I continue to ask, while knowing that I will not find the answer... So I, and we, are left only to figure out—yet again—what to do and how to live our lives in response to, and in the aftermath of, another tragedy.

Thankfully, our Jewish tradition does not lack in lessons and instructions for cases like these. Perhaps not so coincidentally, this week's double *parasha*/weekly Torah portion is translated to mean "After Death-Be Holy!" Many others have told the heroic and courageous stories of the first responders who ran into the breach after the explosions in Boston much more eloquently and knowledgeably than I can. However, the spirit of what they - and the many regular citizens and marathoners who did what they could to help in both small and large ways - all did was precisely in line with the Jewish value and charge to "Be Holy!" This charge to us (and really to all humanity) is vague when taken on its own. However, the text of *parashat K'doshim* enlightens us as to the meaning of the command. It is through the fulfillment of *mitzvot* - many of which deal with showing love, compassion, and caring for those suffering or in strife - that we elevate our daily lives to the level of holiness. One of the *mitzvot* in this week's *parasha* is "Do not stand idly by the blood of your fellow." (Lev. 19:16) How appropriate is this verse and commandment in light of the actions of so many in Boston? In the face of tragedy, they all brought a glimmer of light and holiness into the darkness and void that the bombs created.

In sports, many athletes talk about "doing things the right way" as being the path to success. Our tradition believes the same thing. However, it is not for the achievement of a championship or other earthly rewards that we do the right things. It is for the purpose of living lives in the spirit of what God and Judaism want from us - and modeling such behavior for those around us (being a light unto the nations) - that we are to fulfill the *mitzvot* and bring holiness into the world.

I pray that someday, all of humanity will see the light of the Jewish understanding of holiness and value of life over death, peace over violence. Until then, we can only continue to fight to bring more and more of that light and holiness into the world, serving as God's emissaries and partners on this earth.

May we not need to find ways to understand tragedy again for a right long time!

May God bring comfort to all those in Boston and around the world who are suffering in the aftermath of this tragedy.

May this Shabbat truly be a Shabbat Shalom - a Shabbat of Peace!