

A man died this week. His name may or may not be familiar to you, but he changed the way we live – the way we celebrate, the way we define God, the way we define Judaism, the way in which we imagine community. His name is Rabbi Harold Schulweis. For nearly six decades he was one of the leading Jewish philosophers, teachers, authors and pulpit rabbis. He was a student of Heschel and of Kaplan; he wrote the very first English-language thesis on the philosophy of Buber. His unique brand of Judaism is the basis for my own interpretations of Torah and the way in which I understand our role in the world, both as Jews and as *b'nei adam* – as people. He was my mother's rabbi and my rabbi; he was my teacher, my mentor, my friend. He nurtured me along the beginning of my path toward the cantorate, and for his love and support I will be eternally grateful.

He taught that to be a Jew who believes means to be a Jew who acts. He taught that the beliefs we hold to be so central to ourselves we must extend outward to bring light to a deeply darkened world. Just about twenty years ago, he reached out to the very large Armenian community which surrounded our Jewish enclave in the San Fernando Valley and invited them into our synagogue. He showed us by example that just as we mourn the Shoah, we must stand by our neighbors as they mourn the Armenian Holocaust. We are no different than they. They are as much created in the divine image as are we.

A little more than a decade ago, in response to the genocide in Darfur, he created the organization called Jewish World Watch. He said to us in the synagogue that it is our moral obligation to respond to the atrocities in Africa. "God forbid that our children should ask us where were we as 800,000 were slaughtered in 100 days, just as we ask where was God during the Shoah? Where were the people of conscience as the Nazis exterminated the Jews?" God was in those righteous

gentiles who risked their lives and livelihood to save Jews during the Shoah, and God dwells in each of us as we stand against injustice and use our gifts, talents and means to fight against these and other gross acts. And we cannot be the invisibles as the world is in such disarray – that is not how our tradition calls on us to act.

That is what he believed, that is what he lived, that is what he taught, and that is how he expected each of us to act. So tonight, I dedicated this small piece of Torah to the memory of my teacher – a bright light of Israel whose flame was extinguished during this festival of lights, but whose legacy will live on for generations.

This week, on the Shabbat of Chanukah, we read Parashat Miketz. This parasha is all about human interaction...about relationships. It is about the struggle to find the balance in relationships in which there is clearly an imbalance of power. And in these relationships, we learn about the human potential to find good in the other – even when great enmity exists.

As we will read tomorrow, Joseph had a choice to make – would he punish his brothers all for what they had done to him by denying them the rations they sought during the great famine? Would he keep Benjamin captive when his brothers eventually brought him down to Egypt? Would he simply turn his brothers away, refusing to give them that which they had come to request?

Joseph understood a great truth. As he had grown into a position of power and leadership, he did not forget from where he came. Despite all that had transpired between he and his brothers, he had a moral imperative as a leader to set the

example of what is correct and good. We know that not all leaders know this, and we know that not all leaders who know this are capable of living this way. But the Jew knows that he is created in the Divine image – that she has a responsibility to help the other...We know that hatred, resentment, bitterness cannot be part of our life, especially in times of anguish. We must find it within ourselves to rise above it all, to realize our capacity to have a positive impact on those around us, and to know that like the waves in the ocean, the effects of our deeds will be felt far beyond our initial interaction.

The Torah leaves us with a cliffhanger this week, but we know that in the end Joseph did just this. He did it by inviting his brothers to bring his father with them to Egypt and ensuring that all in his family lived out their lives with plenty. And that is the lesson for us in this week's parasha.

Rabbi Schulweis taught that God is not "where", but "when It is we who bring God and Torah into the world – through our interactions with each other— through deep and meaningful relationships. We realize God's presence when we recognize that every person is created in the same divine image as we, and in our awareness that we are challenged to find the godly spark in each other and help one another to use their godly capabilities to make the world a little more whole than we found it. And through our ability to bring light into the darkest recesses of humanity. Perhaps, then, that is why each year we read this sidra during Chanukah. That we may be reminded in yet another way that it is our sacred duty to be an *or lagoyim* – a light unto the nations of the world, as reads the inscription on the ner tamid in our main sanctuary. That is our calling, that is our mission, and that is how we bring God into the world.

*Zecher tzadik livracha* – may Rabbi Schulweis' memory, the memory of a true *tzadik*, be for a blessing...and may we who knew him be blessed as we carry on his Torah. Shabbat Shalom.