

RABBI'S MESSAGE

A MONTH TO REMEMBER

May is a month for remembering. One of the most significant things we remember in May is Mother's Day. The second Sunday in May has been dedicated to motherhood in America for over 100 years. Whether you are or have a mother; whether your mother is still in your life or of blessed memory...mothers have always been the first (and often most important) influences in our lives. Mothers are protectors, advocates, carpool drivers, tutors and so much more! Sometimes our biggest cheerleaders and other times our harshest critics, there is no doubt that motherhood is one of the most sacred and difficult tasks in the world; and so Mother's Day is perhaps one of the most acknowledged holidays in America. Phone calls, emails, flowers and greeting card sales all spike for Mother's Day.

The modern Jewish calendar also provides various reasons for remembrance during this season. As Passover is the season of the rebirth of the Jewish nation, the following weeks give several other remembrances. Thirty-three days after Passover is the festive Lag B'Omer. While not a holiday listed in the Torah, Lag B'Omer (literally the 33rd day of the counting of the Omer, or the daily counting between Passover and Shavuot) celebrated the end of 2nd Century plague. It is celebrated with picnics and outdoor games. Two back-to-back days in the middle of the month are about remembering Israel. Yom Ha-Zikaron (day of remembrance) is to honor fallen Israeli soldiers. Since all Israeli citizens are expected to serve in the military, everyone in Israel has lost loved ones in wars during Israel's 68-year statehood. Yom Ha-Zikaron is a very solemn day, and ALL activity – including traffic -- stops for two full minutes while a siren gives people time to silently remember those who sacrificed their lives. But when the sun goes down, the next day is Independence Day, and the celebrating is as joyous as any day on the calendar.

Of all these remembrances, perhaps the most powerful is Yom HaShoah, a day for remembering the Holocaust. The biblical word Shoah means destruction or devastation. Holocaust with a small "h" could mean any devastation. But the word Holocaust is now synonymous with the devastation of the Jewish population through the Nazi regime. There is another international Holocaust Remembrance Day in January, developed by the United Nations. That day has not caught on as much as the day Israel designated, Nissan 27. Shortly after Passover, when we rejoice in freedom, we confront the darkest period in our history. It helps us remember how important it is to appreciate life. Whether it comes from a Pharaoh or a Hitler, hatred and intolerance threaten our very being. Learning and listening keep it real. Remembering is important; hence the credo "Never Again." And action is just as important as remembering.

Jews and other "non-Aryans" were de-humanized. Once people were able to accept that humans being reduced to categories and labels, they were able to rationalize their indifference. As philosopher Edmund Burke stated (and repeated by many): "The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing." Or, as Holocaust survivor and author Elie Wiesel put it, "the opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference."

The opposite of indifference is caring. We lead by example. Pirke Avot (Ethics of our Ancestors) says, "Where there is no *mensch*, be a *mensch*!"

As we learn the lessons of the darkest times, let's also remember how to repair the world G-d gave us. We can be the ones to ensure the world won't forget the horrors; but also to remember the potential of a world where all humans are treated with the dignity of being G-d's divine creations.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon

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