

My First Family

by Rabbi Randy Fleisher

My first job out of college was for a citizen's action group in Washington D.C. My supervisor was Jim Leahy who was only a few years older than me. He was from a working class Irish-Catholic family and earned a soccer scholarship to Brandeis University. Jim and I became friends, and once we took a trip together to visit his family who lived outside of Hartford, Connecticut. There was an area in his home that was set up almost like an altar. Surrounding the golden cross, there were three pictures. One, of Jim's brother in his priestly vestments, another, an action shot of Jim the goalie, and then there was a portrait of President Kennedy.

The image of hanging a picture of an American president has stayed with me ever since. Our country has had four presidents since that visit; some I voted for, some I didn't, but none of their pictures have been displayed on my walls.

The other day, I framed a picture of President-Elect Obama, his wife Michelle and their two daughters Malia and Sasha, and hung it near our fireplace. Amy has taken to pointing it out to visitors and remarking light-heartedly, "Have you met Randy's new family?"

She has a point. There is something deeply intimate about the pictures we hang in our homes. This is probably why I picked this president to be my first attempt at replicating the pictorial tribute I noticed over twenty years ago at my friend's family home. It is a symbolic announcement to anyone who is in my house that we are truly embracing this first family of color to be the First Family as our own. For me, it is about *kavod*, a Hebrew word that means respect and honor, but also connotes a certain weightiness.

It is, after all, a weighty moment in history. When we gather this year to pay tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the national holiday in his honor, I believe we will feel more than ever the strength of his words, "The arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice!" When a nation goes from cross-burnings to candidacy; from lynching to landslide, the word 'prophecy' must be contemplated.

I hope that you will contemplate and celebrate with us at our annual Joint Venture service honoring Dr. King. This year's program will be hosted by Cote Brilliante Presbyterian Church on Wednesday, January 14, 2009 at 7:00 pm. The service will feature the combined choirs of CRC and Cote Brilliante and a stirring address from Civil Rights powerhouse Sister Antona Ebo.

It is a time for *kavod*, for daring to bring our most cherished and powerful pictures to life!

B' Ahavah (With Love),

Rabbi Randy