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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Reform Judaism is the official voice of the Union for Reform Judaism, linking the institutions and affiliates of Reform Judaism with every Reform Jew. *RJ* covers developments within our Movement while interpreting world events and Jewish tradition from a Reform perspective. Shared by 305,000 member households, *RJ* conveys the creativity, diversity, and dynamism of Reform Judaism.

DEAR READER

Honoring Fallen Soldiers

A rabbinic colleague recently sought my advice. Two congregants whose son had served as a doctor in a war zone had asked her to read from the *bimah* the names of American soldiers killed that week in Iraq. Should the congregation adopt this practice in conjunction with the recitation of *Kaddish* on erev Shabbat and Shabbat morning?

Though she was sympathetic to the request, this rabbi feared that the practice might ignite a controversy.

While most of her congregants opposed the war, those who supported it might interpret the reading of names as an act of protest against U.S. policy in Iraq. She didn't want the issue to divide the congregation or offend those who had come to say *Kaddish* for a loved one. What, she asked, would I recommend?

Read the names, I advised, but first share with the congregation and ritual committee your reasons for adopting this practice—which, I informed her, a number of Reform synagogues have been doing for some time.

In my view, while it is each congregation's prerogative to decide whether or not to read the names of fallen soldiers—whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, or elsewhere—honoring them during a worship service is *not* an act of political protest. It is an act of mourning those lost and remembering their valor.

Perhaps more than any other religious tradition, Judaism has developed elaborate rituals of remembrance. In addition to the *Mourner's Kaddish* that we say for parents and close relatives, we recite the *Yizkor* prayer on Yom Kippur—and on the three festivals that follow—in memory of family members, martyrs of our people, and friends. For Jews, memorializing an individual's accomplishments is essential: in the Hebrew Bible the verb “to remember” appears no fewer than 169 times.

And while we can disagree about whether the government acted wisely in sending them to war, we must remember that these men and women died on our behalf, believing that they were protecting our welfare by shielding us from our enemies. While the media frequently reports on the number of soldiers killed, reducing our lost sons and daughters to cold statistics denies their humanity. I believe they are entitled to the dignity of having their names read in a sacred setting, where the enormity of their sacrifice can be acknowledged from the heart.

Reading the names of fallen soldiers as part of the Shabbat service allows us to honor them for their sacrifice, and to call upon God to comfort their families—and us.

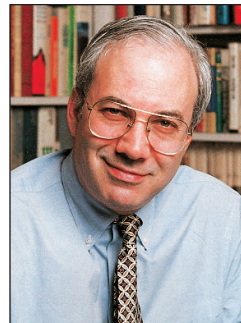


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