

A Leaf Marked 9-11

September 11, 2011

Remarks by Rabbi Yehuda Shemtov at the 9-11 Memorial Ceremony at the Garden of Reflection, Bucks County, PA -The Official Pennsylvania Memorial to the Victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. ©Rabbi Yehuda Shemtov

At 10:03, on September 12, 2011, when United Flight 93 dove into the ground in Shanksville PA, we were reminded that this attack was not only on the icons of America represented by the World Trade Center in NYC, and Pentagon in Washington DC. It was an attack ordinary America, and ordinary Americans.

These words are dedicated to all us of plain Americans.

Just a few weeks ago in the middle of June, I took a walk and I spied with my little eye a beautiful deep rich green leaf, with healthy stem & veins laying at the edge of a lavish lush green garden.

The sun was shining in way which pronounced every feature of this leaf and the many shades of green present across this lawn.

I was struck by this unusual sight.

Yet, in its beauty, something was telling me this isn't right. Something seemed unusual.

As I continued the walk I realized: This is the prime of summer. Leaves don't fall in summer. In the summer green leaves belong on the tree.

My mind took me back to a lovely Yiddish song I heard as a child.

A gardener is going about his duty and notices a fallen leaf.

The gardener asks this leaf:

Dear little leaf, why are you on the ground?

The leaf respond: Don't know. Ask the branch which shook me off and let me go.

The gardener asks the branch:

Branch, branch, why did you shake this leaf to the ground while it was in its prime?

The branch responded: Don't ask me. Ask the strong wind which blew so hard that it forced the leave of my branch.

The gardener asks the wind:

Might wind, why did you shake the branch so hard that in shook off its little leaf?

The wind responded: Don't ask me. Go the powerful forces of nature which are so much powerful than I and caused me to blow so hard that the branch shook the leave off.

The gardener goes to the forces of nature and to G-d the Creator and asks:

Dear Creator: What is the reason that it was so important to create a force so powerful that would create a wind so strong that would shake this branch so hard, that the little leaf would have to be dropped prematurely from its branch?

The Creator responds:

Young man, Let' take a quiet walk to the edge of this beautiful garden.

Pick up the leaf. The gardener uncovers colony of ants which were smitten by the blazing heat of the sun. The ants cried out to me, says the Creator, for relief, so I

immediately put things in motion to give some respite for these creatures and give them energy necessary to fulfill their purpose.

We never know why tragedy strikes.

We can't understand why on a beautiful Tuesday morning in September 2973 souls should were shaken from their trees and taken from our midst in the prime of their lives.

Yet.

Although we can't answer the heart wrenching question of **why**, we must answer the question of **what**?

What can I do as a result of this tragedy to make myself a better person and the world a more peaceful place?

We must ask the question **How**?

How can I remain connected to these departed loved ones, and remain faithful to the great ideals which are the bedrock of this great nation which came under assault on that tragic day?

We must **never** let the forces of evil overpower the innate good values we possess.

That morning, many people walked into the jobs to make a difference in this world.

Each, in their own way, was driven by a passion to live, a desire to be effective, and will to be productive.

WHAT we need to do, is to **courageously and faithfully** keep their spirits and passions alive, not just in our memories, but in our realities, through bringing

their passion and enthusiasm into the things WE do, into the daily interactions we have with the people we love, the people we work with, and the world we live in.

We cannot remove the scars and the pain. But **embedded** deep within the human spirit is the capacity for us to transform the **tear drops of sadness and pain** into **raindrops of nourishment** for growth, hope, and positive actions.

I wondered, what was the conversation between the leaf and its branch just moments before it was blown off the trees?

I found it a popular Israeli song, Aleh Katan:

The song talks of a conversation of tree just before its leaves detach.

The tree tells this leaf:

Be strong. Remember me and we will always be connected.

I have been around through many storms and strong winds, yet I am here because of my strong roots.

Little leaf, continues the tree, take my experience with you, make it part of your life, and that will make sure we always remain together and connected. That connection will give you the strength to prevail and weather even the strongest storms and turbulence of life.

When we can strengthen our connection to these special souls, by bringing their life into ours, then, we can bring them from memory into our reality.

Every day we must ask ourselves:

What additional good have I done today?

It may be something little. It may be something huge. But it must always be something different and more than the day before.

The Rebbe, Rabbi Scheenerson, a great spiritual master, always taught that we must confront tragedy with an even greater dose of goodness.

So, when we have answered this question, we must then ask ourselves a second question:

What have I done to continue to bring the life passions of those departed people into this world? What second, additional, little act of kindness and good have I increased for them.

It may be something little. It may be something huge. But it must always be something different and more than the day before.

Through these additional positive acts we will do, is how we not only fill the void of our missing loved ones, but reinforce our connection and the good we do as whole.

This will enable us to transform the inspiration from this Garden of Reflection, and allow these two great Fountains of Life, to water the seeds we plant to create a garden and beacon of hope, love, and kindness.

I offer the following prayer:

Oseh shalom bimromov, hu yaashe shalom aleinu,

May the One who creates peace on high, allow that energy to flow into our loves and our hearts,

and may we have the strength to turn tears into growth, to transform darkness into light, and replace evil with goodness and kindness.

Let true freedom of spirit and the recognition of the G-d given unalienable rights for all humanity, those of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness ring forth in a much more powerful stronger way as G-d continues to bless our great country of the United States of America. Thank you.

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