

Love and Creativity

Last night I discussed the failure of the current welfare initiative to meet the Jewish standard of Justice, and the negative effects this failure would have on our society. This morning, I would now like to speak on a more personal level and explore the impact of the current thinking in Congress on us as individuals, on our own souls. To do so, we need to examine the philosophical beliefs that lie behind the thinking of our current Congressional leaders.

At the root of the thinking of these leaders lies the assumption that people are fundamentally motivated by material desires. The rich people need material rewards so that they will continue to produce. The poor must not be coddled lest their laziness be reinforced. This belief is itself rooted in the belief that people are by nature essentially fallen. They cannot be trusted to behave properly. Only strong external incentives will motivate appropriate behavior.

We can see the effect of this way of thinking on our current Congressional leadership, many of whom believe that we need the strong material rewards of the marketplace to keep people on the right track.

I call this worldview the religion of the market place. In this belief system, neither the poor nor the wealthy will be productive unless they will realize a monetary gain. But is this really true? Certainly, we are all motivated by economics. But money is only one of many powerful motivators. Look at your own life. Are monetary rewards the only motivator in your life? Most people are like you. Most poor people would prefer the dignity of work to welfare. Most prosperous people work for the satisfaction of achievement, in addition to monetary gain. The religion of the marketplace demeans our dignity as human beings and misunderstands what makes us tick.

This religion of the marketplace also holds to a degrading outlook on human worth. In this worldview, the market place determines our value as human beings. The people who produce the most in this society are the most valuable. People who are less materially productive, people like mothers, artists and teachers, as well as children, the elderly, the disabled and the unemployed, are not worth as much as those who do more "productive" work.

Many of us recoil from this worldview. Nevertheless, if we look into our own lives, we may see that we have been affected by the religion of the marketplace. Our sense worth can be strongly influenced by what we do or how much we make. The same goes for our children. In school, children often learn that their worth is determined by what they produce. "A students" are more respected than "C students". Varsity athletes are treated better than non-varsity athletes. And our elders, sadly, are hardly valued at all. They have lived past their productive years. So, you see, the religion of the marketplace, with its focus on productivity, degrades young and old alike.

A second principle of this belief system holds that *quality of our life* is measured by how much we consume. A good life is one full of lots of goods--house, car, clothes, entertainment, vacations, and the like. Our advertising industry devotes billions of dollars to sell us this truth. And they are successful! National studies have shown that Americans are working longer hours and consuming more goods per capita than ever before.

Be a good producer and a good consumer. That has become the civic religion of our country. We spend most of our time doing one or the other. Yet, we must see that this is truly idolatry. The devotion to these twin gods enslaves and demeans the winners and the losers, the successful and the struggling. This devotion to production and consumption leads to misery and despair, for rich and poor alike.

We know the emptiness and meaningless of serving such gods. We know this truth, each of us, in the yearnings for connection, meaning and peace within our own lives.

Our leaders in Congress talk about "family values" and human dignity. But the marketplace values which shape their legislative initiatives lead us away from human connection and human

dignity. In a system that sanctifies production and consumption, the winners produce and consume most of the goods. But production and consumption do not lead to satisfaction. Our long work hours and shopping lists leave us too little time for family and friends, for fun and for play. And, while the fortunate among us are working overtime, millions of Americans cannot find work at all, and cannot afford the material benefits of our society. In this system, both the winners and the losers ultimately lose.

The dissatisfactions which many Americans feel are neither accidental nor are they inherent in the human condition. They are largely the consequence of the religion of the marketplace.

Our Jewish tradition, along with other authentic faith traditions, offers an alternative value system. Our Torah teaches that the primary purpose in life is not to produce and to consume. Rather, Judaism teaches that we are placed on earth to love and to create. To love and create, that is why we are here. That is what we are supposed to be doing with our lives.

Think about it! What brings you the most satisfaction in life, the most meaning and joy? Is it producing, for the sake of producing? Is it buying one more thing? I don't think so. I suspect that you find much more satisfaction in activities like the following: being with family and friends, sports, gardening, reading, music, drama, art or a hobby. At work, I suspect that you find the most satisfaction in facing a creative challenge, in learning something, or in making a positive difference in someone's life. These are all activities which involve learning, growing, giving, connecting, creating. These are the qualities that feed the human soul. That is where the joy and the juice is in life. For simplicity sake, I find it helpful to sum up all of these qualities in two words, creating--which includes learning--and loving. That is what we are here to do.

Our Jewish tradition resounds with this message. We are made in the image of a creative God. We are commanded to be fruitful and multiply. We are taught to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to love God with all of our hearts, all of our souls and all of our might. Who can believe that we were created in the image of God in order to produce and consume? God forbid! We were created in the image of God to do what God does, to love and to create. Our work life, our relationships, our leisure activities, are all opportunities, opportunities to love and to create.

We are all influenced by the sanctification of consumption and production in our culture. If we wish to live satisfying lives, we are called to go against the grain of our culture, and to connect to the love and creativity that lives at the core of our lives. This reconnecting to our inner center is important spiritual work. So, I would like to invite you to take a few moments to do this connecting here as a part of our services. As we have done on previous Yom Kippur mornings, I would like to provide some quiet time now for you to do this kind of *tshouvah*.

Please begin by getting comfortable in your seats. Let your prayer books rest in your laps. You may wish to close your eyes. Begin to focus your attention inward by taking a few easy, slow breaths. Feel yourself becoming more relaxed with each breath. Now, I would like you to imagine a place, which makes you feel really relaxed and safe, really good inside. It may be in the mountains, or in a forest, or by a lake...Imagine yourself in that place...and feel the good feelings that come from being in that place... Notice what it is about that place which feels so good. Perhaps it is the sunlight, or the fragrance in the air, or the sounds of that place. Whatever it is, bask in those good feelings.

And now, from that safe and relaxed place, I would like you to imagine what it would feel like to be held by a loving and caring God. Don't let your thinking mind or your beliefs limit your imagination here. You do not need to even believe in God. Just imagine what it would feel like to be held by a loving and caring God. What images do you get? How does that feel in your body?

Now, imagine that this God who holds you is the Source of all love and creativity... Love and Creative is God's essence. Feel how good it feels to be in the Presence of such a God... And now feel the love and creativity in your center, deep inside, near your heart. You are a vessel for God's creativity. The divine love flows into the world through you. Feel the presence of love and creativity, as potential, inside of you. And now ask yourself to whom or to what did I give my love in the last year? How could I deepen or expand that circle of love in the year to come? How did my creativity find expression in the last year? What will be the focus of my creative activity in the coming year? What kinds of loving and creative acts are being called forth from you?

Take some time now just to see what your New Year would be like if love and creativity were your priorities. Let your imagination guide you. Take just a few more moments to feel your way into what are you called to do, and who are you called to be in the New Year

And now, take a moment to give thanks to the loving and creative God who has created you in the Divine image and blessed you so abundantly in this life. And now take a couple more easy breaths, and let your awareness return to sitting here in this Sanctuary on this holy day.

As we conclude this Devar Torah-meditation, I would like you to consider what our society would be like if loving and creating were are prime social values. How would we treat each other? How would we treat ourselves? What would we do with our time? How would we feel inside?

I wish for all of you a New Year full of love and full of creativity, for you, for your families, for all Israel and all the world.

Would that it be so.

AMEN