

One Voice for the New Year, 2017

As we turn to our shofar service, the calls have taken on more meaning as calls to justice. Right now hundreds of rabbis around the world will be sharing this exact message against hate and racism, in the aftermath of events in the US this summer.

The Talmud teaches, “If you see wrongdoing by a member of your household and you do not protest – you are held accountable ...and not just your household but 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. We must voice hard truths even to those with great power. 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: “You cannot dehumanize, degrade and stigmatize whole categories of people in this world. 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 declare in unison: acts of hatred, intimidation and divisiveness will not be

tolerated in north america. 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 people are created equal.

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 nazi marchers. The wound reopened when the right and left clashed violently in [Berkeley] and in Boston when the glass wall of a holocaust memorial was shattered and a local mosque was attacked not far 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. As Elie Weisel wisely admonished us, “We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere.”

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. Those fiery torches illuminated a 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 Torah admonishes: "tzedek tzedek tirdof - 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 -- On this first day of the New Year WE are "Proclaiming liberty throughout all the land" [Lev 25:10].