*The Weekly Shabbat Message from Rabbi Rheins*

**From Mourning to Healing Through Love**

Once again, the weekly Torah portion has a message that profoundly connects to the events and issues that dominate our lives and current concerns. We are still in a state of shock from the massacre at Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh. Our emotions run the gamut from fear to anger, from outrage to compassion, from vulnerability to appreciation for the outpouring of communal support.

And, as if on cue, this week’s *parashah, Chayei Sarah* (“Sarah’s Life”)*,* dwells on the impact of death and how we process loss. The reading begins with the death of our matriarch Sarah. Her husband, Abraham, and her son, Isaac, react to her death in different ways.

Abraham mourns her. He eulogizes her (“*Lispode l’Sarah*”) and cries for the loss of the love of his life (“*v’livkotah*”). His immediate concern is to make sure that Sarah has a proper burial. He appeals to his neighbors, negotiates and then buys a burial spot, the cave of Machpelah, which is in Hebron.

Isaac took the death of his mother very hard. He took long walks to meditate and pray and pour out his feelings to God. The text reads: “*Vayeitzei Yitzchak la-suach ba-sadeh, Isaac went out to supplicate* (*la-suach*) *in the field at the beginning of the evening”* (Genesis 24:63). *La-suach* is variously interpreted as “to pray” (Rashi and the Talmud) and “meditate” (Malbim). From this verse, the Talmud also credits Isaac for inventing the afternoon prayer service (*Minchah*).

From this we learn that we all mourn in our own way. Some mourn through tears of grief, others by tributes that extoll the virtues of the deceased. There are those who spring to action, pouring the energy of their loss into tasks devoted to taking care of the dead and the survivors. Still others mourn in more private and quite ways, expressing their feelings through personal prayers, heartfelt meditation, and contemplative walks.

Likewise, this past week, we all mourned the victims of the massacre in Pittsburgh in our own way. We organized, participated and attended vigils. We railed against the rising tide of anti-Semitism and pressed our national and local leaders. We sent letters, made calls, and left messages of sympathy and condolence. We made donations to help provide better security for our synagogues. Some voiced their emotions, others worried quietly trying to cope with the fact that our society still breeds people inflamed with hate and bigotry. And as we cry for the victims, their families and their friends, we wonder: “What about us? Will we ever be safe? Will our children have to live in a world like this one?”

So let’s look closer at Abraham and Isaac’s experiences. Abraham found support from his neighbors. They helped him find the burial cave and aided in the negotiations. He described himself as a “resident alien” a stranger among them. But they surprised him with warmth and assurance.

Isaac, too, was surprised. Deep in a sad reverie, he lifted his eyes to find love. Rebekah came into his life and renewed Isaac’s sense of joy:

“Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother’s death” (Genesis 24:67).

The Torah’s message is timeless: after a tragic loss allow the support and warmth of neighbors and friends to help you through; after a period of grief and mourning, be open to love that will reaffirm the goodness and holiness of life.

At Temple Sinai, we came together for a moving memorial service last Sunday. More than 300 attended: students, teachers, parents, and congregants of all ages poured out their emotions in prayer and song. Over the past week, many congregants and Preschool families have made contributions to help provide for more security personnel during school hours. And this week, we have received many calls and letters from our neighbors of different faiths declaring their friendship and support. We only had to lift our eyes from despair to be comforted by the good people and love that surrounds us. We are not alone!

This Friday night, our *Erev Shabbat* service (6pm) is our annual Pink Shabbat. This is a service that will draw attention to the challenges of breast and ovarian cancer. The lessons and support we share will be vital to those currently going through this battle as well as their devoted friends and family.

On Shabbat morning, our early service (9:00-10:30am) is our Solidarity Shabbat, a Sabbath of Unity and Peace. Clergy and neighbors from different faiths with join us for our Shabbat service and will participate in prayers that honor the memory of the victims in Pittsburgh. This special service will be a meaningful experience that will help all of us heal and rally to confront the scourge of bigotry that plagues our society.

Please join us for these very important Shabbat services and add your voice to peace and healing!

*Shabbat Shalom!*

Rick

Rabbi Rick Rheins