



Rabbi Jason Bonder

Remarks - Interfaith Unity & Healing Service
October 28, 2018

On my refrigerator there is a magnet.
The magnet reads in Hebrew

גם אור קטן מאיר חושך גדול

"Even a small light illumines a great darkness."

More than the words themselves, the quotation is special to me because of what happens inside my heart when I read those words. I am reminded of who I am.

This little bit of wisdom, on a tiny magnet, reminds me of two lights – two identities – two flames – that burn bright within my heart, each one co-mingled with the other. Each one complimenting the other. One light is an eternal light – like the one that shines in every synagogue. This light in my heart is that of the Jewish People that shall never be extinguished. The other, alongside it, equally strong – is the light of freedom. Like the beacon that shines forth from Lady Liberty's Torch. This light in my heart, is the light of joy, and blessing, and responsibility of being a citizen of our United States of America.

"Even a small light illumines a great darkness"

These words in my kitchen are the words of Rabbi Israel Ben Eliezer – better known as the Ba'al Shem Tov – the 17th century rabbi and founder of Hasidic Judaism. And each time I see these words, I am reminded of another quotation from a different time and place. Yet so naturally linked.

"We are not here to curse the darkness." Said President John F. Kennedy "But to light the candle that can guide us through that darkness to a safe and sane future." I am an American and I am a Jew. I am a Jew and I am an American. It is a gift and a blessing to be both. And there is no separating the two.

The horrible crime in Pittsburgh yesterday was anti-Semitic. It was an attack on the Jewish People. But it was also an anti-American act. Attacking innocent people who were exercising their Constitutional right to worship freely. While this coward thought he was protecting his country, he was eroding the foundation upon which this great nation was built. The act was anti-Semitic, yes. It was also anti-American. There is no separating the two.

The fact that the words of a Ukrainian Rabbi from the 17th Century is linked in my heart to the words of an American President in the 20th Century is not strange. It's not coincidental. It is a reminder of who I am and it is a reminder of who we are as Americans. It is a reminder of our shared goal to bring light to our communities and to our country. That link is unmistakable – and unbreakable – even in the face of cowardly acts of violence.

We are not here to curse the darkness. We are here to light the path towards kindness, towards understanding, towards peace. We are not here to curse those who wish ill upon us. We are here to thank, and to honor those who are brave enough to stand with us, those who protect us, and those who are brave enough to exemplify the best of their religious traditions and the best of our American values.

Yes, "Even a small light illumines a great darkness." But an even larger light, a collection of small lights, like this gathering tonight, has the potential to banish the darkness for good.

The Mourner's Kaddish is perhaps the most famous of prayers in Jewish liturgy. In the moment of our greatest pain, at the moment when we stand in the shadow of death, the Jewish people do not curse the darkness. Rather, we bless Source of Life - The Source from which the very first Light was created.

We bless, and mourn, by saying "Exalted and Hallowed be God's great name."

One coward, attacking the innocent, will not derail us from our purpose. One senseless, anti-Semitic, anti-American act, will not make us curse the darkness. Instead we will remember, we will kindle lights of remembrance, and their memories will help us shine light on that which is good.

Tonight we remember

Joyce Fienberg, 75,
Richard Gottfried, 65,
Rose Mallinger, 97,
Jerry Rabinowitz, 66,
Cecil Rosenthal, 59,
David Rosenthal, 54,
Bernice Simon, 84,
Sylvan Simon, 87,
Daniel Stein, 71,
Melvin Wax, 88,
Irving Younger, 69.