

Dear Chavraya,

It has been such a hard week for everyone. Word came of the horror in Orlando even as we stood at Sinai, on the morning of Shavous. Words fail, and perhaps that is because they aren't enough, and yet that is where we begin. I had wanted to write in a different mode today, simply as prayer. I had been asked to write a statement for the Mass Board of Rabbis. As of today, I have not been able to do it. What follows below are as notes to myself, yet needing to be shaped and to be drawn from to become a coherent whole. With trepidation, I share these thoughts with you by way of sharing something of where I am and seek for all of us to be. I ask for your forgiveness and forbearance, for your encouragement. As we learned from Rebbe Nachman on the very night of the slaughter, "may our *kinot* (dirges of lament) be turned to *tikkun*," that we might move from despair to repair. May we find strength and solace in Shabbos embrace.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor

(Toward a Draft)

Beyond Prayer – Channeling a Torrent of Tears
Statement of the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis in Response to Orlando

My dear ones are drowning in the sea while you linger in prayer... (Sota 37a)

The Massachusetts Board of Rabbis cries out in horror with all Americans for the carnage wrought in Orlando. As the list of place names continues to grow in rapid-fire succession, we are stunned in spite of ourselves by the slaughter unleashed by one more semi-automatic rifle in the hands of yet another crazed gunman. We shed a torrent of tears and cry out *Eicha/How*, the word with which the Book of Lamentations begins and by which it is called in Hebrew. We reach out in tearful embrace to the LGBTQ community in Orlando and across the land. Standing together, we are all lesbian and gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. We reach out to the Latino community, knowing too that we are all Latino now. When there is no safety to be found among one's own, it is for all of us to be that place for each one.

We decry all efforts to divide, whether with walls of stone or walls of words. We call on political and religious leaders to eschew language that demonizes our Muslim neighbors, recognizing all terror as its own religion of hate. The true language of faith is one that affirms the image of God in every human being. In response to the fear that touches us all, we warn against the false dichotomy between security and compassion. We have affirmed with words and deeds so many times before that open hearts and open doors mark our greatness as people come together as a nation, the only way if we are to be one and indivisible.

As the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis, we have issued numerous statements to address all that cries for redress in the world around us. In the quest for wholeness, of all that pleads and bleeds for justice and repair, so many of our statements become as one in Orlando. Chastened by our own words, we wrote in response to gun violence: "The Massachusetts Board of Rabbis is horrified by the epidemic of gun violence in our cities, in our state, and throughout the country. We call for action to stop the bloodshed. We are joined in anguished spirit with those whose lives have been shattered. As rabbis called to comfort mourners, we grieve with all the parents of slain children. They are our children, and we pledge not to stand idly by their blood" (see full statement). Seeking to create safe space for the transgender among us, the "T" in LGBTQ, as for all the ways of gender and sexual identity, we wrote with hope for the community we are meant to be: "The Massachusetts Board of Rabbis celebrates the breadth of diversity within the Jewish people, as among all humanity. Delighting in the myriad ways that human beings are created in God's image, we encourage the greatest spirit of openness in our communities, that we might be blessed through the unique holiness of all who enter.... With growing awareness of the gender/sexuality spectrum, our communities are becoming more open to transgender individuals. Grateful for the increased openness we witness today, the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis is committed to the full inclusion of transgender Jews" (see full statement).

As rabbis, words are our medium, whether written upon the pages of a statement or as prayer of the heart rising on wings of song. Even as we issue one more statement, Orlando reminds us that words are not enough. We take to heart the rabbinic teaching of Moses standing at the shore of the Sea before the waters parted: "At that time, Moses was praying at length. The Holy Blessed One said to him, 'My dear ones are drowning in the sea, while you linger in prayer before Me?!' Moses said before God, 'Master of the Universe, but what is in my power to do?' God responded to him, 'Speak to the children of Israel and let them journey forth...'" (Talmud, Tractate Sota 37a).

Without diminishing the power of words or of prayer, we also know that more is needed. We hold each other and cry bitter tears, then hand in hand to journey forth. We journey forth in the way of political action to rid this land of the vicious weapons that allow those gripped by madness and hate to take forty-nine precious lives. We journey forth to foster love and compassion in all the worlds of our lives, at home, at work, at school, and in the market place. We journey forth to build bridges with all of our neighbors, none to be demonized because we are all as each one.