

Parashat Miketz
December 16, 2017
Guest Speaker Mark Sokoll
Temple Aliyah, Needham

Thank you Charlie, Rabbi Perkins-Kehillah Kedoshah of Temple Aliyah....

Topic as advertised: Have you ever wondered what the holiday of Hanukkah, the music of the Grateful Dead, and Fiddler on the Roof have in common? And what do all three have to do with the future of the American Jewish community? On Shabbat Miketz, the Fourth day of Hanukkah 5778, these and other questions will be answered

A True Story:

Several years ago JCC preschool parent to her director: family request given people from Atlanta and Chicago and marriages between Jews and people of other faiths, and to aid in travel and life, move the seder to Saturday night. What should I do? For our response, stay tuned. The inspiration for our answer.....

Chanukah:

How appropriate a holiday of the battle among Jews over how to respond to change-manifested in the seductive and overwhelming spread of Hellenist culture into Israel, embrace or reject- Mityavnim vs. Chasidim, more urban upper classes vs. more rural lower classes, the Hasmoneans, the Sons of Mattathias/Maccabees or as I love to call them the Hebrew Hammers engaged in a Bloody Civil War. Read about it.....

Story not in the Tanach, never made it in- but in versions of the Catholic Bible that include the First and Second Book of Maccabees. By the time Jews write about it, hundreds of years later, under Roman rule post other failed revolts, it evolved into a story of the miracle, Antiochus uniting the Jewish people in a revolt of the few against the many, that succeeded with the help of G-d and small bit of oil. It started as a civil war.



Ironies-A)those that fought against Hellenism are remembered today in Israel and around the Jewish world beyond Chanukah in two ways. Maccabiah-purest symbol of Greek culture, athletic competitions-Go figure. B) the holiday of Jewish civil war and fight against the domination of outside culture, in America has become the Jewish Christmas. And it is celebrated on the 25th of Kislev, which just like the 25th of December is a Festival of Lights!

Change will happen whether you like it or not! Sam Cook sang-“change is gonna come.” Bob Dylan-“oh the times they are a changin!”

Fiddler on the Roof:

The most produced musical in the world, over 60 languages, and most popular in Japan-a society that wrestles mightily with the battle between tradition and change.

Whole show is about how to respond to the unrelenting advance of change-cultural, political, religious, and within the family. A family torn apart from the outside and inside by how they each respond to these overwhelming and inevitable forces of change. On one hand...on the other hand..until there is no other hand.

Mottel and Tzeitel have forced the entire social structure of Shidduch-arranged marriage to come crashing down because of the one thing-that which makes a Subaru a Subaru, that which conquers all even death, LOVE. A change Tevya eventually embraces when he asks Golda, “do you love me?”

Hodel is marrying a Jewish communist and leaving home, a change Tevya reluctantly and sadly embraces and Chava is marrying Fyedka, a Russian who is not Jewish and for Tevya there is no other hand. Most important scene in the show (saw again two summers ago on Broadway in the front row with my wife, son and daughter, and with Tevya played by Danny Burstein who is not Jewish, the day after seeing Hamilton starring among others Daveed Diggs as a tall African American Lafayette and Jefferson, who is Jewish!) is when Hodel and Fyedka come by to say good bye as Tevya packs the wagon and she says,” Good bye Pappa” in order to break thru the stonewall of his rejection and it crumbles before us as Tevya utters, “G-d be with you.” Even the hardest of hearts can only be whole when it is broken.

Change may be excruciatingly hard, painful to let go of closely held beliefs and traditions, but rejecting it will mean the next generation will simply walk away.

Grateful Dead:

My favorite band. I still travel with other loyalists-Deadheads to see the remnant band members of the originals mixed with new life and energy at extremely high ticket prices. My first show at the old Boston Garden in the early 1970's. My first time witnessing the decision by a progressive thinking rock band not just to embrace change but to inspire and catalyze it, turning tradition on its head and enshrining themselves in the hearts and minds of millions and history of American music. They had decided to urge concert goers, against all practice, custom and even law, to record their shows and share their music for free-FREE-with anyone and everyone they possibly could. It was outrageous! To challenge and change the whole system of recording, marketing, and distributing music. And their open sourcing of their music has made them the most popular concert band of all time. And they built a community of followers that are fiercely devoted to the music and each other that has outlasted the original band, spawned a next generation and continues to grow! Mi Dor L'Dor!

If you give something of great quality away for free, not surrounded by rules and fences, its value may increase and not decrease.

How does all this connect to the future of the American Jewish Community and our beloved Conservative movement, and our JCC Greater Boston?

-This is Shabbat Miketz, the Shabbat of having and interpreting dreams as a key to great things happening for the Jewish people. Joseph interprets dreams, goes from jail to Prime Minister (or at least Sec'y of State), and after a rough patch crossing thru the Sea of Reeds we are free to journey toward a different future.

Talmud-Dream not interpreted is like a letter unopened

So here is my dream about our future:

Conclusion of opening story: Whenever you choose to do your seder do you have everything you need to make the Seder a meaningful experience for you and your whole family.

Tevya shouting TRADITION, while looking at his youngest daughter's eyes as that tradition is shattered, manages to let go with his heart breaking and full of love at the same time. I dream of that future where we can let go sometime with our hearts breaking and full of love at the same time. If not the next generation will just walk away. Our Jewish gifts must be shared like the music of the Grateful Dead. And that means the rules and the laws sometimes need to bend and sometimes be broken.

Unlike Chanukah our narrative is not about a civil war over embracing vs rejecting our dominant American culture. We are beyond the point of no return. 3 of 4 non Orthodox Jewish kids in America are marrying someone who is not Jewish. The future is only about how weak and vulnerable we will be if we can't talk civilly and respectfully to those within and outside our community and welcome those who do not think, look, behave, belong or believe like us. I am a child of Temple Bet El in Fall River, Ma a once great Conservative Shul. And now, sadly not so. The movement today embraces things unimaginable only a few decades ago- true egalitarianism, marriage equality and will thrive only by embracing every imaginable constellation of family that considers themselves Jewish. And inevitably we will see our rabbis officiate at wedding ceremonies involving only one Jewish person.

Our JCC has redefined our mission to embrace every family on their own path to constructing a meaningful Jewish identity for themselves on their own terms, with our support and without our judgment. A great American military mind once said, "if you don't like change, you will like irrelevance even less!" Let's share the music, with hearts unbroken and full of love, not in fear of change, and the next generation will walk in and not walk away- on any night of the week they are having their seder!

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Samayach!