

One Voice High Holiday Message 5778
Shared by the Central Conference of American Rabbis

The Talmud teaches, “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 President who fuels hatred and division in our beloved country. This is not a political statement. 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 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 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 [single shofar blast] The 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 stand upon the shoulders of the sages, poets and rabbis in every generation who fought for freedom. 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 [men] 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].

The shofar blasts: Shvarim [3 shofar blasts] The Sound of Brokenness:

Something crumbled inside us when we watched the televised images of Charlottesville’s beautiful streets filled with hate-spewing marchers. The wound reopened when [localize/personalize here] EX a few miles from our homes protestors from the right and left

clashed violently in [Berkeley] OR a few miles from here in Boston the glass wall of a holocaust memorial was shattered OR a local mosque was attacked only a few miles from where we pray today. How much more vandalism, how many clashes, which other cities? 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. 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.” May we never be neutral, never silent in the face of threats or of discrimination toward any. Let us interfere as [rofei lishvurei lev] healers of the broken [hearted], and [u’mchabaysh l’atzvotahm], binders of their wounds. Psalm 147:3 : לְעֶזְבוֹתָם שִׁמְחָה וּבְיָרִיִּם לְשִׁבְרֵי פֶּאֶה הֶ

The shofar blasts: Truah [9 short blasts] 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 in the fact that most – but certainly not all - 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.

The Shofar blasts: Tekiah Gdolah [lengthy single blast] The Endless Pursuit of Justice:

Tzedek tzedek tirdof 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 truly to 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 you 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.