

A Weekly Message of Torah from Rabbi Rheins

Go forth for blessings...but watch your back: Kristallnacht, Pittsburgh, Pueblo...

This Saturday, November 9, will mark the 81st anniversary of Kristallnacht, the night of “broken glass,” the beginning of the organized terror campaign against the Jews of Germany, the foreshadowing of the systematic murder of 6-million Jews by the Nazis, their allies and the complicit support of much of Europe.

On Sunday of this week, we marked the first anniversary of the murderous attack at Tree of Life in Pittsburgh that left eleven Jews dead.

On Monday of this week, the FBI arrested a man who plotted to blow up Temple Emanuel in Pueblo. The accused posted and boasted his venomous plans, saying, “I wish the Holocaust really did happen...they need to die.”

The FBI and our local police departments have heroically protected Jews and other minorities against racist and ant-Semitic attacks. The ADL works tirelessly to monitor hate groups, as well as teach greater respect through programs like “No Place For Hate” in our nearly 80 public schools throughout Colorado.

I’m also grateful for the prompt and sincere call that I received from Congressman Jason Crow (6th District, CO). He personally reached out to me to check on the welfare of Temple Sinai and the Denver Jewish community. He graciously offered his support and help.

So, what do we focus on? The anti-Semites, the terrorists and the hate groups that plague every generation? Or do we realize how profoundly lucky we are to have such caring friends and organizations who stand by our side? Of course, the answer is both.

We need to be forever vigilant about our enemies and we need to be forever grateful for God's blessings that have inspired so many good-hearted people who rally around those who are most vulnerable.

It is only in this week's parashah, *Lekh-lekha* (Genesis 12:1- 17:27), that the Torah begins the story of our ancestral family with the tale of our patriarch Avram and matriarch Sarai. They courageously took up God's charge to travel forth to the land of Canaan in order to create a new faith and people.

The Eternal said to Abram, "Lekh-lekhah, Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing, and all the families of the earth will bless themselves by you" (Gen. 12:1-3).

In time, their covenantal relationship with God was concretized as they adopted the names Avraham and Sarah (Genesis 17:4-16). An examination of the verses reveals the depth of the blessings:

"As for Me, this is My covenant with you: you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. And you shall no longer be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fertile, and make nations of you; and kings shall come forth from you. I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come" (Gen. 17:4-7).

And:

God said to Avraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah. I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples shall issue from her" (Gen. 17:15-16).

Both at the beginning of this sacred relationship and throughout their journey, God promised Avraham and Sarah blessings. Indeed, it is this covenant that is held as the most precious legacy of our Jewish family. And yet, the Torah emphasizes that the nature of this blessing is not to be measured in temporal or even material benefits. Note that immediately after the original blessing (see above, Gen. 12:1-3) a famine broke out and forced them to find refuge in Egypt.

This naturally evokes the question: “What kind of blessing is it when a young family has to find refuge in an inhospitable country?” Versions of this question have been asked by nearly every generation of our Jewish family: “How can we understand God’s covenantal blessing when powerful nations attack and destroy your homeland and exile Your people? How can we understand God’s covenantal blessing when tyrants and mobs and church leaders and hate-groups target us, persecute us, hound us and seek to wipe out our Jewish family---even in the 21st century?”

The pain, loss and humiliation suffered by our people is literally beyond comprehension. And yet, still we find some people promoting BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) in order to undermine the welfare and security of Israel, the home of over 7-million Jews. We still find, even among educators, professors, artists and political activists those who unashamedly write and speak about their goal to eliminate Israel.

So where is God’s covenantal blessing? Ah, look closer at the verse: “I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you” (Gen. 12:3). For all the efforts of the anti-Semites and anti-Zionists, the Jewish people in this 21st century are more numerous, more secure and more prosperous than ever. Note that the once mighty nations and cultures that persecuted the Jewish people have disappeared from the world stage. Pharaoh’s Egypt, the Babylonians, the oppressive Greek armies, the Romans, the Crusaders, and the Nazis are all

gone. Meanwhile, the Jewish nation of Israel is strong, proud and is a world leader in technology and culture. And organizations like ADL and AIPAC and the essential interfaith efforts by synagogues like Temple Sinai have created friends and partnerships that are blessings of cooperation. Yes, there still are bigots in the community; but there are many, many more good, caring, thoughtful and righteous people, and together we stand proud and strong. How fitting it is that this Erev Shabbat we will honor our US War Veterans: the brave men and women who risked their very lives to protecting the American values of liberty, freedom and justice for all!

Avraham and Sarah went with courage and faith to create our ancestral homeland in Israel. True, they and their descendants faced hardships, setbacks and vicious enemies. But they and every generation of our family met every challenge and, in turn, the blessings we have been gifted we shared with every community that welcomed us in peace. "I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you," it is written . . . and so it is.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rick

Rabbi Rick Rheins