

Rabbi Lewis' message for May 2007

"April is the cruelest month," writes T.S. Eliot in "The Waste Land." There were moments when it seemed that way as we watched the events unfold at Virginia Tech. And who could not appreciate the painful irony of the death of Professor Liviu Librescu, an Israeli Holocaust survivor, who sacrificed his life for his students on Yom HaShoa. Rabbi Marvin Hier, of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, was quoted as saying, "Here's a Holocaust survivor who lived through the period when so many stood by silently and did nothing. When evil stopped at his door and he saw this murderer was going after his students, he decided that he would not be a bystander. It's quite remarkable." These words of Asael Arad, an Israeli student at Virginia Tech, say it all: "...all the students lived - because of him."

April isn't usually the time of year when we Jews indulge in introspection and selfreflection, but it is hard not to think about the power of Librescu's legacy and wonder about the legacy that will survive each of us. His untimely death reinforces the rabbinic advice, "Repent one day before your death." Live the life you want to be remembered for and live it every day because you don't know how much time you have left.

That rabbinic adage is meant for us all. It isn't only the rich and famous who do or should worry about their legacy; we all consider what others will say about us after we are gone. On his deathbed, even Johnny Sack of "Sopranos" fame worries about the name he is leaving behind. Worrying itself is a waste, of course, if it doesn't lead to reevaluating and doing.

Most of us don't have a moment when we know we are making history, when we know what our legacy will be. Jackie Robinson was one of the few who knew his actions would make history. On the 15th of this same month, Major League Baseball marked the 60th anniversary of the day Jackie Robinson became the first African-American player to don a major league uniform in a regular-season game. He changed the face of baseball forever but wasn't satisfied that he had done enough. He went on to influence the creation of the American Civil Rights movement. His words bear remembering:

- *"A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives."*
- *"I'm not concerned with your liking or disliking me. All I ask is that you respect me as a human being."*
- *"Life is not a spectator sport. If you're going to spend your whole life in the grandstand just watching what goes on, in my opinion you're wasting your life."*

Critics of T.S. Eliot are not sure whether to understand "The Waste Land" as a poem of despair or of salvation. April seems to offer us both possibilities. We see the death of winter and the rebirth of spring. We are reminded of the cycle of life and we are reminded, too, that ultimately we can't control how we are remembered. That is the choice of those who come after us. We can only control how we live.

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