



Har Shalom

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Mar–Apr '10

GUEST COMMENTARY

Righteousness Ain't All It's Cracked Up To Be

by Rabbi David A. Whiman, North Shore Synagogue, Long Island, NY (Sermon delivered November 4, 2005)

This week's Torah portion speaks of Noah and the great flood. Growing up in Virginia as I did, this week's Torah portion was also a component of my 7th grade English curriculum. Though, I assure you, in the public school I attended the story of Noah was never referred to as this week's Torah portion.

After reviewing chapters 6 and 7 of the Book of Genesis, my teacher—Mrs. Waddington—asked, “Children, why did God save Noah?” There was no response. She repeated the question. “Why did God save Noah from the flood?” No response. Finally, one of my braver classmates raised her hand and said, “Mrs. Waddington, God saved Noah because Noah was good Christian.”

Now I knew that Noah was not a good Christian. Since I had learned the story in Hebrew School I was pretty sure that Noah could not have been a Christian. But by that same logic, I concluded that Noah must have been a good Jew.

But of course, Noah was neither Jewish nor Christian. In fact, Noah was a member of no organized religious profession. Like Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel—Noah was generically human, or to put it in our modern day parlance Noah had no religious preference.

Noah was not religious but he was in fact righteous. The Torah says so. He was a tsadick. Noah hayah eesh tzadeek b'dorotav. Thus the Torah seems to be teaching us a distinction between righteousness and religion.

You do not have to be religious to be righteous. You don't have to be a member of a church or a synagogue to be good or to aspire to virtue; and thus religious group have not cornered the market on righteousness. Goodness is an equal opportunity opportunity, accessible to all without regard to race, color, creed or national origin. Noah, neither Christian nor Jew, Buddhist nor Muslim was a good and righteous man.

So if that's the case why be religious? If I can be righteous without religion why bother with the rituals and strictures of a particular spiritual philosophy, persuasion, profession or creed.

The Midrash speaks to this point. When Noah and his family left the ark, we are told that the family brought offerings, burnt offerings to God. In Biblical parlance, though, burnt offerings were brought for the expiation of sin. So what was Noah's sin? What trespass had he committed? After all, “Noah was a righteous man.”

The rabbis tell that when Noah emerged from the ark he found the world desolate and forsaken. Forests and gardens completely uprooted. No grass. No vegetation. No sound. No life. A wasteland of unimaginable proportion. In horror, Noah cried out: “God you made the all of creation and now you have brought your work to ruin. Why did you not show compassion for your creatures? How could you do such a thing?”

And God replied, “Now! Now you speak up! Now you raise objection! Now you come seeking explanation! Now, after the destruction, you show your concern for your fellow human beings. Noah, when I said to you, ‘Make yourself an ark for I am about to destroy all flesh,’ you did not plead for your neighbors. You did not speak up for the world. When you learned that judgment was to strike the world, you thought only of yourself and your household. But Noah in days to come there will appear on this earth my servant Abraham, and when my anger is kindled against Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham will pray on behalf of those wicked people. And after Abraham will come Moses, and when his people anger me with the Golden Calf he will offer his life on their behalf. But you—when all else would perish by water—you thought only of yourself.” Then Noah knew that he had sinned.

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Atidaynu Celebrates Tu B'Shevat

Spring is beginning to show its signs in our Atidaynu classes. The children participated in a beautiful Tu B'Shevat Seder in January. Many thanks to the Adar family who joined us and answered our many questions about trees in Israel.

The 6-7 year olds are engaged in an ongoing study of Mitzvot and have two projects that they would love your help on. There is a donation box by the office marked "YWCA", please take a look at the letter above it. Our preschoolers and kindergartners are always leaving class with wonderful and useful projects that mark our seasonal holidays ... and they made some pretty tasty gluten free hamentaschen! Our oldest group is doing a great job working through some difficult material and learning about Jewish history. Every class is making strides in Hebrew. Parents, please remind your children to continue work on this at home. Happy Spring!

Upcoming Events

Passover Community Seder

Our annual community Seder is set for the evening of March 30. Look to the weekly email or the website (www.har-shalom.org) for details.

Congregational Meeting

On April 11 we will meet as a congregation for an update on the successes of the Synagogue for Missoula—Building Jewish Community Campaign. The day's schedule that Sunday is: 10 am to noon Atidaynu Sunday School, noon to 1 pm catered lunch, 1 pm to 2:30 pm meeting. Child care will be provided.

Board of Directors

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The Har Shalom newsletter is written entirely by volunteers. Submissions are always welcome!

The next deadline is February 15 for the March/April 2010 Edition.

Send news, events, or letters to info@har-shalom.org. Newsletters publish semi-monthly.

Guest Commentary *(continued)*

There is a difference between righteousness and religion. You do not have to profess a religion to be righteous, but what religion adds to righteousness is a communal dimension and perspective. Religion and specifically Judaism is a corporate affair. It takes place with other people and in human association. It directs the gaze beyond the boundary of the immediate self. The down side, the limitation of righteousness, says the Midrash, is that you can be righteous all by yourself. You can be good by withdrawing from people. You can be good and absolve yourself from responsibility to and for others. You do no harm, but your righteousness is self contained. Its boundaries extend no further than the self. Religion, says Judaism, is righteousness extended into community. Religion seeks to foster a spiritual and a righteous life shared with others and lived in part for others.

Looking within our own religion you know that the Kaddish traditionally can only be recited in the presence of a minyan, a quorum, a gathering of ten adult Jews. Mourning is not intended to be a private affair. Why not? Because mourning in the presence of others, others mourners reminds the mourner that though bereavement is the most personal of pains, death is not personal. It's normal. Death is painful but it is not personal. You have not been singled out to suffer the loss of a dear one. Additionally, the great prayer of sanctification, the Kedushah can only be recited in the presence of a minyan. Kaddish, Kedushah—both words are derived from the Hebrew word for holiness. And remember, we are commanded to be—not only righteous—but holy as well. Righteousness is good, desirable but ultimately insufficient in and of itself. Holiness says Judaism grows out of human association. And unless you are spiritual in a way given over to few mortals, we need one another to get to that higher, more rarefied level of piety and grace.

The only problem is that people can drive you nuts. Centuries ago, even the noble Abraham and saintly Moses learned this lesson in spades. So while religion has its benefits, I would submit to you that it is much harder to be religious than to be righteous. Because religious life is lived with others, true religion requires an enhanced capacity for compromise, understanding, coordination, sympathy, and flexibility, and it takes a certain kind of strength to compromise, to reach consensus. Because religious life is lived with others, religion also requires an ability to share.

Sharing is not easy. It may not even be natural, but it is necessary. Sharing is one of the first lessons taught in Kindergarten. But notice, you have to be taught to share. You weren't a bad kid if you ate all your Oreos yourself. But the beginning of religious consciousness lies in the acceptance of the proposition that part of our human responsibility lies in sharing the bounty that is ours with others. The Midrash points out that a righteous man could lock himself away from the cries of the world. The truly religious exemplars were open to and sensitive to the needs of others.

Interestingly, there are very few rules to the building of a synagogue, but one of them prescribes that the synagogue must have windows. In Judaism, a house of God must be open to the world, to its sights and sounds, its problems and its pain. This room has an ark but is not an ark, a place to seal yourself off from the world. The purpose of this room and what goes on in it is to remind you that there is no escape from the world out there and that it is our duty to live in, to repair and perfect creation.

But, please, do not think me naïve. I have heard it said many times that “more people have died in the name of religion than for any other reason.” I dispute this claim, but there is truth in it; and like any other organized human activity—be it politics, government, economics, education, athletics, you name it—when that activity loses sight of its goals and purpose—the result is—to turn a phrase—one righteous disaster. I know and you know that religions and religious organizations are made up of people, and as such they are subject to the corruption, the foibles, and the hypocrisy of any and every organized human enterprise.

Religious institutions, Jewish institutions are far from perfect, but when I survey the number of good works and civic projects undertaken by religious organizations, when I think about the number of opportunities to diminish the pain and suffering in God's world made available in this one congregation alone, I am heartened. I know that I and many others are challenged to a greater goodness simply by virtue of our association with this institution. North Shore synagogue challenges me to a fuller and more complete demonstration of my own potential righteousness.

Do we do all that can be done? No. Do we do all that needs to be done? No. Can we do more? Should we do more? Of course, but in the words of Rabbi Tarfon: Ours is not to complete the task But neither are we free to desist from it. And as Hillel added: If not now when? You may tire of the phrase. You may try to drown out the message. You may not even like the message, but it is the purpose of this synagogue, I suggest it is the purpose of any

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Toda Raba

A special thank you to Toba Winston for spearheading and matching all donations to get us new prayer books.

Yahrzeits

The Yahrzeit is the anniversary of a loved one's death according to the Hebrew calendar. The civil date varies from year to year. The current year's civil date is listed first, followed by the Hebrew date, then the anniversary. Yahrzeit candles should be lit the evening before the date specified. This is because the Jewish day actually begins at sundown on the previous night. It is customary to make a donation to the synagogue in remembrance. May the memory of your loved ones be a blessing.

Special Note: Please email info@har-shalom.org if you have changes or additions. Thank you.

— FEB/MAR

- 2/17, Albert Belsky, 3 Adar, 3/1/98
(Jill Belsky's father)
- 2/28, Victor Tevah, 14 Adar, 3/3/88
(Anita Aronofsky's father)
- 2/16, Frank Spector, 2 Adar, 3/7/92
(Ellen Silverglat's father)
- 2/28, William Rosenberg, 14 Adar,
3/15/87 (Ed Rosenberg's father)
- 3/10, Louis Bloom, 24 Adar I, 3/13/88
(Michael and Zachary Bloom's
Grand/Great-Grandfather)
- 3/6, Joseph Friedman, 20 Adar,
3/20/06 (Muriel Friedman's father)
- 3/14, David Kooris, 28 Adar, 3/21/09
(Jeff Kooris' father)
- 3/31, Golda Alperin, 16 Nisan, 3/28/94
(Michael and Zachary Bloom's
Grand/Great-grandmother)
- 3/18, Dorothy R. Friedman, 3 Nisan,
3/31/03, (Muriel Friedman's mother)

— MAR/APR

- 4/5, Edward Cohen, 21 Nisan,
4/10/96 (Jackie Cohen's father)
- 3/7, Sophie Goren 21 Adar, 4/1/05
Carolyn Goren's mother
- 3/13, Gabriel Jolles, 27 Adar,
3/3/2000 (David Jolles' father)
- 3/22, Janet Getzenberg, 7 Nisan,
4/16/05 (Anne Getzenberg's
mother)
- 4/19, Ann Cohen, 5 Iyyar, 4/17/02
(Keegan Eisenstadt's grandmother)

Register with Taglit-Birthright Israel: Young Judaea

REMINDER: Free trips to Israel this coming Winter 2010-11, opens in August, and space will be limited. All Jewish young adults, age 18-26, who have never participated in a peer group Israel trip are eligible.

Join the E-mail List for information and registration updates. Go to www.toisraelnow.org or call, toll-free, 877.464.2624.

Contributions *(Donations made after newsletter deadline will be reported in the next issue.)*

General Operating Fund and Building Maintenance

David Aronofsky
Jeff Bendremer & Danielle Wozniak
Hank Butzel
Joy & Mark Earls
Karen Erickson
Shirle Gray
Jack & Shelly Meyer
Sang & Naomi Shin
Toba M. Winston
Judy Klein *"Thank you for all you do."*
Bernard and Janice Silverman

Synagogue for Missoula Campaign

Jeff Bendremer & Danielle Wozniak
Arnold Finklin
Garden City Montessori
Barry & Kathy Good
Reisa Kahn & George Masnick
Maeta Kaplan
Liatis Foundation
Harold & Eileen Ort
Shelley Schribman
Ellen & Michael Silverglat
Janet Tatz & David Morey
Toba M. Winston

Honors and Memorials

Stephen Craney—in honor of Samantha Jolles
Herbert Shulman—in honor of the Earls family

Rabbi Fund

Peggy Schlesinger

Prayer Book Donations

Lisa G. Carter
Tom Fellman—in honor of Ted & Estee Fellman
Elizabeth Howard & Stan Nashel—for: Avery, Ethan and Jesse Howard
Susan & Russell Labowitz—in honor of our grandchildren:
Benjamin Graham & Ada Rosalee Labowitz with love
from Bubby & PopPop
Melinda Robin & Mike Smith—in honor of Hanna Maile &
Isaac Brooks Smith, and Syla & Berny Robin
Shelley Schribman



Guest Commentary *(continued)* and every religious organization of merit, to keep repeating and repeating the message: If not now when? If not now, when?

No, you do not need to be religious to be righteous. You do not have to belong to a synagogue to be good. But if you are a member of a synagogue do not surprised or put off or offended that the call to righteous involvement with others is repeated so often. To extend goodness and righteous into the corporate, public arena—that is the rationale for our organizational existence

and the purpose of our coming together as a community of faith.

Friends, tonight you and I are here in this religious institution, we are here, you and I to bring closer to reality, to bring nearer the day when the Lord shall be one and God's name shall be one. As a Jew, if you are to take your membership in this religion and in this synagogue seriously then righteousness is not an option and goodness is always your goal and both of these virtues must be extended out into the larger community and out into the world. So how well are you doing? How well are we doing? Think about it. Shabbat shalom.

UPCOMING EVENTS CALENDAR

All events, unless otherwise noted, are at Cong. Har Shalom, 3035 S. Russell St., Missoula
Snacks are provided before our Shabbat service; if you arrive early you are invited to have a nosh with us.

** indicates activity led by student rabbi Callie Souther.*

Student rabbi appointments: email Callie Souther: callie.souther@gmail.com

MARCH

Wednesday, 3/3, 7:30-9 pm Chevruta Talmud Study
Friday, 3/5, 6 pm Kabalat Shabbat Service with Kiddush
Saturday, 3/6, 10 am-noon Torah Study
Tuesday, 3/9, 6-8 pm Board Meeting
Wednesday, 3/10, 7:30-9 pm Chevruta Talmud Study
Friday, 3/12, 6 pm Kabalat Shabbat Service with Kiddush*
7:15 pm Vegetarian Potluck*
Saturday, 3/13, 9-10 am Torah Study
10:30-noon, Shabbat Morning Service*
Sunday, 3/14, 10 am-noon Atidaynu Sunday School*
Wednesday, 3/17, 7:30-9 pm Chevruta Talmud Study
Friday, 3/19, 6 pm Kabalat Shabbat Service with Kiddush
Saturday, 3/20, 10 am-noon Torah Study
Wednesday, 3/24, 7:30-9 pm Chevruta Talmud Study
Friday, 3/26, 6 pm Kabalat Shabbat Service with Kiddush
Saturday, 3/27, 10 am-noon Torah Study
Sunday, 3/28, 10 am-noon Atidaynu Sunday School
Monday, 3/29, sunset Passover begins and continues through nightfall of April 6.
Tuesday, 3/30, Community Seder. Details to be announced.
Wednesday, 3/31, 7:30-9 pm Chevruta Talmud Study

APRIL

Friday, 4/2, 6 pm Kabalat Shabbat Service with Kiddush
Saturday, 4/3, 10 am-noon Torah Study
Wednesday, 4/7, 7:30-9 pm Chevruta Talmud Study
Friday, 4/9, 6 pm Kabalat Shabbat Service with Kiddush*
7:15 pm Vegetarian Potluck*
Saturday, 4/10, 9-10 am Torah Study
10:30-noon Shabbat Morning Service*
Sunday, 4/11, 10 am-noon Atidaynu Sunday School*
noon-1 pm Congregational Lunch (catered, no charge)
1-2:30 pm Congregational Meeting about A Synagogue for Missoula Campaign and building fund. Childcare provided.
Tuesday, 4/13, 6-8 pm Board Meeting
Wednesday, 4/14, 7:30-9 pm Chevruta Talmud Study
Friday, 4/16, 6 pm Kabalat Shabbat Service with Kiddush
Saturday, 4/17, 10 am-noon Torah Study
Wednesday, 4/21, 7:30-9 pm Chevruta Talmud Study
Friday, 4/23, 6 pm Kabalat Shabbat Service with Kiddush
Saturday, 4/24, 10 am-noon Torah Study
Sunday, 4/25, 10 am-noon Atidaynu Sunday School
Wednesday, 4/28, 7:30-9 pm Chevruta Talmud Study
Friday, 4/30, 6 pm Kabalat Shabbat Service with Kiddush



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P.O. BOX 3715, MISSOULA, MONTANA 59806

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED