

My friends, for Jews the term “Super Sunday” means phone calls from Federation. Therefore, we must be careful to note that the day after Shabbat is not Super Sunday, but Super *Bowl* Sunday.

For many of us, myself included, Super Bowl Sunday is a day to watch what will be, at least in theory, one of the best football games of the season. Good game or not, it will determine the NFL champions. Most of you would have liked the Colts to be playing; I would have liked the Eagles to be playing, and a Colts/Eagles Super Bowl would have been an awful lot of fun. But as football fans, most of us will be watching the game.

For others, it’s become a day to host a Super Bowl Party, so even those who don’t care so much about the game have a good time socializing with friends. Some watch the game, some schmooze, everybody eats, and everybody has a good time.

There is a newer aspect to Super Bowl Sunday that I want to talk about tonight. It's the commercials. I think it began with an Apple Macintosh commercial many years ago, and now everyone knows that new, creative, and perhaps innovative commercials will be seen during the Super Bowl. Some enjoy the commercials even more than the game.

Tonight, I will talk about two commercials. Don't worry; I am not going to spoil your fun at being surprised by the commercials. I'm going to talk about two commercials that you will not see.

The first is a commercial by the NFL Players Association. As you may know, their collective bargaining agreement will expire next month. The owners of the NFL franchises think they made a bad deal last time around, and want to make changes that the players rightfully oppose. It's safe

to say some of the proposed changes will shorten careers and make life after football even more difficult for the majority of players. I am not talking about someone like Peyton Manning, who will retire someday financially secure for the rest of his life. I'm talking about the more typical anonymous player who might play four years, maybe five, and retire with a ruined body and nowhere near the money you imagine he makes. The owners have said if the players do not accept their demands, the owners will institute a lockout. The players are not striking. The owners will lock them out.

According to the current agreement, the players get to air two commercials during the game. They made a powerful commercial showing empty stands, an empty field, and so on. It shows players saying "Let us play," and fans saying "Let them play." I've seen it—you can too, online—but you won't see it on Sunday. The network has refused to show it. A network spokesman said it made the network

“nervous.” What if they had to show the owners’ side too? That was the fear.

There is a fundamental issue of fairness here, but that is not how this story made it into a Shabbos evening sermon. It’s the second commercial that you will not see that I knew I would talk about in shul, so I decided to mention both. Here’s the one that justifies them as sermonic material.

It’s a commercial made by a Christian group called Fixed Point Foundation. You’ve all seen fans at sporting events holding a sign that says John 3:16. The ad points viewers to the words of John 3:16. It’s a citation from the Christian Bible, which says “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The commercial was rejected because it contains “religious doctrine.”

It certainly does. So do the prayers offered by chaplains before the game in locker rooms. So do the interviews with the players who thank Jesus after the game, and the prayers that some players from both teams come together to offer together. And so does the gesture of pointing to the heavens that many players do after they score or make some sort of great play.

Your first reaction may be that as a Jew, you're glad the network banned the commercial. Perhaps you're glad that you won't be exposed to the words of John 3:16, words that I do not believe any more than you do. But I ask you to think a second time.

Watch the commercials on Super Bowl Sunday and pay attention to how violent some are sure to be. Pay even more attention to the incredible amount of sexual content that others are sure to have. And then ask yourself this

question: Do I want my society to be far more accepting of gratuitous violence and blatant sexuality than it is of religious expression? Sunday will be as much Viagra vs. Cialis as it will be the Packers vs. the Steelers.

My friends, John 3:16 is not sacred scripture to us. I rather doubt that a single Jew or Muslim would have become a Christian after being exposed to a one minute television commercial. I don't know if any Christian will become more religious after seeing it. I doubt it, but I hope so. But the effect the commercial might have had pales in contrast to what banning it says about our society. Brutal violence and nearly naked young women and men in suggestive poses in order to sell us things? No problem. A brief religious message? Too dangerous. Too controversial.

Our nation was not founded on the unique idea that sex sells or that violence holds people's attention. Our nation was founded on the unique idea that the human rights

come not from the generosity of the state, but from God. How sad that we have become more accepting of exploiting violence and sex for commercial gain than we are of a simple religious statement that we can simply choose not to accept. This may not have been your first reaction to hearing about the commercial, but I ask that you ponder what I have said tonight. Think twice. You may conclude, as I have, that although I have no need for a commercial about John 3:16, I worry about a society that finds it more offensive than bombarding viewers with violence and sex.

Agree or disagree, either way I bid you Shabbat Shalom.