

Weekly Teaching

May 3, 2019



Yesterday, I participated in the *National Day of Prayer*. The *National Day of Prayer* was initiated by members of Christian religious leadership throughout the country. In some communities, this day has been used for promoting a particularistic expression of religious form and content that is foreign to our own Jewish expressions of faith. However, in our local community, religious leadership has created a day of prayer that safeguards the secure expression of prayer for all faiths ([click here](#) to view photos from *Greenwich Time*).

During our time together, we heard selections from the Bible that resounded through our shared public space, and we were treated to the joyful hopes and expressions of gratitude found in wonderful and various faith traditions. Together, we sang as a faithful community some of our most cherished patriotic songs; the familiar words and melodies ringing out as strong and clear as our Liberty Bell.

Sometimes finding inspiration while at prayer can be challenging. This was not the case at this special service. I am used to praying in one voice with our congregation, and feeling moved by the communal aspect of our intent and solidarity. This civil ceremony, while an Interfaith event, was powerful in its own way. I found myself wanting to explore what made it powerful for me personally.

The people gathering reflected a mixture of our American cultural identity and values, and our collective religious commitment to prayer and ethical monotheism. This group, attending this special day, were simultaneously discerning, seeking and petitioning God. We were calling upon God's Outstretched Hand to assist us with our actions pertaining to: business, education, families, influence of media, government, defense, and our police, firefighters and military forces that protect us all.

I also was treated to the keen prayerful reminder of the fourth verse to *America the Beautiful*, and also a verse in *My Country 'Tis of Thee* that I had forgotten.

The prayerful words referred to the geography of our land and much more:

"I love thy rocks and rills,
thy woods and templed hills;
My heart with rapture thrills
like that above."

We Americans are passionate, and this is the essence of our national character. We are passionate about justice, tolerance, freedom, heroism, spirituality, humanity, progress, faith and America itself. As a multi-ethnic, multi-religious American collective nation, we are comfortable with our emotions that fuel our passions, but we are tempered with careful thought and well-honed discipline.

At the heart of believing in Ethical Monotheism, is in realizing that love is the most basic need of all humanity. At all times we try to find love, to hold it, and keep it as it changes form, character and predictability on us and within us. Faith recognizes that love's strength and hold ebbs and flows within and from us. We pursue and try to secure love, but, like the air or the ocean, love defies our efforts to ever completely master it. We can live within love, but we cannot own it.

Religions equating love and God is not new because they are so similar in effect. My dwelling on these phenomena of love, passion and patriotism during our *National Prayer Day* inspired me, and made the experience the most worthwhile. At our sacred Interfaith gathering, I felt the power of our love that frames the passions of our national character. On this day our faiths praying together managed to cast aside the darkness of international fear and fury. This prayerful positive day generated feelings that to this very moment I am still finding powerfully restorative.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Mitch
rabbimitch@templesholom.com

