

Dear Chavraya,

At Standing Rock North Dakota this week, protectors of Earth, *Shomrei Adamah*, held up mirrors for all to look at themselves, a reminder to ask of each one's own responsibility for Earth and each other. It is such a powerful symbol. With so much struggle in the world, inevitably reflected within ourselves, the bitter fruit of electoral strife, of hate and love in fateful dance, people joined and separated, we look into the mirror and see ourselves. Turning the mirror just a little, we see another who is not so far away from where we stand.

It is the week of *Parashat No'ach* that tells of the flood of violence that filled the earth and then of water that drowned out the fiery hate of one for another. The portion of *No'ach* is part of the universal backdrop of the Torah. Creation and its undoing, the earth abused by its inhabitants, and then it was no more, all universal history, a telling and teaching for all people. The story of the Jewish people does not begin until the context is set, teaching that we are one among many peoples, all of us living upon this fragile earth. The critical tension is set between the universal and the particular. *Parashat No'ach* is that mirror held up in which to see our selves and each other, each in relation to the other. The question pulsates amidst the raging waters, what does it mean to be just and good in this world?

The greatness of No'ach is in his doing good in the midst of evil, in seeking to walk his own path undeterred by the violence and hate of others. In words that are beautiful, a tender image of caring and faithfulness, we are told that *No'ach walked with God/et ha'elokim hit'ha'lech No'ach*. That he sought to do good, that he walked with God is praiseworthy, but so too commentators see in these words, and in what is missing in the telling, the moral failure of No'ach. In the end he does only what God tells him to do and does not challenge God. He does not stand as Abraham later does for the sake of Sodom and Gomorrah and demand to know how the Creator can countenance destroying what has been created. No'ach does not stand up to God and demand that God do justly.

Looking into the mirror of *Parashat No'ach*, we realize it is for us to stand up and do justly, to stand up for and with each other and to challenge those who would divide us. In the midst of the churning flood of hate that threatens us all, there was also hope this week near to home, of people standing together, each as the dove that went out from the ark and offered hope beyond the flood. A call came from the Muslim community asking for others to speak out against the anti-Muslim hate to be spewed in Stoughton. The great sadness for Jews is that the haters were speaking in a Synagogue. Rabbis were called to sign on to an interfaith statement. At first some were uneasy about speaking out against a local shul and its rabbi. As it became clear how ugly and real the message of hate would be, people began to sign on, becoming a significant number of the signers. As the mirror for each other, we had to wonder what we would seek from others if anti-Semitic speakers came to a local mosque or church. In a beautiful letter of thanks to all of the signers and organizers for standing with the Muslim community, the Executive Director of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center, Yusufi Vali, wrote: "Last but not least, please know that should any of your congregations/communities be subject to any hate, please count on Shaykh

Yasir, our ISBCC community, your Muslim colleagues across the state, and myself as allies and friends in that fight. We will want to speak up, stand up, and support you.”

Standing with each other, we become the mirror in which we see the beauty of what is possible, each one as the dove flying above the flood.

Please see the interfaith statement below and follow the links that make clear the challenge.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor

Rejecting Hate: Statement of Interfaith Solidarity Against Islamophobia in Massachusetts

As Boston-area religious and cultural leaders, we are committed to building a community that embraces people of different beliefs and practices, including our Muslim neighbors and friends. This work is particularly important in the present political climate, in which some public figures are voicing messages of intolerance and xenophobia, pitting segments of the American populace against one another.

It is for this reason that we are deeply concerned to learn of an event scheduled for November 2nd in Stoughton featuring three speakers whom the Southern Poverty Law Center has identified as anti-Muslim extremists or hate group leaders. Jerry Boykin, Frank Gaffney, and Tom Trento cast Islam as an inherently immoral faith, and spread conspiracy theories that Muslims are secretly infiltrating US and European governments as a “fifth column.”

For example, Mr. Gaffney has claimed that “most of the Muslim-American groups of any prominence in America are now known to be, as a matter of fact, hostile to the United States and its Constitution,” and Mr. Boykin has argued that “We need to realize that Islam itself is not just a religion - it is a totalitarian way of life. ... It should not be protected under the First Amendment, particularly given that those following the dictates of the Quran are under an obligation to destroy our Constitution and replace it with Sharia law.” This inflammatory rhetoric has no factual basis and directly fuels anti-Muslim discrimination and hate crimes.

Our houses of worship should be spaces for prayer, reflection, study, and community building. While free political debate is a vital element in our democracy, voices that demonize ethnic, racial, or faith groups have no place in our sanctuaries.

As clergy and organizational leaders seeking to cultivate a shared ethos of interreligious and cross-cultural cooperation, we the undersigned reach out to and call on Congregation Ahavath Torah to revoke their invitation to these

individuals, all known purveyors of vitriol and acrimony. They, and the gross misinformation in which they traffic, are not deserving of a platform in our community.

¹ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/lieutenant-general-william-g-%E2%80%9Cjerry%E2%80%9D-boykin-ret>

¹ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/frank-gaffney-jr>

¹ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2016/active-hate-groups-united-states-2015>

¹ <http://shariahthethreat.org/a-short-course-1-what-is-shariah/a-short-course-8-what-is-the-muslim-brotherhood-and-how-does-it-operate/>

¹ https://youtu.be/qaNjU9TmQ_A

¹ <https://www.aclu.org/report/nothing-fear-debunking-mythical-sharia-threat-our-judicial-system>

¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/18/us/politics/hate-crimes-american-muslims-rise.html?_r=0