

Dear Chavraya,

Just a week ago, throughout the Jewish world we marked Yom HaShoa. In remembrance and recognition of what happened, we affirm a timeless bond with the Six Million. I try to imagine the depth of aloneness that we would feel if others refused to acknowledge the attempt to destroy the Jewish people as genocide. That is exactly the experience of Armenians, struggling to hold their own historic grief, just as we hold ours, but in the face of that refusal on the part of so many. I have spent time during the past months learning about the Armenian Genocide, the first genocide of the twentieth century. Today, April 24th, is observed by Armenians as Genocide Memorial Day, this year marking the one hundredth anniversary of the start of the Armenian Genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Empire. I share with you below a statement that I wrote for the Mass Board of Rabbis that I hope will be disseminated in the coming week, to be shared in friendship with the large Armenian community in Greater Boston.

There is much description of personal suffering in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Tazria-M'tzora*, of people with broken bodies and spirits seeking to rise. We can imagine that the worst part of their suffering is rejection by others, the aloneness of suffering in silence. Allowing us to imagine the pain of such alienation, to consider the cruelty of so responding to others, the Torah then cries out against such abusive reading of holy texts, such narrow reading of itself. The rabbis teach on this portion that the one suffering needs to make known their pain to others *and others will seek compassion upon them/v'rabim m'vakshim alav rachamim*. As for one who suffers, so for a people. Armenians are suffering and making known their pain. It is time, one hundred years later, for the world to respond.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor

Honoring the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide – A Statement by the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis

The Massachusetts Board of Rabbis reaches out in solidarity and sorrow to Armenians everywhere on the one hundredth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. We acknowledge the pain carried through generations of a people decimated, the psychic scars transmitted, the truncated branches of family trees yet to regenerate. We hear the echoes of pleading voices long stilled that call us to remember, to learn, to witness. We call for universal recognition of what happened on the plains of Anatolia, the 1915-1923 atrocities carried out by the Ottoman government. Only truth shall be surety for the timeless cry of "Never Again."

Details unfold as a scroll of lamentation, these we remember and pour our hearts out. We remember the hundreds of Armenian intellectuals, the writers, artists,

doctors and lawyers, the communal and political leaders arrested and executed on April 24, 1915. We remember the desert death marches, the killing squads, and the concentration camps. We remember the one and a half million Armenians killed of some two million in their ancestral homeland prior to World War I, mourning the destruction and exile of an ancient people. We remember the use of trains for deportation to death, cattle cars packed with human beings, portent of genocide to come. We remember the heroic efforts of American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, the missionaries and aid workers who cried out to the world for response. We remember the continuing denials and the shame of refusing to recognize what happened, to call it for what it was.

We remember words that challenge silence and disallow denial. Words of witness by Ambassador Morgenthau, laying bare the plan by its architect, Talat Pasha: "It is no use for you to argue..., we have already disposed of three quarters of the Armenians...; we have got to finish with them...." Igniting the flames of one genocide from the embers of another, Adolph Hitler, his memory be blotted out, cynically asked, "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" We honor with pride and humility the work of Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew who did speak, who coined the word "genocide" in 1943, his long held anguish for Armenians merging in the midst of the Holocaust with anguish for his own people.

We take to heart Elie Wiesel's lament for the "double killing" of Armenians that happens through silence. Challenging Turkey to acknowledge what happened, it is our challenge, as well. Recognition of another's suffering and willingness to describe it accurately should never be a matter of political expediency. The prevention of future genocides rests with our willingness to acknowledge those of the past. As the Holocaust should not be subsumed within the Second World War, neither should the Armenian Genocide be subsumed within the First World War.

We call on Turkey to recognize the Armenian Genocide. Heirs to the Ottomans, Turkey's burden is also an opportunity to insure that what happened one hundred years ago will no longer define the relationship today between descendants of the victims and descendants of the perpetrators. We call on the United States to unequivocally recognize the Armenian Genocide, affirming our commitment to justice and giving meaning to annual expressions of condolence and sorrow. We call on Israel to unequivocally recognize the Armenian Genocide, giving voice to the moral legacy of its own emergence from the ashes of the Holocaust.

Toward healing among communities and peoples:

- We call on the American Jewish community through its official organizations to unequivocally recognize the Armenian Genocide, to apologize for past reticence, to reach out from heart to heart.
- We call on local Jewish communities to learn about the Armenian Genocide and to reach out to their Armenian neighbors, building friendship and cooperation.

- We call on all people to refrain from manipulating past horrors to demonize members of any people or faith today, Christian, Muslim, or Jew.

In the midst of Anatolia where the Biblical Mount Ararat rises, Noah's ark found rest, a dove with its olive branch still waiting to alight. To give rest to the dead and peace to the living, a rainbow promise of never again, the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis calls for universal recognition of the Armenian Genocide.