



Torah for Turbulent Times “Be Holy, Have Hope”

Sinking my teeth into that first bite of a soft, pillowy, hole(y) bagel post-Passover, I almost forgot for a moment that we were still living under quarantine. Several seders, a few rounds of the mandatory four cups, and eight days later, I was transported. Celebrating freedom and liberation definitely had a different taste and feeling this year. We’re all still living under stress and strain, as the pandemic plague remains with us. But, the simple pleasure of returning to a “normal diet” following Passover this year felt, well, satisfying and almost indulgent. At least some things can return to normal.

After a couple of days of enjoying bagels, pizza, croissants and challah, our family has settled back into a more regulated routine. Following Passover, our Jewish calendar picks up with what some of us refer to as the “*Yom Ha’s.*” That is, *Yom Hashoah*/Holocaust Remembrance Day, *Yom Hazikaron*/Israel’s Memorial Day and *Yom Ha’atzmaut*/Independence Day. The community gathered on Zoom this week for the first of these, Holocaust Remembrance Day. It was a surreal experience to be remembering the millions of lives lost, as we sat in our homes, isolated from the rest of the world. But, it also gave me hope to be gathered together in collective memory.

This past Shabbat we discussed the themes of loss of life and holiness in the Torah as it relates to keeping kosher. The narrative of the death of two of Aaron’s sons is given various rational explanations by many commentators. For me though, what rings true today is that some things are simply beyond human comprehension. As for the laws of keeping kosher, some might say the same. Ultimately though, we learn that we are to be holy and that in a way, we are what we eat. Among ethical behavior and ritual practice, our diet is also deeply connected to our identity. The Torah teaches that each one of us, being created in the image of G-d, is holy. This of course, comes along with a few responsibilities.

Staring at the screen for the commemoration of Yom Hashoah, I recognized this essential teaching. Since there is a divine spark in each of us, when we gather together as a community we bring a unique flash of illumination and brilliance into our hearts and homes. In one Zoom frame, we sang, prayed, shared, listened, grieved, and remembered, together. The image on my screen, our new sanctuary of sorts, captured a snapshot of holiness and hope. Hope is sewn into the fabric of our souls, our inner beings, our *kishkes*. It's that glimmer or twinkle in the eyes of each of us. I know it's with us because I've seen it with my own eyes. Along with study, prayer, song, humor, and food, hope is essential to our collective human and spiritual life. "Just as we cannot live without dreams, so we cannot live without hope. If dreams reflect the past, hope summons the future." (Elie Weisel)

As we gather again on Wednesday evening next week, we'll share stories of our various experiences of living in and visiting Israel. We'll listen to music, and we'll conclude by singing Israel's national anthem, "*Hatikvah* - The Song of Hope." Hope for better health. Hope for peace. Hope for life and our planet. As a community, a people, a nation, and a world, we have the power to summon the future and to hold out hope.

-Rabbi Mark