

Rabbi Zamore's Message for November, 2014

True Unity Lies in Diversity

Friends, I would like to share my commentary on the Tower of Babel, which appeared on the [URJ blog 10 Minutes of Torah](#) on October 20th. Following the commentary, I share a few more words on how this well-known biblical narrative can inform our lives every day.

The Tower of Babel narrative has always bothered me. How could God have acted in this most unfair, jealous manner towards our ancestors? It used to outrage me that God destroyed a pretty good moment for the humans. Uniting into one voice, one place and one purpose was quite an accomplishment for the people who were last seen in the Noah narrative “filling the earth with violence” and terrorizing each other. Perhaps, the Babel Builders were completely misguided trying to rise up into the heavens, sword in hand, to challenge God’s power. However, I always saw it this way: they were acting like ignorant, deluded children.

Given a complete chance, they would have built a monolith that was destined to fall like a poorly built tower of playschool blocks. Their ambitions could have never come to fruition, because their goal was misguided from the start. If God waited long enough, the Babel Builders with their juvenile aspirations would have learned experientially that they were barking up the wrong tree. They would have failed and moved on to a better understanding of architecture and theology. However, threatened by their unity, God jumps in prematurely and disrupts their union, which is never restored to this day. In my eyes, God had played it all wrong.

Now I see the Babel text differently. In contrast to their living as seventy different nations, the humans were able to create peace and harmony among themselves only when they were united by place, language and mission. God foils their plan and scatters them, and us, their descendants, in order to send a strong message, one still needed today. True peace, true unity lies in respectful diversity. The answer to the pre-flood human-against-human violence is not evolving into a homogenous unit; only when we learn to co-exist as different nations, cultures, religions, lifestyles and languages will we find true peace.

JCNWJ friends, when we think about celebrating difference, we usually think of the contrast between the broad differences which I refer to above. Certainly, living in harmony, while respecting and even rejoicing in those dramatic differences is a very important goal, one which each person must dedicate him or herself to everyday. However, there is another, more subtle way to reach for harmony within difference.

Each one of us must strive to tolerate and navigate the small differences which challenge us everyday. When we do not agree or even clash with others in our smaller communities, we have an opportunity to practice tolerance and acceptance. We can try to express our disagreement or displeasure in a manner which promotes peace.

In the end, we may still disagree, but we can avoid layering anger, resentment, and pain on top of difference. In this way, we accept one another and our various approaches to life.

L'Shalom,

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