



Congregation Tikkun v'Or

Ithaca Reform Temple
Spirit • Community • Justice

August 18, 2017

Dear Friends,

I am writing to join with you in sadness and outrage at the disgusting white supremacist march in Charlottesville last weekend. We are all shocked by the violence and by the vile antisemitic and racist chants of the marchers. We mourn the death of Heather Heyer, a young woman killed by a white supremacist and we pray for all those injured. As you may already know the congregation issued a public statement yesterday. In case you didn't see it, I have printed it right below this letter.

I know several rabbis who went to Charlottesville last weekend to join a group of clergy who were there to support and protect the local community and to be a moral witness against racism and white supremacy. One of my best friends, Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, a child of Holocaust survivors, was one of them. On Sunday night when he arrived back home, he told me about the frightening level of violence and how fortunate he was to be back home in safety. I was proud that he and my other colleagues were there.

Personally, I couldn't get the image of those people with torches chanting, "You will not replace us. Jews will not replace us" out of my mind. I imagine many of you may have had a similar reaction. It was truly frightening.

The march itself was shocking, as was the equivocation of the president and his subsequent defense of the marchers as "fine men." After the president was elected, I shared with you my sense that his election marked a resurgence of white supremacy. This week the president fully revealed himself as a supporter of white supremacy. He has refused to disavow and condemn his white supremacist supporters who look to him as their protector and leader. More than that, he has equated their values with the values of those who seek justice. Since his election, there has been an increase in violent attacks against people of color, immigrants, Muslims and others. There has also been an increase in antisemitism. He has exploited legitimate grievances of some affected by the economic inequities in our country (that his policies will only make worse) to foment hatred and division.

How do we respond to this critical moral/political/spiritual crisis?

The struggle for racial justice has been a core commitment of our congregation and of Reform Judaism for many years. We devote ourselves to racial justice because we believe that the dignity and equality of all human beings is at the core of our Judaism and because our people know the pain and suffering of systemic oppression. As Jews, we also know the deadly consequences of silence in the face of injustice and we will not be silent.

We understand that white supremacy has been part of the history of our country from the very beginning and that systemic and structural racism is part of our everyday life. Our country has made progress but it still has a long road to walk to end racism. As a congregation, we will continue to educate ourselves and one another about the history of white supremacy and about structural and systemic racism that is part of the fabric of our lives. We will continue to confront and unlearn our own racism and we will join with people of color in the struggle for justice and equality for all.

It has been a very hard week, but I am heartened by the courage of so many people and communities, including our own, that have spoken up against racism and antisemitism. I know that many of you have participated in vigils this week and will continue to speak out. We can all be proud of the statement that Miranda and Shawn released on our behalf yesterday. I am so honored to be the rabbi of this beloved community devoted to the highest ideals of Judaism and the Jewish people: to freedom, justice and equality for all in our country and in the world at large.

May we all, each in our own way, and as a community, follow the call of Heather Heyer's mom to channel our anger (and fear) not into violence but into righteous action.

There are many organizations doing great work in response to the event of the past week. Two organizations that are focused on neo-nazi and white supremacist groups are: [The Southern Poverty Law Center](#) and [Turning After Hate](#). I encourage you to check out their websites.

On Tuesday, it will be Rosh Chodesh Elul, the first day of 40 days of repentance (teshuva) ending on Yom Kippur. Each day we blow shofar. May it offer us all an opportunity to wake up, for reflection on the difficult challenges we face and may it inspire us all to turn to one another in love and righteous action.

Much love and many blessings,

Rabbi Brian