WHY I AM NOT TALKING ABOUT FRANCE
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz – JAN 16, 2015

1. Last week I spoke at length about the terror attacks in France and the rise of radical Islam and Anti-Semitism in France and throughout Europe.
    a. Tonight I am not talking about those things.
    b. It is not an omission – this is by design
2. Throughout modern Jewish history people pondered and asked how is it that Judaism has survived and indeed thrived in the face of all forms of oppression, interference and naked hostility?
    a. Why are there still Jews and why is there still Judaism?
        i. The Dahli Lama asked this question of a rabbi
            1. His answer was the ritual and memory
        ii. The same question was asked of Early Zionist Ahad Haam – his answer was the Sabbath, that as much as the Jewish people have kept the Sabbath the Sabbath has kept the Jewish people (not that different from what the Rabbi told the Dali Lama)
        iii. Tevia contemplates the same question in Fiddler on the Roof and his answer, again related to the previous two is:
            1. TRADITION
    b. My own answer is little different but I don't deny or discount in anyway the wisdom of those already offered.
        i. For me the answer also comes from Fiddler, its just a different word.

1. L'CHAIM – TO LIFE

ii. Judaism has survived because above all and in the face of all we celebrate life.

1. We strive toward life
2. Life takes precedence – ALWAYS.

c. Judaism is quite pragmatic about this approach.

i. If Sheloshim falls during the lead up to a wedding of your child, the wedding - the celebration of life takes precedent.

1. Specifically the Talmud gives great deference to the joy of the bride and groom – permitting many exceptions so as not to cancel or postpone the wedding.

ii. If there is a choice between life and health; essentially any of the 613 mitzvoth, you violate the commandment to preserve life (Pikuach Nefesh)

iii. In a favorite teaching, tradition instructs that if you are in the process of planting a tree and you hear that the messiah is coming, you must first plant the tree then greet the messiah. Life takes precedent!

3. I am not talking about France, Anti-Semitism or Terror tonight because – if I interrupted every sermon or teaching to address the collective desire of so many to destroy Jews, Israel and Judaism I would never talk about anything else.

a. And I think if I do that the terrorists, the anti-zionists and the anti-semities win.
    i. The great Jewish philosopher and holocaust survivor Emil Fackenheim famously observed that after the Shoa there was added a 614th commandment, which is not to give Hitler a posthumous victory.
        1. That we must continue Jewish life in the face of all obstacles.

4. So tonight – life goes on, Judaism goes on.
    a. A young girl was given her Hebrew name on this bima tonight.
        i. N'shama – a soul that our tradition teaches is eternal.
    b. A young boy began his Bar Mitzvah weekend tonight, tomorrow he will read from Torah in the same temple that his grandparents are members, his mother grew up and his parents were married in.
    c. Tonight families come to mourn loved ones who death has taken from us.
        i. Their sadness is profound and palpable. And yet our tradition counsels them and all of us to remember the departed for blessing, so that we can take the lessons of their life into our own.
            1. Shiva and Sheloshim will end and life goes on.
            2. Our tradition gives us the ritual of leaving the house of mourning and walking around the block to re-enter the world.

a. Life must go on!

5. Helen Keller, deaf and blind, who managed to teach and write and educate a generation, told us:
    a. "The world is full of suffering but also full of the overcoming of it."
    b. All around us each day are people struggling with disease, infirmity, loneliness, hunger and the possible loss of hope. Yet many of those same people are paragons of goodness, of giving and of love.
    c. It does not erase the obstacles in life, but each day they arise anew knowing that the world requires "the overcoming of it."
6. What is the proper response to the attacks on Jews and Western values in France, Israel and around the globe?
    a. For sure there is a military response
    b. Perhaps a diplomatic or legislative response
    c. But I prefer the Jewish response.
        i. L'chaim To Life
        ii. Life must go on, Judaism must go on, there is no other response but to overcome.
    d. In the states this weekend they are celebrating Martin Luther King Jr.
        i. It seems fitting then to add as a coda
        ii. We too, we Jews we shall overcome.
            1. In spite of everything, we always have!