

Another View



Rabbi Victor Reinstein Letting go of conflict

On Friday, the week of Parashat Korach, the new mosque and cultural center at Roxbury Crossing was dedicated. I attended the interfaith breakfast that celebrated the event. It was a deeply moving gathering, with speakers representing a wide spectrum of the interfaith community as well as videotaped words of welcome from Governor Patrick.

A thread of hope ran through all of the talks, including those of

two Jewish speakers. It was a hope that this breathtaking edifice would be a place of interfaith gathering, a place for communities to come to know each other and to acquire new understanding.

Amidst this celebration of hope, there was a glaring absence that filled me with sadness. There was not a single representative, nor a greeting conveyed, from the official leadership of Jewish Boston.

There has been hurt and there have been legitimate concerns. The work to be done has been acknowledged, and a hand extended toward its doing. As a community, it is time to extend our own hand and to receive that of the other.

Beyond the absence of those who should have been there, a gathering of demonstrators formed outside. Condemning the mosque as extremist, the demonstrators refuse to let go of the controversy that many of them fomented in recent years, straining relations between the Jewish and Muslim communities.

The inability to let go of conflict, to be willing to approach and be approached by the other, is one of the sad dynamics in Parashat Korach, the Torah portion that framed the week of the mosque's dedication. Seeking to defuse tension in the face of their rebellion Moses calls on Korach and his compatriots to come and talk. Of their refusal, a midrash teaches: from here we learn that people should not hold fast to

conflict/ayn machzikin bama-chioket.

Of Korach's revolt, the Zohar describes its nature as plugta d'shalom/a contention against peace. Rabbi Yitzchok Meir of Gur comments further, p'lig al Shabbos d'Shabbos hu shalom/it is a contention against Shabbos, for Shabbos is peace.

Whether among individuals and families, communities, peoples and nations, it is difficult to let go of conflict and controversy. It is difficult to recognize new realities and transcend old fears and perceptions. In the spirit of Shabbos, on whose eve the dedication of the mosque took place, itself the Muslim Sabbath, it is time for the Jewish community to let go of the conflict and to embrace a new beginning.

Conveying dignity and the hope of reconciliation, a young Muslim leader called on people not to debate with the demonstrators. In a moving gesture, he asked people instead to take one long-stemmed white rose and to offer it to a demonstrator.

Holding a rose in my hands, almost tearful, I approached one of the organizers of the demonstration. Though his words to me did not suggest any readiness to relinquish conflict, his arms were enfolded around an ever-burgeoning bouquet of white roses. I placed my rose upon the others and wished him Shabbat shalom.

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