

Finding Common Ground – Zikaron V'Tikvah

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Sometimes we encounter people who are very different from ourselves. That is the case with me and David Chadwick. He is the Pastor of the impressive Forest Hill Church that houses thousands of worshippers every Saturday evening and Sunday. I got to know David Chadwick because Forest Hill also graciously houses us as a congregation... not only last High Holidays but the next High Holy Days, as well.

Last Thursday, I pre-recorded with him a radio show called the David Chadwick Show that will be aired on WBT this Sunday morning. In opening that radio program I shared in jest that I'm not sure if you could find two more different human beings. David Chadwick is tall, at least six feet four, and I'm on the shorter side, measuring in at 5 foot 1 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  (I wear heels to help me stand taller). He was once a UNC Chapel Hill Basket Player, while I can't even hold a candle to the basket ball playing of my 8 and 10 year old boys. David Chadwick is a Christian Conservative. I am a liberal Jew.

We differ on our views of heaven and hell, and what it takes to get to either place. We differ in our responses to the rise of radical Islam. We differ even on Israel... I imagine he feels more strongly than I about our entitlement to the Biblical borders of our holy land.

Even so, David Chadwick and I share common ground. We both share a desire to heal our city and our world. We both feel an immense responsibility to eradicate hatred and discrimination from the daily lives of humanity -- to banish violence and especially genocide from the face of the globe.

It is from that common ground that we could engage in 40 minutes of great dialogue about the genocides of the past and present and what we can together do to prevent the seeds of mistrust and hatred from being sown in Charlotte that could lead to the dehumanization of another human being.

David Chadwick visits Africa frequently and is active and engaged in working to eradicate genocide there.

My father was born in Munich, Germany, and fled from there in 1938. He escaped the Holocaust and the deaths that it brought to so many of the branches of my family tree. The Holocaust and the lessons it teaches form a strong part of the fabric of my life.

I live with the awareness that the statement "never again" must not only be said with words, it needs to be affirmed with actions.

That is why I spend so much time working on diversity in our community. I believe that building strong bridges of connection and understanding with our neighbors will keep our community healthier and ultimately keep all of us safer.

In our Torah portion this week we have the inexplicable deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, the High Priest. We are simply told that the sons race forward in the ancient sanctuary to offer alien fire and God consumes them on the spot.

In our Haftarah, we have the inexplicable death of a man named Uzzah. The ark is being brought to Jerusalem. The carriage which is holding it becomes unsteady and Uzzah, in his effort to stabilize the ark, reaches out to catch it, and like Nadav and Avihu, is also put to death without a stated reason.

King David's response to Uzzah's death was fear. "Don't bring the ark to Jerusalem. For others could also die," was the intention upon which he acted.

Aaron's response to his son's, Nadav's and Avihu's death, was silence. What words can be said in the face of losing two children?

At first, our world's response to the horrors of the Holocaust was similar to that of our Biblical predecessors. Like King David, we were filled with fear and horror. Like Aaron, at first, we responded to the tragedy of the Holocaust with silence. What words can be said in the face of death of 11 million individuals – among them six million Jews and 1.5 million children? Over time, survivors, one by one, found the strength to find the words to share their stories.

According to our Jewish calendar, this Sunday night marks the beginning of Yom Hashoah – Holocaust Remembrance Day. In Israel, the day of Yom Hashoah begins with silence. At 10:00 am, sirens are sounded across the country and every person stops - even the cars on the highways come to halt - in order to observe a moment of silence.

While silence is our first response to genocide, it must not be our last.

In our Torah this week, after the death of Nadav and Avihu commentators asked, "Where was God?"

After the Holocaust the entire world asked, "Where was God?" Hence, a new genre of post-Holocaust theology was born.

Emil Fackenheim teaches that the Holocaust now obligates us to fulfill a 614<sup>th</sup> commandment, to keep Judaism alive and not to give Hitler a posthumous victory.

Others say that the terrors of the Holocaust are the price we pay for having free will. If God could interfere with history, our free will would cease to exist. The Holocaust reflects negatively not on God but on humanity.

While still others say that we must be the response to the Holocaust – ensuring that evil is eradicated wherever it rears its ugly head.

Where is God in the face of dehumanization? We must answer that question by bringing God into the world through celebrating our differences and by finding common ground with those who may be taller, or more liberal, or of another faith, or raised in a different geographic location, or who support a different political party, who look or act or who live their lives different from the way we live our own.

A project was created in San Diego called Zikaron v'tikvah – memory and hope. They have the ambitious goal of inspiring the creation 1.5 million ceramic butterflies which are painted to memorialize the 1.5 million children killed in the Holocaust. Hundreds of those ceramic butterflies have been painted here. Next year, on Holocaust Remembrance Day, we hope to have built a sculpture in front of our Blumenthal entrance with the butterflies upon them. It will be beautiful Shalom Park Holocaust Memorial.

Yesterday David Chadwick emailed me and offered to be a part of next year's event. I imagine that he and his wife Marilyn will speak of the present decade's genocides in Africa and our required response.

Next year's community commemoration of Yom Hashoah – Holocaust Remembrance Day will be called Zikaron v'tikvah – memory and hope.

Yom Hashoah should be observed not only by looking backwards with silence and sadness and the act of remembering but it should be observed by looking forward with healing and with hope.

Zicharon v'tikvah – may we remember humanity's failing of dealing with differences in the past and may we look forward to the future with hope – that our differences will enable us to build a better and brighter future for the millions of children who follow us.