

Sermon on Shemot following attack on Capitol Hill (1/8/21)

When I was at NFTY, and we spoke out on many current issues that were concerning our country, I learned quite well about the limitations of a 501(c)3 organization - a non-profit organization and what disqualifies you from your status. As a 501(c)3 congregation, we cannot and I will not speak out about any political figure or candidate for public office, either in favor or against them.

But I will speak tonight about the angry mob of people who breached our nation's capital just 48 hours ago, who terrorized our lawmakers and leaders, who tried to overthrow an election and change an outcome - using violence and force to get what they desired, when other means had not prevailed. I will join my colleagues across American in condemning those who sought to undermine our system, to threaten our government process, and to harm those whose only job was to follow the rules set forth by our United States Constitution. I join you in being horrified, disgusted, ashamed, and aghast. But I refuse to get angry. Anger will solve nothing. Anger makes us like them. Instead, I will speak, I will share, I will condemn, and I will take actions to ensure that something like this NEVER EVER happens again.

Why? Because the slope between violent mobs and insurgencies into full on Civil War, interment camps, and genocide is a slippery slope, and we are already moving downward.

Why? Because the people who were part of that angry mob wore sweatshirts that read Camp Aushwitz Staff or 6MWE - meaning 6 Million Wasn't Enough. All a reference to being proud of the atrocities of the Holocaust. Because symbols such as the confederate flag were on full display, a symbol of dissent, of enslavement, of hatred. Because these people didn't come with the intention to peacefully protest our government process, but rather with the intention to incite violence, chaos, and harm others in order to do their will and live out their deeply held beliefs - beliefs that were prominently on display. Beliefs of hatred and oppression.

These scenes from Wednesday were reminiscent of the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923 in Bavaria, where Nazis staged a failed coup d'etat using violence and inciting chaos and declaring a "national revolution." Knowing that the Bavarian state commissioner von Kahr was addressing a large crowd there, hundred of Nazi's burst into the Beer Hall and fired shots demanding they be heard, declaring their anti-government expressions, and sending the public into panic. Though ultimately that night they were unsuccessful in their coup, we know what ended up happening less than a

decade in Germany, and then throughout Europe. Government buildings burned and taken over, a new government replacing the old one, and a systemic plan to get rid of all those that did not follow. And that was just the beginning.

We cannot take these matters lightly, especially when those among the hatred are spewing Anti-Semitic and hateful sentiments. What occurred on Wednesday in our nation's capitol was nothing less than a pogrom against democracy. History has taught us that one national traumatic event like this doesn't just go away. It can signal a start to some deeper splitting and eventual breakage of all that we held to be dear and true. Sadly, our history teaches us that Jews will not survive or thrive in a society which allows lawless thugs to violate the sacred halls of liberty. Where there is unrest, violence and evil, antisemitic vitriol will soon follow.

So today, I ask you to stand, should to virtual shoulder with one another and with us against this attack on our democracy. Condemn the blatant antisemitism that showed it's face and support the Jewish community, now more than ever. Support us PUBLICLY. Reach out to one another. Speak out. Put it on social media and tell all that you know that you will not stand for this kind of behavior, not now and not ever. This is more than just a sad moment for our democracy, this is a terrifying

moment for our Jewish and Black communities. And it is a turning point for us to stand up and LOUDLY say ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. This must end here and it must end now.

Yesterday, former First Lady Michelle Obama said “The work of putting America back together, of truly repairing what is broken, isn’t the work of any politician or political party. It’s up to each of us to do our part. To reach out. To listen. And to hold tight to the truth and values that have always led this country forward. It will be an uncomfortable, sometimes painful process. But if we enter it with an honest and unwavering love, then maybe we can finally start to heal.”

We are standing on a precipice. If we look one way, there is division, violence, anger, anti-semitism, white supremacy, hurt and chaos. If we look another way, there is healing, hope, love and unity. Do not look away from this moment, because it is painful. Look at this moment and make the choice which direction you are going to move in. Make the choice to speak up and out about how you want this world to look and be. Be the person you know you can be, the human and the Jew who will stand up for what is right, who will tell the world this moment is not okay and who will acknowledge that this is more than anti-government sentiments. This is a

moment for us all to acknowledge our own abilities to spread anti-hate message and to move in the direction of hope.

As we learned, earlier this week, from our colleague Rabbi Daniel Gropper, we call to mind in our Torah portion *Shemot* the beginning of the enslavement of the Ancient Israelites in Egypt. Moses, too, turns his head from side to side and sees that no one is defending those that are enslaved. So he takes it upon himself to be their champion. He sees the atrocities being committed and he steps up to lead. This is the first example of him being an “ish” Tzedek - a righteous person who stands for justice. In Pirke Avot we read that Rabbi Hillel said “*B’makom sh’ain anashim, hishtadel l’hiot ish*” In a place where no one is acting like a human, strive to be a human. That is what Moses did when he too was an ish. It means to stand up, to speak out, to stop being silent and acting like any of this is okay. It means to take charge and to lead and to be unafraid because if we turn the other way and do nothing, history has taught us well what can and will happen.

I don’t say all of this as a means to scare you. And I know many, many of you feel the way I do. But I do say all this as a way to wake us up that we are at a dangerous moment in history and it is up to us to not look the other way. We cannot convince ourselves that we are immune

because this is American in the 21st century and not Ancient Egypt, or Europe of the 1920's and 1930's. We cannot stand idly by because this was an assault in Washington, DC and not here in our community. That mob doesn't come from DC, they come from our communities and our neighboring yards. We cannot be convinced that this is someone else's job to do because it hasn't blown up into a total and complete chaotic revolution filled with antisemitism and white supremacy. It has begun. We are standing at the precipice. And we have a choice to make.

I believe very much in action, but I also believe in hope and in prayer. I believe in nourishing our spiritual selves with words and thoughts and feelings that will lead us toward our intentions and our actions. So even though I ask, I beg you, to not stand idly by, to not be silent, to not turn your head away, I also ask that we come together and we pray. We pray for the peace of our nation, and all it's inhabitants. We pray to turn the hearts of those that are in anger towards love and compassion. We pray to have the courage to stand for justice and righteousness in the face of evil, oppression and hatred. We pray for healing and we pray for ourselves. And so we end, tonight, with a prayer. From Rabbi Barry Block, CCAR:

Gracious God,
We come before You as supplicants today,
Seeking comfort and hope,
As terror reigns at our nation's Capitol,

Spreading fears of violence throughout our land.
Spread your shelter of peace
Over the United States of America,
Upon all who dwell within its borders.
Embolden every American
To defend democracy,
To uphold our Constitution,
To protect the First Amendment right to assemble in protest,
And to eschew violence and mayhem.
Sustain us in faith
That the “better angels of our nature”^[i] will be victorious,
That democracy will triumph,
That peace will prevail.
Bless all who are entrusted with restoring peace in Washington
And throughout this land.
Grant wisdom to
The President,
The Vice-President,
And to every Senator and Member of Congress.
Be with the President-Elect and Vice President-Elect,
Charged with unifying
This divided country
In the days and weeks ahead.
We Jews have always been
“Prisoners of hope.”^[ii]
Restore us to hope today.
Grant us trust,
Even on a terrible day,
That we may look forward to a new day dawning,
Speedily and soon. Amen.