



Memorial Day - A Time for Mourning

By: Rabbi Morris Panitz

“A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven... A time for weeping and a time for laughing. A time for mourning and a time for dancing” (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 3:4).

While the author of Ecclesiastes presents the twists and turns of our lives as a passively experienced inevitability, in truth, the art of meaningful living revolves around the intentional structuring of time as a response to life’s unfolding chapters. We must, in essence, demarcate periods of time to honor and give proper expression to the range of emotions and significant events that are natural to the human experience. Anniversaries, graduations, and retirements provide outlets for joy, a sense of accomplishment, and a recognition of growth.

and support groups create space to name our losses and draw from the resilience offered by communal support. Failure to mark these moments risks grave consequences. In a culture that mistakenly equates vulnerability with weakness, we too quickly brush aside or “soldier through” our moments of grief, leaving us as a society of “walking wounded.”

While the precise origins of Memorial Day (once known as Decoration Day) are disputed, with as many as 25 communities claiming to have originated the holiday, the common denominator seems to be the American Civil War. The bloodiest conflict on U.S. soil left 620,000 Americans deceased, approximately 2.5% of the total population at the time (equivalent to 8.3 million Americans today). For the first time, national cemeteries were established, and both Northerners and Southerners began memorializing their dead through organized gatherings. Memorial Day therefore originated as a collective response to the profound and widespread sense of grief throughout this country. In setting aside a fixed date on the calendar for

mourning, two important messages are communicated. First, it is both natural and healthy to



