



Loyalty

These post-Pesach weeks are marked by special commemorative days meant to preserve some vestige of important Jewish memory for later generations. Thus Holocaust Remembrance Day, Memorial Day for the Fallen Israeli Soldiers and Israel Independence Day all somehow convey an identity with the Jewish people and its history to new generations that have not experienced the actual events these days commemorate.

Unfortunately, the Day of Remembrance for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terror needs no memory recall, for it is a continuing reality in Israeli life. However, the alienation of a large section of world Jewry from its faith, practices and traditions has created a dangerous state of amnesia amongst this group. There are already Jews who are Holocaust forgetters, even doubters, who wish the whole subject of the Holocaust to be forgotten and ignored. Enough already! is their cry. This will eventually lead to Jewish Holocaust denial in the name of solidarity with the more radical “progressives” of the Western and Moslem world.

As far as Israel Independence Day is concerned, there are large sections of the Jewish world that pay it no heed out of theological, political and deep psychological motives. The Jews of the far Left call the creation of Israel a “mistake,” and many of the Jews of the ultra-Othodox religious right consider it to be a false messiah. The Jews who are in foreign governments

seemingly always act against the interests of Israel when in power and later write books about why their peacemaking efforts bore no substantial fruit. There are therefore many Jews – and certainly many more non-Jews – who would simply wish to erase the past century of Jewish and world history and start all over again as though none of it ever happened.

In the real world though, the fate of the Jewish people as a whole is inextricably bound to the wellbeing of the Jewish State of Israel. Almost half of the world’s Jews live here and to a great extent, it provides the teachers, scholars, political and social leaders for the entire Jewish world. Thus, attachment and loyalty to the existence of the State of Israel would seem to be a self-understood requirement in the societies of all types of Jews.

Sadly, this is not present even here in the State of Israel itself. Reading some of Israel’s newspapers, listening to portions of the radio or viewing television programming would convince an alien visitor from Mars that Israel is the chief villain of the world and responsible for all problems currently facing humankind. The entire concept of Jewish loyalty has become foreign to large sections of Jewish society. It is not taught in many Jewish schools here and abroad, it is absent from the programming of Jewish organizations operating on many college campuses, and it is absent in the spirit of many nominally Jewish households. In fact, loyalty is viewed as being anachronistic, passé

and not in the spirit of current civilized society.

When Yehoshua bin Nun entered the Land of Israel with the Jewish people millennia ago, the Tanach records for us that he encountered a stranger (who later turned out to be an angel sent by Heaven). Unaware of his identity or his intentions, Yehoshua asked him only one question: “Are you with us or are you with our enemies?” Apparently there is no middle ground allowed in answering this question. It poses the harsh reality of Jewish life and does not allow for the illusions of a utopian, even-handed, collateral-damage free, moralistically perfect but unobtainable world to interfere with the stark and truthful answer required to this question. Loyalty to our Torah and its commandments, to our fellow Jews the world over, to our Land and State, are the guarantees of our survival and continued accomplishments. It may be old-fashioned to espouse loyalty in today’s weird world but loyalty to the concept of loyalty itself is an inextricable component of Jewish life.

Rabbi Berel Wein is Senior Rabbi of Beit Knesset HaNassi in Jerusalem and Director of the Destiny Foundation