

Shabbat Shalom

What a week it has been. We have been witness to the mighty destructive power of nature and the devastation that has come in its path. The pictures from the Gulf Coast and New Orleans have been heartbreaking to see. I grew up in this part of the country. Biloxi and New Orleans were towns that we often visited. New Orleans was my home away from home in High school. And so to see the city flooded and the people stranded and the violence and chaos swirling there, has saddened me deeply.

We see such chaos there and the failure of government to adequately respond. If you had means- money or transportation- you were able to flee, if you were sick or poor and relied on public transportation—you were out of luck and the most vulnerable in society have received the worst of it. It is almost a week and there are people still stranded. Bodies still piling up.

The roaming gangs, the looting and utter anarchy that prevails today in the Crescent City on the Mississippi River should give pause to us all. Humanity can take such a turn for the worse when desperate. Yes, our Torah portion speaks loudly upon this subject—See this day I set before you blessing and curse—blessing if you obey the commandments and curse if you do not obey the commandments. How easy it is to choose curse—and the consequences of that choice—has victims shooting at the medic helicopters sent to bring out those who are ill.

With such great synchronicity, our Haftarah this morning seems also to speak directly to both the victims of hurricane Katrina and to each one of us who have witnessed the horror. Isaiah speaks words of comfort—“Unhappy storm tossed one, uncomforted! I will lay down gems as your building stones and I will make your foundations of sapphires”. The Haftarah embodies a message of hope that even as the storm abates—a brighter future—rebuilt will be our inheritance. Let us hope and pray that this will be true as well for the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

That future will mean making order out of chaos. No different than the original creation story—the order that came out of the *tohu v'vohu*. A Divine order. But we must not forget that even in the Creation Stories of Genesis that human beings are a significant part of that story. Even as we shall be part of this re-creation story—the recreation of the communities along the Gulf Coast that were devastated. Although we live so far away-we must do as this week's portion reminds us “If however there is a needy person among you one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that Adonai your God is giving you do not harden your heart and shut

your hand against your needy kinsman. Rather you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs.”

It will take years to bring order out of this chaos of devastation and there will be many who are needy—both Jew and non-Jew alike. We must neither turn a deaf ear nor as the days and weeks and months drag on let our compassion meter run low.

While our president fights his mythic war in Iraq—our nation suffers. While we are spending hundreds of billions of dollars fighting terrorists, we did not spend the money we need to protect ourselves. We could have strengthened the levees and prevented much of New Orleans’ flooding. Money was approved under Clinton’s term but diverted in Mr. Bush’s to fight his war on terror. It has been time to bring our soldiers home for a long time—but now in the face of Katrina’s terror—it is ever more pressing. We must summons the courage to come home—and attend to the business of rebuilding our own American communities. We must insist on rebuilding a safety net for the most vulnerable of our society—so that not only when disaster strikes, they will not be the after thought –but taken care of equally and fully every day.

We can keep the vision of Isaiah espoused at the end of the Haftarah, alive , “So shall you summon a nation you did not know” Let that nation be our own— A nation that surprises even us, a nation that reaches into its heart and resources as long as is necessary to rebuild and bring order out of the chaos.

Today too as we celebrate the upcoming wedding of Dean and Haim we see in them the hope we place in the future. That their commitment and love helps in this process of bringing order out of chaos. The words and promises they will exchange beneath the chupah tomorrow—teaches us that even when disaster strikes we must look to the future. Their wedding tomorrow shows us that through their trust in one another and their faith in God they help in the rebuilding of our entire world. And so Dean and Haim we are grateful to you both—for helping us look to the future—a bright future that we see in you that world may one day yet be redeemed. May you find comfort in one another, and may your marriage be filled with hope for the future.

And now it is my privilege to call up –my colleagues to give a special blessing to Dean and Haim on the eve of their wedding...

And my rabbinic colleagues who are here today to join me in this blessing—Rabbis Alan Henkin, Linda Bertenthal, Hillel Cohn, Richard Levy, JB Sacks-Rosen, and Neal Scheindlin.