

Rabbi's Column

Bits and pieces week:

If Passover did not need to be in the spring, then Purim would be approaching very, very rapidly. Tu Bishvat (the new year for the trees) arrives on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Purim would be the next month – but this year, a leap year, there are two months between Tu Bishvat and Purim. In the fall and winter, we will wonder why everything is so late – now you know.

From a listing courtesy of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, here are some of the Jews who died during 2018 in no particular order (I have taken the liberty of adding the most recent): Amos Oz, Philip Roth, Rona Ramon, Stan Lee, Neil Simon, Claude Lanzmann, Anthony Bourdain, Shoshana Cardin, Connie Sawyer, Evelyn Berezin, Mac Miller, Rachel Cowan, Charles Krauthammer, Naomi Cohen, Connie Kurtz, Charlotte Rae, Clara Schwarz Kramer, and the Pittsburg 11: David Rosenthal, Cecil Rosenthal, Bernice Simon, Sylvan Simon, Daniel Stein, Jerry Rabinowitz, Richard Gottfried, Joyce Fienberg, Rose Mallinger, Melvin Wax, Irvin Younger.

The above is naturally an incomplete list. I imagine that in Elul there will be a more complete review of the events from 5779. By the way, if you recognize each of the above names, you are very well tied into all aspects of American culture and history.

What is the essence of a person? it is not solely what they look like, or which group they can be placed in (either because of what they look like or various memberships they have), neither is it solely how they have reacted to people's treatment of them in the past. Pigeonholing people is seldom effective in interacting with them. This is difficult, since none of us know every single incident that the person we meet has had with somebody who is like us in some fashion. We can never be quite sure when a person's reaction is based on what we have done or on what somebody who is not us has done to them in the past. This implies that when somebody reacts to us, we need to see if their reaction is based on who we are. If it is, and we don't like what that implies about us, then we need to work on changing ourselves. If it is not, we need to cut them some slack – sometimes constantly and consistently.

The bottom line? Kindness and patience in our personal interactions with each other is essential. Please continue to act this way during the upcoming secular year.