

A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

Reprinted from the October 2005 Adath Jeshurun Newsletter

One Life at a Time



The *Talmud* teaches us "Whoever saves one life is regarded as the savior of a whole world." Similarly, "Whoever destroys one life is regarded as the destroyer of a whole world." Derived from the biblical concept that one person was the totality of creation, the lesson stresses the importance of each individual life, and that upon that one life rests generations of souls, yet unborn, and yet unknown, who will be given life, or consigned to oblivion.

There is no greater moral challenge in America today than really taking this lesson to heart and finding a way for us to respond to its exhortation as individuals and as a polity.

The recent catastrophe on the Gulf Coast occasioned by Hurricane Katrina has demonstrated the incredible compassion, courage, generosity and ability of individual Americans in coming to the rescue of those in need out of a sense of shared humanity. At the same time, it has highlighted the chasm that rends our society along lines of wealth and poverty, white and black.

The ongoing war in Iraq has now taken the lives of almost two thousand men and women in the American armed forces and countless Iraqis, all in the name of a constantly shifting rationale, until the latest is that the war must be continued to validate the war itself! How can we stand by as a society and allow the continuing loss of life? Who can number the souls lost with the death of each heroic service person, and the loss of each new casualty?

We continue to debate the morality of life-saving scientific inquiry such as stem cell research because of sectarian dogma. How many lives are condemned to suffering and oblivion while we protect the specious "rights" of microscopic particles?

And in the midst of all of this, as I write these words we are fast approaching the fourth anniversary of 9/11. In the new *Mahzor Seder Avodah*, I included a poem in the Martyrology section by Billy Collins, a former poet laureate of the United States, that he read in Congress on the first anniversary of 9/11. Called simply, "The Names," the poem evokes the incomprehensible loss suffered by the families of those who died on 9/11 by listing names, one for each letter of the alphabet, representing those who died, and those who now will never be born.

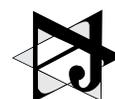
"Names of citizens, workers, mothers and fathers," Collins writes. "So many names, there is barely room on the walls of the heart."

So many names . . . what will we do to diminish the gratuitous addition of names to the list? There can be no more room on the walls of our hearts until we have done all we can to roll back the tide of destruction.

This is a new year.

Let us be saviors of worlds.

CONGREGATION
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