Thought Tools

Do You Remember?

Memory is among those easily overlooked gifts for which we ought to offer up daily gratitude to God.

Without memory, one is isolated from others. But even worse, one is isolated from oneself. Without memory, life is a disconnected sequence of thinly sliced moments of time. It is memory that stitches together those instants, compiling them into our identity.

The word “re-member” means to join together just as the word “dis-member” means to separate.

Loss of family memory is also a tragedy. Happy memories help unify families. Creating a repository of good times spurs smiles and a strong sense of connection when those memories are later shared.

Institutional memory is a real asset for a business. My friend, Dave Ramsey, America’s herald of hope, emphasizes how companies must teach their new employees the story of how the business began. To this day, employees of Bank of America are inspired by the memory of Amadeo Giannini keeping his two year-old bank open during the aftermath of San Francisco’s 1906 earthquake, while other bankers fled the ruined city.

Similarly, a country’s citizens are sustained by a collective memory of how and why their nation’s founders struggled. Only by knowing their shared history can people share a destiny.

Not surprisingly, Scripture repeatedly directs Israel to remember. Numerous verses in the Five Books of Moses stress the act of remembering. Take a look at this general admonition:

Remember the days gone by
(Deuteronomy 32:7)

Ancient Jewish wisdom offers a crucial clue to the nature of memory. In the Lord’s language, if two concepts share the same word, those two concepts are connected. It is significant that Hebrew uses only one word for both male...
and memory.

So God created Man in His image…. male (ZaCHaR) and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

And the butler did not remember (ZaCHaR) Joseph, he forgot him. (Genesis 40:23)

Now why would God link the concept of memory to males rather than females? Well, one of the most significant differences between the sexes is that most girls naturally grow into womanhood, while many boys, if neglected, will either remain adolescents or become barbarians. Surely you know more forty year-old males who are still adolescents, than females? Transforming boys into men takes effort.

While most girls intuitively feel the desire to devote themselves to one man and instinctively know how to cuddle a baby, for a society to endure, boys must be taught how men should behave.

Girls mature with an inbuilt awareness of time while boys tend to live only for the moment. This makes them act destructively toward themselves and also toward their community. The cure for this is memory which links a boy to his father and to the uplifting traditions of manhood.

Boys desperately need role models of manly behavior from the past. Heroic accounts of brave and chivalrous men inspire boys, encouraging them to adopt similar behaviors. Memory is vital for men to become men, which is why families use the father’s name rather than the mother’s.

While unfortunately, not every boy receives the needed education from his family or community, one resource, the Bible, is available to all. In the earliest chapters of Genesis, God establishes the ground rules for male behavior. As I explain in my audio CD set, Modern Men: Men Reaching the Hebrew Word of Man, (on sale this week) even the first usage of the Hebrew word for man, appears in a surprising location, delivering a potent message.

(You may wonder why I recommend my Torah teaching resources in our Thought Tools. I do it because the brevity of these emails limits how many of God’s dazzling thunderbolts I can deliver, and I want you to have access to many more.)

Loss of memory is a dreadful affliction. Medical science has not yet found the solution. However, we can do much to create and maintain memories in our families and in our businesses. We can also play our small roles in helping the young males in our communities aspire to successful lives. The means is memory and the handbook is the Bible.

Dear Rabbi,

Could you please explain Deuteronomy 22:5, which speaks of women and men not wearing similar garments.

Does it pertain to us today? Can a woman wear pants?

Crystal W.
Every once in a while in a flurry of tidying, I come across scraps of paper and pages ripped from magazines containing titles of books whose descriptions piqued my interest. This usually leads to a session with the “place hold” button on my library’s web page, and eventually, I carve out time for a reading frenzy.

To read the rest of Susan's Musings click here.