

SHABBAT SERMON
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“What have you done for me lately?”

This week marks two historic moments ... one for the Jewish people and one for me. And the two are certainly connected and provide us with an important Thanksgiving lesson.

I don't remember it, but I can tell you the date that my family first recalls my ever coming to shul. As an infant I did not go to shul because in those days there was no eruv, and so my mother would not push a baby carriage on Shabbos. Besides, hard as it is to believe, in my youngest years I had been a bit rambunctious ... Yiddish translation: “ah vilder chaya!” But on that Saturday night, November 29, 1947, as soon as Shabbos was over, my father had insisted that my mother bring me to shul. That Saturday afternoon and evening the United Nations was debating and voting on a partition plan for a Jewish State in Palestine. Throughout the day the Jews in my father's shul in Borough Park – many of them refugees from the Holocaust – had been saying T'hillim, psalms, with great fervor. Hundreds had remained after the evening service as a radio was put on to hear the vote. My mother had felt that I should be home asleep, but she remembered the words my father said to her that night: “Jews have waited for this day for 2000 years. I want Moishella to be here to witness it. Maybe the Moshiach is about to come.” 60 years ago this week, November 29, 1947 ... the night the U.N. voted in favor of a Jewish state in Palestine. I don't remember it, but my family remembers it as the first time I was ever in shul!

That was a great moment in time for the Jewish people. For 2000 years we had been in exile, for 2000 years ours was a homeless people. And now we had come home. No one who was alive then will ever forget that moment. This week the Jewish people will celebrate the 60th anniversary of that moment. But there won't be much celebrating because, you see, most of the people who were alive then are not alive today. Today we have a new generation of Jews, and according to a recent survey, more than half of them just don't feel comfortable with the whole idea of a Jewish State. It seems hard to believe but it's true! We are raising a whole generation of Jews who feel no sense of attachment to Israel. And if you ask me why they feel this way, I would tell you that they are a part of a generation that has grown up with a mantra which asks: WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY?

It was not so long ago when every single Jew in the world was proud of Israel. They took on six Arab nations that attacked them on the day the State was born, and they won. That made us feel so proud. When Ben Gurion on Friday afternoon, the fifth day of Iyar, stood up and read the Israeli Declaration of Independence, every Jew in the world was so excited. We basked in their glory. And then, when Hollywood made the movie Exodus and starred Paul Newman in the role of Ari Ben Canaan, and brought the story of

Israeli heroism to the whole world, all of us were so pleased and so proud. And then, in 1967 when in six days they defeated the mighty Egyptian Air Force and the artillery of the Jordanians and the soldiers of the Syrians and conquered the Sinai and the Golan Heights and Jerusalem all in six days . . . all of us were so thrilled and so proud and so excited. And then, on the fourth of July, 1976 on America's 200th birthday, when Israeli commandos landed in secret at the Entebbe Airport and rescued those Jews who were held hostage there, in a daring raid that was so dramatic and so exciting . . . every single Jew in the world stood up and cheered. Israel made us feel proud and tall as it defended itself against all those who sought to destroy it. But you know what? There haven't been too many six day wars lately. And you know what? There haven't been too many Entebbes lately. There haven't been too many wondrous airlifts of Ethiopian Jews lately. And so lately, more and more Jews are looking at Israel with a seeming shrug wondering to themselves, "What have you done for us lately?"

You know who don't feel that way? The people of Israel don't feel that way! And I experienced it in a never to be forgotten moment ten years ago this week. Ten years ago I was on sabbatical in Israel. It was Saturday evening, November 29th. Weeks earlier, Sherry and I had purchased tickets to see the Israeli Philharmonic perform Beethoven's 9th symphony that evening. We didn't realize it at the time, but November 29th that year was the 50th anniversary of the U.N. partition vote. And so, 50 years later, on Saturday evening, November 29, 1997, there were celebrations commemorating that moment in the major cities throughout Israel. And there was also a celebration at the symphony that night. Before the performance, a brief movie was shown recording the historic vote that had taken place at the United Nations that same night, 50 years earlier. They replayed a recording of the vote as it had taken place. The vote had been 33 in favor, 13 against, 10 abstained. And then the lights went on in the Mann Auditorium. The mayor of Tel Aviv came out on stage. Invited to the performance that evening as guests of the State of Israel were the Ambassadors from the 33 countries that had voted in favor 50 years before. And as each name was called out, and as each Ambassador rose, there was a massive outpouring of applause and accolades. It seemed as if everyone was standing, applauding, with tears in their eyes. And I stood there and I thought to myself about some of these countries that Israel was expressing its gratitude to. Countries like Czechoslovakia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Iceland, Liberia, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Uruguay, Venezuela . . . some of the countries haven't cast a favorable vote for Israel since, most all of the countries Israel had surpassed in most every area of endeavor in just 50 years. And yet, here it was 50 years later and Israel was still recognizing and thanking them for their vote of support. The people of Israel were not asking, "What have you done for us lately?"

On this Thanksgiving weekend that is an important lesson for us to remember, not only as Jews in relation to Israel but each of us as individuals in relation to those who we love and care for. We can all take a lesson from Meyer Kripke. Meyer Kripke is a rabbi . . . but not just any rabbi. He is a very different kind of rabbi and his is a very different kind of story. You see, Meyer Kripke is a rabbi who *gives* money! Meyer Kripke learned a lesson on Thanksgiving that he put into practice.

Meyer Kripke was born in Toledo, Ohio in 1914, one of seven children. He came to New York in 1930 to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary. There he met a student from Brooklyn named Dorothy Karp. They were married at the Seminary in 1937, a week after he was ordained. Rabbi Kripke served at several synagogues before coming to the Beth El synagogue in Omaha, Nebraska in 1946 at a salary of \$7500 a year. His wife helped supplement his income by writing children's books, one of which caught the eye of a woman named Susie Buffett. Mrs. Buffett discovered that Mrs. Kripke lived only two blocks away from her, so she called her, was invited over, and they became close friends. So much so, that when Mrs. Kripke was ill with a brain disorder, Mrs. Buffett drove her new friend to physical therapy once a week. Eventually, their two husbands became friendly as well: Meyer Kripke and Warren Buffett, a man who was in the investment business. Over the years, the Buffetts would invite the Kripkes to Thanksgiving dinner at their house and because the Kripkes kept kosher, the Buffetts served tuna salad for Thanksgiving. It was at one of those dinners that Mrs. Kripke encouraged her husband to ask Mr. Buffett to invest the \$65,000 they had managed to save over the years. Rabbi Kripke did not want to bother his friend Warren, who didn't spend time dealing with clients who were investing \$65,000. But eventually, Rabbi Kripke asked, Warren Buffett accepted. As Warren Buffett's reputation continued to grow, and as he became one of the wealthiest men in America, Rabbi Kripke's investment continued to grow as well. When the Kripkes celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary, his wife's condition had deteriorated and Rabbi Kripke decided it was time to put his affairs in order. He called the Jewish Theological Seminary and told them that he would like to make a gift. He made a gift of eight million dollars from the twenty five million dollars his \$65,000 investment had turned into. He made the gift to the Jewish Theological Seminary in honor of his wife, adding that it was at the Seminary 60 years before that he had met and married his wife, and besides, the Seminary had never charged anything for the wedding.

I told you, the story is a bit different. But it's different not only because it's the Rabbi giving the money. It's different also because Rabbi Kripke's mind set runs contrary to modern thinking. Rabbi Kripke felt a debt of gratitude for something that had occurred 60 years earlier, while for many today, the more frequently exhibited attitude is that of "What have you done for me lately?"

Do you know there are lots of men saying those words lately? They're saying it to their wives. Men like Warren Buffett. You see, the Kripkes and the Buffetts stopped getting together for Thanksgiving. That was due in large part to the fact that the Buffetts themselves didn't get together anymore. They're living their own separate lives. That's happening with lots of couples I know of these days. Husbands and wives, who after years of marriage, pick up and leave, feeling that they have outgrown each other when so much of that growth was made possible by a spouse's sacrifice and support and love and understanding during the early trying years of their marriage. And now, "What have you done for me lately?"

And you and I know of many children who echo these words as well; children whose parents struggled to make ends meet, children whose parents' goal in life was to

make sure their children had more and better than they had. But then, as the children grew bigger, they didn't grow better. They grew more distant and had other priorities ... between working and vacations and golf ... that doesn't leave much time to call or to bring over the kids. And besides, "what have you done for me lately?"

Thanksgiving weekend is a good time for us to take stock of what we have and what we have to be grateful for. We have a glorious Jewish homeland. We have glorious homes. We have so much more than most any of us could have dreamt of having when we started off in life. So let us not get caught up in this WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY mentality. Rather, let us be grateful for all the good that God has helped bring into our lives, as Americans, as Jews, as parents and children, as husbands and wives, as we echo the words of our daily prayer: "Modim anachno loch – we give thanks to Thee, O Lord." "Al nisecha sh'bchol yom imanu – for Thy miracles which are always with us and for Thy marvelous goodness toward us at all times." Amen.

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