

SHABBAT SERMON
Parashat Miqetz/Chanukah
5778

I dated two women in college who were daughters of Holocaust survivors. I asked the first woman if her parents told her about what happened to them – the year was 1972. She said they never talked about it. The other woman I dated once took me as her date to a family engagement party. Everyone in the room spoke with heavy accents. On the arms of the women who wore short sleeved dresses, I saw tattooed numbers. And they were laughing and having a good time.

- Elie Wiesel did not write his first book, *Night*, until 1958, thirteen years after the war ended.

These stories are common. The survivors wanted to live in the future, not the horrible past. They were moving forward.

In Parashat Miqetz, Joseph names his first-born son, M'nasheh. The Torah explains that the name comes from a word that that means “to forget.” “God has made me forget completely my hardship and my pa-

rental home.” It’s easy to read that verse and feel a pain of loss: Joseph has walked away from his family. One commentary reads these words differently: “Joseph is acknowledging the mercy in oblivion: he is grateful not to be haunted by memory. The dangers of obsession with the past are very real for Joseph; they have the power to cripple him in the essential task he has undertaken.”

- Joseph must put his past aside to live in the present and plan for the future.

There is truth in this. If we focus on the painful past we cannot live fully in the present or build for a different future. This is true for us as individuals; it’s true for the Jewish people.

I just finished a painful book. “Killing A King” is about the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995. Rabin was back then and remains today my Israeli political hero. Rabin was neither a leftist nor an idealist. He had no good feelings for Yasir Arafat and no illusions about the

Palestinians. But he thought an agreement with the Palestinians was achievable and in Israel's best interests. He had a vision of a better future. In 1993, he balked at shaking Arafat's hand on the South Lawn of the White House. For the sake of Israel's future, he made himself do it. He was moving forward.

This applies to us as individuals as well. I know someone who cannot let go of every hurt, real or imagined, that ever happened to him. Just recently, he said that he needed some treatment. The therapeutic process is about learning that we are strong enough to put past hurts aside so they don't control us in the present.

I have no formula for which past hurts we should keep in front of us and which we should leave behind. But if it says in the High Holiday liturgy:

“There is no forgetting before Your holy throne,” then I’ve always thought that there are things we can let God remember while we put them aside.

Since 1948 we have celebrated the Maccabees as the precursors to the modern day Israeli soldier: they were Jews who could take care of themselves on the battlefield. And after the Shoah, that was an important image for us to promote. But we cannot forget that line from the haftarah:

“Not by might and not by power but by My spirit’ says the LORD of Hosts.” Something more than battlefield prowess has kept us alive for 3700 years. That is our will to move forward, to look toward the future, to never give up hope in a better day.

As individuals and as a people, that must continue to be our strength.