

Not Knowing

For those of you who were here last night, I spoke again about Parshat Zakhor and about remembering Amalek. And I related it to a theme that is, I think, the essential religious value that I uphold.

And I love Purim for this reason, because Purim is the holiday of not knowing, of uncertainty. Uncertainty, not as a principle of quantum mechanics, but as a principle of religious consciousness. That not knowing is, as the Zen master said, most intimate. Not knowing is most intimate. That on Purim we are given a commandment, so to speak, a mitzvah, mechayiv inesh le'b'sumi b'pur ya'ad d'lo yada. Aad d'lo yada, until you don't know between Haman and Mordechai. And what I think the religious value that is being instilled in each and every one of us, the spiritual practice, is, like the great Shlomo Carlebach used to say, you never know. You never know.

And I would like to pray for a world where people who really don't know are quiet. And instead of reflexively, in a knee-jerk way, respond to uncertainty with certainty, radical certainty, we acknowledge that we don't know. That rabbis and clergy around the world are heard in the aftermath of the tsunami that the prime minister, who later retracted his statements, blamed the Japanese people for the earthquake. And in the aftermath of the massacre last Friday night, there are people who understandably but wrongfully equate those who would destroy us with an essential characteristic. We have to be careful. It is okay to be angry. It is okay to not know how these things come about. It is okay to acknowledge that we don't know, to fight for peace, to fight for justice.

But most of all, to maintain the one thing we do know is that human beings are all created with Itzelam, with the image of God, and that although many, many things can obscure it, we have a belief, the Emunash Lema, with a deep abiding faith, that that is one certainty that we can be sure of and fight for. So if that is what you heard, hopefully that made clear what I was trying to say. I'm not in any way condoning anything, God forbid, but just to keep the heart of Dr. Abu Laish, the Palestinian doctor, who lost three daughters and became a peace advocate. He was already a peace advocate and he wrote a book, Thou Shalt Not Hate, that things happen that are unjust, but we won't hate. We'll fight for peace, we'll fight for justice, we'll fight for education, we'll fight for all of those things, but we won't hate. We won't be brought to that place.

I won't be.