

If you look at the commentary to our Torah readings today, it notes how a character's eyes are opened by a dramatic moment. So much of this past year has seen our eyes opened wide by dramatic events around our country and our world.

Too many of the dramatic moments have held great pain, from natural disasters, to outrageous tweets, swastika graffiti, torch-wielding marchers...the only tiny bit of hope that has come to light for me, is that America appears to be in a moment of awakening.

Let's face it, it's been much easier to be asleep, to tune out the news, to tune out our inner moral compass, pass a blind eye over the poverty in our streets, the rampant drug and alcohol addiction across all economic brackets, genocide in Syria, potential of nuclear war, the strife in the Middle East, the crisis of healthcare in America, the climate disaster and on and on and on. For years we've been able to push aside, bury deep the hard stuff as we go about our days. And, perhaps this is because we live in affluent country and have been afforded such luxury. And this may be why many of us have resembled the character of our Yom Kippur afternoon service, Jonah. Who when called upon to cry out to the people of Nineveh, to be the messenger on morality, and require them to fix their wrongs, he shied away. He turned his back and fled. He caught a boat, went deep into its belly and fell fast asleep. Shutting out his duty, blinding himself to the chaos of the world around him, so much so he doesn't even feel the storm that came upon the ship. He slept soundly in the depths of the boat, and eventually in the belly of a huge fish, hiding from the woes of Nineveh. Unable to have moral courage, he slumbered through the days.

As a country and community, it appears to me that we are rejecting the role model of Jonah, and emerging from our slumber.

We are beginning to rise up, and I want to encourage us to continue this awakening, and heeding the mission as a Jewish people. For we are a people defined by its values, who live by a moral core. We never give up on trying to create a world in which we would want to live in. As Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks articulates, "I am a Jew, because our ancestors were the first to see that the world is driven by a moral purpose...teaching for the first time that human life is sacred, that the individual may never be sacrificed for the mass, and that rich and poor, great and small, are all equal before God."<sup>1</sup> As a Jewish people, we do not celebrate wealth or power, but rather morality and ethics!

I feel we are sitting on the precipice of an awakening, and our teachings would tell us push, push, push, and push further. Literally be the cry of the shofar, driving us and those around us towards our moral purpose, no matter how hard the task may be.

We are in a critical time in America and in our world. So much so that the Reform Movement, the largest and most powerful Jewish force in North America, with over 900 member congregations connecting millions of people together, we have chosen to unite in sharing a singular message this High Holy Day season. Never since its founding in 1889, has the Central

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.rabbisacks.org/why-i-am-a-jew/>

Conference of American Rabbis encouraged us to speak the same words from our pulpits across the country. But the crisis is real, the time is now.

The Talmud teaches<sup>2</sup>, “If you see wrongdoing by a member of your household and you do not protest – you are held accountable. And so it is in relation to the members of your city. And so it is in relation to the world.” As Jews we are held accountable in ever-widening circles of responsibility to rebuke transgressors within our homes, in our country, in our world. One *chutzpadik* medieval commentator teaches we must voice hard truths even to those with great power, for “the whole people are punished for the sins of the king if they do not protest the king’s actions to him.”

Today, I speak words of protest, joining hundreds of my Reform rabbinic colleagues across the nation in fulfillment of our sacred obligation. We will not be silent. We will, without hesitation, decry the moral abdication of the leaders in our country, who fuel hatred and division in our beloved cities. We, like the prophets before us, draw from the deepest wisdom of our tradition to deliver a stern warning against complacency. And, an impassioned call for action. We call on you to rise up and say in thousands of ways, every single day, as proud Jews and proud Americans:

“You cannot **dehumanize, degrade** and **stigmatize** whole categories of people in this nation. Every Jew, every Muslim, every gay, transgender, disabled, black, brown, white, woman, man and child is beloved of God and precious in the Holy One’s sight. We the people, all the people, are created *b’tzelem Elohim*, in the image of the Divine. All the people are worthy of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Rosh Hashanah is called in our Torah, *Yom Teruah*, the day of sounding the Shofar, whose piercing tones sound an alarm, express our fears and especially in these times compel us to respond with a resounding call for justice.

The shofar blasts: Tekiah [Rabbi Hronsky sounds single shofar blast]

Tekiah, a solitary blasting sound, a sound of certainty:

As rabbis we are, from sea to shining sea, speaking to our congregations in every accent of America to declare in unison: acts of hatred, intimidation and divisiveness will not be tolerated in these United States. We are certain. We stand upon the shoulders of the sages, poets and rabbis in every generation who fought for freedom. We are certain. We speak in memory of every Jew and in memory of all people who tragically and senselessly lost their lives at the hands of evil oppressors. We call on our political leaders; progressives and conservatives alike, to rigorously uphold the values brilliantly articulated in the founding documents of our country, the “immortal declaration” that all people are created equal. We call on every elected leader to responsibly represent our country’s history and advance its noble visions of tolerance. On this first day of the New Year, WE are “Proclaiming liberty throughout all the land” [Lev 25:10].

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<sup>2</sup> “One Voice for the New Year, 2017” authored by Rabbis Elka Abraham and Judy Shanks, from CCAR Facebook discussion and Rabbi David Stern, CCAR President. I stayed fairly true to the provided text, changing some delivery details, adding clarifications, specific tasks towards action, and adapting for our congregation.

The shofar blasts: Shvarim [Rabbi Hronsky sounds 3 shofar blasts]

*Sh'var* means to break, and the call *shevarim* illuminates the sound of brokenness: The brokenness of our hearts, our souls, and our country.

Something crumbled inside us when we watched the televised images of Charlottesville's beautiful streets filled with hate-spewing marchers. The wound opened again when protestors from the right and left clashed violently in Berkeley, when the glass walls of a Holocaust memorial in Boston were shattered, when swastika's appeared on local school campuses, and decrees of "Gas the Jews" were heard on an Elementary school playground in our area. Hate crimes are on a sharp rise in every major city, up 12.6% in LA so far this year. Hate crimes against Latino's, Muslim, Jews, Asians, LGBTQ community, hate against anyone who is seen as "other".

How much more hate will we tolerate? How many more cities will witness violence?

We must not accept or become inured to some warped version of "normal," of racist and anti-Semitic acts or rallies popping in and out of breaking news cycles. Let us never grow numb to the brokenness, but let our pain fuel our vows to respond – with peaceful protests, and with public calls for healing, by building alliances and by speaking in unison with other minorities and faith communities.

In the last few weeks, we have sought out unity at TBH by bringing together teens from TBH and two African American churches, Ward AME and McCarty Memorial Church<sup>3</sup>. Building bridges between our communities. We are committed to furthering this relationship, working together on Social Justice advocacy, and pulpit exchanges. And, in partnership with our Caring Across Generations cohort, TBH marched for solidarity, eleven days ago, in the shadow of the anniversary of 9/11. Over 800 individuals marched down Ventura Blvd, seeking a just society, united together across race and religion, to cry out for the rights of all individuals and bring about a stronger community united against hate.

We will not be silent, we will not be complacent. Neither silence nor complacency nor waiting anxiously and fearfully for the next wounding event are options. Not for us! Elie Wiesel, of blessed memory, possessed a rare understanding of unfathomable brokenness. His memorable words sound a warning to us today, "We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere."

As a people, we take action; we speak out, and reach towards and embrace the other. May we never be neutral, never silent in the face of threats or of discrimination toward any person.

The shofar blasts: Truah [Rabbi Hronsky sounds 9 short blasts]

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<sup>3</sup> With gratitude to Jewish Center for Justice who created the space for the opening dialogue.

### The Sound of Urgency:

The events of these simmering weeks are a wake-up call to our Jewish community. Racism is wrong whether it seeps into explicit anti-Semitism or not. The Talmud teaches that God created us all from the first Adam so that no human being could ever say, “my lineage is greater than yours.” But just in case we thought the white supremacists were after someone else, or that the Confederate flag has nothing to do with modern day Nazi sympathizers, or that we were somehow safe simply because a majority – but certainly not all - of Jews in America are white. Those fiery torches illuminated another truth, one we learn and forget only to learn again this day: if one minority group’s rights are threatened, we are all threatened. As Martin Luther King taught us, “We are all tied together in a single garment of destiny,” whether we are the least powerful or the most powerful person in our world.

In our Torah portion this morning, Abraham in the horrendous moment poised with knife in hand, the most dramatic moment, wakes up when he hears his name called. He lifts his head, opens his eyes, and sees in front of him something so important, the ram caught in the thicket. The answer to this dramatic moment was found literally in the resources in front of him, once he opened his eyes.

I am hopeful that we too in this year will open our eyes each time a dramatic difficult moment happens for us in our country and around the world. Open our eyes to the possibilities of how to offer repair, how to fix, see the resources we have right in front of us, and put it all together to do the hard work.

I ask all of us, as TBH congregants, to sign the brit olam, a covenant a contract with our world. Commit to this holy work at this most important time. The members of TBH L’tzedek – TBH Seekers of Justice have signed it, our TBH Board has sign it, and I ask you to pick up a copy from the lobby and agree to be a protectors of our world, to be one who fights for justice.

Our resources are vast, as long as we engage them. Join us as we make lunches for the homeless through PATH, People Assisting the Homeless, every month. Help us to feed the most vulnerable in our community through donations and volunteerism with the North Hollywood Interfaith Food Pantry. Participate on November 18 in our Social Justice Shabbaton where we will learn about areas in need of our advocacy work and we will take action. In addition, you will see provided resources from the Reform Movement’s Religious Action Center, in the lobby. Take them, learn about three areas in need of our advocacy, and be inspired to take action on the campaigns for “Criminal Justice Reform” “Transgender Rights” and “Immigration Policies.”

We honor as well this year, the anniversary of one of the most courageous seekers of justice, a great moral compass, in honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> year since his assassination, TBH will commence Mitzvah Day on the Sunday of MLK Weekend. Mark your calendars, garner your resources, and give back. Be a part of repairing our world.

And finally as we know, the shofar blasts: Tekiah G’dolah [Rabbi Hronsky sounds the lengthy single blast]

This long blast should be for us a symbol of our Endless Pursuit of Justice. As Dr. King famously cried, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” He knew then that this pursuit would be endless for us.

*Tzedek tzedek tirdof*<sup>4</sup> the Torah admonishes: “Justice, justice you shall pursue, so that you may live and inherit the land which I, God, give to you.” Our sacred text reminds us that for a community to truly inherit its place in the world, thoughtful leaders at every level must be dedicated to equality and to unity. Every community relies on passionate and engaged citizens; it relies on us to be insistent advocates for tolerance and enduring kindness between the diverse peoples of our nation. To pursue justice is to create a society that protects and enlivens every citizen. Let us be relentless, tireless builders of that society in our city and in our country - in this New Year. Amen

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<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 16:20