

# Weekly Teaching

July 7, 2017



**Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn leads services at Iwo Jima, 1945  
(American Jewish Historical Society)**

With our recent celebration of American Independence, I thought about the high price that is often paid in defense of our liberty.

Especially on my mind was the story of Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn, who served as military chaplain assigned to the Fifth Marine Division at the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945.

Rabbi Gittelsohn's tireless efforts to comfort the wounded and encourage the fearful won him three service ribbons.

When the fighting was over, Rabbi Gittelsohn was asked to deliver the memorial sermon at a combined religious service dedicating the Marine Cemetery.

*Here lie men who loved America because their ancestors, generations ago, helped in her founding, and other men who loved her with equal passion because they themselves or their own fathers escaped from oppression to her blessed shores. Here lie officers and men, Negroes and whites, rich men and poor...together. Here are Protestants, Catholics and Jews together. Here no man prefers another because of his faith or despises him because of his color. Here there are no quotas of how many from each group are admitted or allowed. Among these men, there is no discrimination. No prejudices. No hatred. There is the highest and purest democracy...Whosoever of us lifts his hand in hate against a brother, or who thinks himself superior to those who happen to be in the minority, makes of this ceremony and the bloody sacrifice it commemorates, an empty, hollow mockery. To this, then, as our solemn duty, sacred duty do we the living now dedicate ourselves: to the right of Protestants, Catholics and Jews, of white men and Negroes alike, to enjoy the democracy for which all of them have here paid the price...We here solemnly swear that this shall not be in vain. Out of this and from the suffering and sorrow of those who mourn this will come, we promise, the birth of a new freedom for the sons of men everywhere.*

Rabbi Gittelsohn's words were shared in *Time* magazine, and also placed into the Congressional Record.

His words ring as powerfully today as they did in 1945.

It is our religious obligation as American Jews to continue to assure that the sacrifices paid by others for our liberty shall never be taken in vain.

We are charged to cherish our rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

And similarly charged to assure that these rights are granted to all of our fellow Americans

As American Jews, we must, on an on-going basis, help to assure for our nation's citizenry that God's Divine Presence shines within our National Soul.

And to advocate always for our national leaders that we guarantee to continue to keep our hearts and minds open to the great worth of human life, and the responsibilities that accompany human freedom.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch

[rabbimitch@templesholom.com](mailto:rabbimitch@templesholom.com)