

Special Edition Teaching

November 1, 2018

I have the honor of once again serving as president of our Greenwich Fellowship of Clergy, and my dear friend and colleague, the Rev. Heather Wright, serves as our 1st Vice President.

Many of our clergy colleagues, and their own congregational members from their respective Houses of Worship, will join us for Shabbat Services this Friday Night at 6:30 pm.

We will “Stand As One” with the Jewish community of Pittsburgh, observing a Sabbath of Solidarity in the wake of the tragedy at the Tree of Life Synagogue.

We will stand with those experiencing inconsolable pain, and remember the individuals struck down by a hate that has targeted our people in too many places and at too many times.

We will stand together so as to serve as reminder that all People are created equally in the image of God.

Join us, and let us pray that God brings comfort to those who mourn, and give us all strength to help make a tomorrow free from hate.

May the memories of the innocent eternally be for a blessing:

1. Richard Gottfried Z’L
2. Rose Mallinger Z’L
3. Jerry Rabinowitz Z’L
4. Cecil Rosenthal Z’L
5. David Rosenthal Z’L
6. Bernice Simon Z’L
7. Sylvan Simon Z’L
8. Daniel Stein Z’L
9. Melvin Wax Z’L
10. Irving Younger Z’L
11. Joyce Fienburg Z’L

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch

rabbimitch@templesholom.com

Standing in Solidarity

By Rabbi Mitchell M. Hurvitz and Rev. Heather Wright

While we had another article ready for this week, we both decided it was important to try to craft a joint statement in response to the tragic massacre at the Tree of Life congregation in Pittsburgh this past Saturday.

Rabbi Mitch:

The Psalmist wrote: “My heart pounds in my chest because death’s terrors have reached me. Fear and trembling have come upon me; I’m shaking all over. I say to myself, I wish I had wings like a dove! I’d fly away and rest. I’d run so far away! I’d live in the desert. Selah! I’d hurry to my hideout, far from the rushing wind and storm.”

Every good and caring human being was horrified and heartbroken by the recent attack at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill neighborhood. We all are in mourning, and yet we people of faith cannot become trapped in the pit of despair. Now, more than ever, we must seize the opportunity to advocate for love over hate.

Fear of differences can lead to a nurturing of hatred; it is why we must reiterate over and over again the teaching of Genesis that ALL human beings are created equally in the image of God. Fundamental to being a religious person is to pursue at every opportunity the mitzvah of love, compassion, empathy and tolerance.

The synagogue in Pittsburgh, "The Tree of Life", is named for the Biblical Hebraic phrase of *Eitz Chayim*—Tree of Life. Jews traditionally refer to our Sacred Torah as *Eitz Chayim*, and at every Torah service declare the *Eitz Chayim* prayer: "Torah is a Tree of Life to those who cling to it; blessed are they who uphold it."

Jews grasp firmly their sacred heritage of faith, community and traditions. Our Jewish prescription for faith is good for us as Jews and as human beings. Our Jewish traditions and rituals, however, serve no purpose unless it grounds us into moral living. I often teach "One can be a good human being without being a good Jew; one cannot be a good Jew without being a good human being."

We are all made equally in God's image, we therefore know as Jews that our job is to actively confront brutality and bigotry. Elie Wiesel wrote: What is a "good Jew?"; it's any Jew who is trying to be a better Jew." The Jewish response to Pittsburgh and to all acts of senseless hatred is to be better.

We do this by being more just, more righteous, more loving and more compassionate each and every day. We make ourselves into human vessels of love and holiness, and we pour out our love at every opportunity. This is why so many of our blessings begin: *Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam Asher Kidashanu B'mitzvhotav...* Praised are you God, Ruler of the Universe, who makes us holy through our sacred path of life.

Rev. Heather:

To my dear friend Rabbi Mitch and the congregation of Temple Sholom, along with all my other Jewish clergy colleagues in town and the congregations of Greenwich Reform Synagogue, Shir Ami and Chabad Lubavitch, I want you to know the community stands beside you in grief and distress over this injustice. We mourn with you. We pray for you God's Shalom/peace and for all people of faith to stand in solidarity with you. We ask God to comfort the brokenhearted, to bring peace to fear, and in the words of Isaiah, "Tell everyone who is discouraged, Be strong and don't be afraid! God is coming to your rescue..." (Isaiah 35:4).

On occasion where words fail me, I turn to Scripture for insight, inspiration, comfort and direction. As I have prayed about this heart-rending news, I am reminded of the description of Hagar at the well naming God "El Roi" because "you are the God who sees me." God sees his people in pain and distress and brings community around suffering. He calls on all of us to be bold and strong in standing up for injustice and like the prophet Amos prayed, we too pray, "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5:24). The truths found in those pages call out the better person in all of us, as Rabbi Mitch described it, and gives us direction for how to cope with tragedy and suffering.

We stand in solidarity with you. I was with a circle of clergywomen on Monday morning from different faith communities. We put aside our agenda to pray for you, our Jewish brothers and sisters, in the town and throughout our country. We will continue to pray and show up to let you know of our support. In our faith tradition, the Tree of Life is also seen in heaven, God's kingdom, "Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree

were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:1-2). We believe one day we will be in God’s presence, and every tear will be dried, there will be no more suffering and no more pain. The healing of the nations will be complete. Until that day, we work for God’s justice and pray for peace.

I am reminded of my visit to Yad Vashem two years ago, in considering the role of those of us supporting the Jewish community in Greenwich and beyond. May we be found faithful, as righteous Gentiles, or the Righteous among the Nations, who did not see others in pain or need and turn aside but instead advocated for justice and acted in courage to do and say what is right regardless of the personal cost. Then we will be our brother and sister’s keeper to God’s glory.

Eitz Chayim—Torah is a Tree of Life to those who cling to it; blessed are they who uphold it.