

Weekly Teaching

May 26, 2017

We live in an amazing country; a free democratic society that has been the paradise that our immigrant forebears imagined when they came to the shores of America.

But, it's the "free" that also challenges us.

With the blessings of freedom comes the imperative to actively choose the religious priorities of our lives, for they will not be chosen for us.

"Separation of Church and State" guarantees that there will be no dictation of religious form. But, this doctrine can also be a catalyst to the diminishment, or even the elimination, of "church"/"synagogue."

Secular, by definition, is the actions or attitudes by which there is no religious or spiritual basis. Unless we make a conscious choice otherwise, secularism whittles away at our Jewish essence. Secularism even whittles away at the meaning of our American essence.

Think of our upcoming American observance of Memorial Day.

The holiday in its "sacred" framework is intended to prompt our memory and gratitude for those "defenders of liberty" who have died fighting our country's wars. Amidst many corners of our nation we will observe the mitzvah of remembrance.

But, as I can personally testify, these ceremonies are not attended by the multitudes. In fact they often are attended by only a few people. The religious act of paying tribute is slowly dying because of the affliction of irreligion that secularism can prompt.

The only antidote is making a conscious choice. Taking a "neutral" posture will only prompt the vehicle of holiness to fall further down the "secular mountain."

Secularism also whittles at our *kavanah*, the "intentions" of our soul.

We have to consciously choose our spiritual posture, or our secular stance will eventually cement our ability to walk God's holy path.

Choose your Judaism, and re-choose it over and over again.

Don't spend all of your "worship" time at the altars of secular life. Instead consciously choose to make "holy;" to "separate" from the mundane so as to re-claim the sacred.

Once a week, consciously choose to experience an element of the Sabbath so as to create a sacred space and time within your life.

Once a day, consciously choose to offer a prayer by which you can re-discover how to seek help so as to improve your life, and express gratitude for your blessings.

And, with both the Jewish and American holidays, consciously choose to participate in rituals that more firmly anchor the identity that you most treasure.

On Memorial Day, take the time to remember. Share a story of just one of our heroes with your family and friends. Consciously speak about your appreciation for their courage and sacrifice. Physically, or at least spiritually, choose to stand by the graves of our heroes and remember. Choose the moment by which you can stand still in sorrow and in silence, in grief and in gratitude, in reverence and reflection, and appreciate fully the legacy left to us.

And, a few days later, choose to re-claim your Torah at Mount Sinai on Shavuot. Choose to re-prioritize your Covenant with God and your fellow Jews, the commitment to seek holiness and be a “light unto the nations,” even while living in a secular society.

Abraham Lincoln prayerfully declared:

“With malice towards none, with charity towards all, let us go forward to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and for his orphan, to do all that we can to achieve a just and lasting peace amongst ourselves.”

This posture of holiness isn’t procured accidentally; we all need to choose its pursuit.

May the memories of our soldiers, our defenders of liberty, eternally be for a blessing.

And may those men and women who are presently in harm’s way be safely returned to their families, and their nation.

Amen.

Shabbat Shalom,
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