

Trust and Fear, Light and Darkness

On the Wednesday night of Hanukkah, about 150 Emunah-ites gathered for our annual Hanukkah dinner. Thanks to our dedicated staff and volunteers, we held our first (and I hope what will be our annual!) donut bar. The oil was sizzling and the fattening fresh treats were fantastic. After songs and an indoor candle lighting, I gathered a sizeable group to head



outdoors to light our jumbo twelve-foot Hanukkiyah that overlooks Route 2.

Our wondrous Brotherhood engineers added new elements to the sheer size of our Hanukkah menorah. In addition to flickering lights that mimic flames, the entire Hanukkiyah is controlled by an app available on my phone through Temple Emunah's Wi-Fi! How cool is that!

Since the Wi-Fi coverage was a bit spotty, we were unsure if it would work. When it did, one third grader pulled me aside and asked me in a soft voice, “Rabbi, do you think the Wi-Fi will last for all eight days of Hanukkah?”

It was a joyful comment that lit up the moment. It certainly put a smile on my face!

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Let us acknowledge that these are dark days of the year. There are barely nine hours of daylight. The atmosphere seems dark and gloomy. But, of course, it is the mood in the world. Over the last months, the world has experienced devastating terrorist attacks in the Sinai, Turkey, France, Israel, and here in the U.S., among other places. There seems to be no end.

And then there is the unending violence wrought by guns in our country. I spoke about that last Shabbat and I thank so many of you for [taking action](#).



And then there are words, hateful, vile words. We hear them all over the world; we hear them from our enemies; but now, we hear them more

and more from leading political candidates. We have heard unbelievable words of intolerance.

The world seems overrun by violence and hate.

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Before the terrible events of the last couple of months, I was working with the American Jewish Committee, the AJC, on a special Shabbat focused on curbing Global anti-Semitism. Given recent events, I thought we might postpone it and focus on other issues.



However, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that it is the SAME phenomenon. It starts with hate, with allowing our fear and anxiety to overwhelm us. Vast swaths of Europe were consumed by anti-Semitism before the Shoah and that led to violence. Acts of hate do not happen in isolation. Hateful ideas are allowed to spread unchecked, breeding a culture of intolerance that can lead to violence.

In order to combat this phenomenon, we need to speak out against it – wherever it is and to whomever it occurs.



(Left to right: Raiyan Syed, Reverend Laura Everett, Reverend Jim Antal, Rabbi Howard Jaffe, and Rabbi David Lerner)

This week I had lunch with a few local Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders to discuss current concerns. The Muslim leader spoke about behaviors threatening Muslims throughout America in the wake of the terrorist action in San Bernardino. He spoke about his wife who is afraid to wear her *hijab*, her traditional Muslim headdress. Other incidents include people showing up in Arizona with semi-automatic weapons outside mosques in an effort to intimidate Muslim worshippers. Just last week, his mother-in-law was confronted by a man who approached her in a

threatening manner (she was wearing her *hijab*) in a parking lot of a Walmart and said, “I could kill you right now.”

Unbelievable.



Muslims have said that things are worse for them right now than in the weeks after 9/11.

And let us all condemn that.

This threatening behavior is simply acceptable. This cannot be a country that tramples on its values.

This cannot be a country that shuns people. This cannot be a country that reverts to internment camps, as we did during the Second World War.

That said, there is clearly a major problem that Islam as a whole is experiencing. While violence is being perpetrated by a small percentage of Muslims, there is enough of it that Muslim leaders must take it seriously and highlight the values of love, tolerance, and pluralism in their faith.

As my high school and rabbinical school classmate and roommate, [Rabbi Shai Held wrote in the *Forward*](#): “In facing the current moment, there are

four pitfalls we must avoid. The first two, the mistakes of misguided liberals, are (1) denying that Islam has anything to do with ISIS, and (2) refusing to admit that Islam is in unique crisis. The latter two, the mistakes of reactionary conservatives, are (3) declaring that Islam is irredeemably evil, and (4) painting all Muslims with the same brush. All four of these illusions are appealing to some, but all are false, and ultimately noxious.”

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And at the same time, let us also speak out against the scourge of anti-Semitism which grows not merely in Muslim countries, but is being renewed in Europe to a degree we have not seen in decades and, further, throughout the world.

Our community is proud to participate in [Mobilization Against Global Anti-Semitism Shabbat](#), an initiative of [AJC Boston](#) and the [Massachusetts Board of Rabbis](#).



We are increasingly alarmed at the mounting evidence that anti-Semitism in Europe and around the world is on the rise. I sent an email earlier this week about how you can take action in New England to combat global anti-Semitism and I will resend it.

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To be present in such a moment in the world is difficult, but we must try to find a healthy way of being. We are presented with two options: trust or fear. Our instinctive reaction as animals (and we are all animals on a basic scientific level) is fear. We are afraid. People are saying terrible things. People are shooting each other in medical facilities, in community centers. People are becoming radicalized through the Internet. The San Bernardino mass shooting and the Boston Marathon Bombing are more frightening because they are not coordinated attacks, they are Internet-inspired attacks.

So, we are frightened. But, if we remain consumed by fear, we will act solely based on that. That is why people are going to buy guns in droves. This is sad since the statistics are stark. Once you have a gun in your home, the chance of your spouse or children being killed goes up tremendously, while there is NO PROVEN BENEFIT to you. So, now, fear has led us to more guns.

Fear is leading us to hateful speech. Fear is leading us to acts of intimidation against Muslims. Fear is the cause of much of the violence targeting Jews in Israel and around the globe.

Fear is fear and it does not discriminate. It impacts all of us.

I am not naive. I know there are real dangers. And we should be careful. Everyone who comes into the country should be screened. And while that should be done in a rigorous manner for all immigrants, we should not close our borders to all Muslims! We should not close our border to Syrian refugees!

As Jews, we know better than that and our own people's experience of anti-Semitism teaches us better. And there may be other security measures to take and, yes, I am no friend of ISIS. Please defeat them and other deadly terrorist threats. But, stop and remember: how will we proceed at this moment?

Which will it be: fear or trust? Which will animate our response to this world of darkness, of brokenness, of hate?

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Our *parashah*, our Torah reading is helpful in exploring this choice. After Joseph becomes vizier to Pharaoh, his brothers show up in desperate need of food. And the Torah reads: "*Va'yar Yosef et-eihav, va'yakirem* – When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them; but he acted like a stranger to them and spoke harshly to them." (Genesis 42:7)

The Hebrew word our Torah uses for Joseph's behavior is "Va'yitnaker – which could be translated as "he hid his identity from them" or "he made himself into an outsider." I prefer that he hid himself from them. Yes, while we know that he decided only to deceive them, the bottom line is he was being mean. And he hid his essential goodness from them. He reacted strongly to their visit by reverting to the fear that animated their relationship previously.

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Like Joseph who chose fear and revenge, how many times do we remain in a place of fear? And we allow that emotion to overwhelm us. That fear is part of the same spectrum – one can move from being frightened to hate, from hate to action. That's how we get hateful political rhetoric in our own country, anti-Semitism in Europe, the murders that led to the Black Lives Matter campaign (I am fortunate that I also had the opportunity to meet with leaders of the Black Lives Matter campaign in our own area.)



(Left to right: Rabbi Victor Reinstein, Rabbi David Lerner, Reverend Willie Bodrick II, Ms. Yavilah McCoy, Dr. Valerie Batts, and Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow)

A culture of fear leads to gun violence as well in our country, and terrorism throughout the globe.

We need to move from fear to trust. Juxtapose Joseph's hard words with how he is transformed in next week's *parashah*. Joseph embraces his brothers and amidst his tears, he is reunited with them in love. He kisses them and cries on his brothers' shoulders. Joseph moves from fear to trust.

Along this journey, he is moved by Judah who offers one of the most moving speeches in the entire Torah as he pleads for Benjamin's life. Judah takes a risk – he moves out of his place of fear to a place of trust. He stands up for his brother, potentially endangering his own life and freedom to do what he feels is right.

And with that act of trust, of *hesed*, of love, Joseph responds in kind. Fear breeds more fear, but trust breeds more trust.

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My friends, Hanukkah contains many narratives. It is a military story of how the Jews defeated the Syrian Greek army. It contains a spiritual narrative about the miracles of the oil. At different times, throughout Jewish history, we have emphasized different aspects. After the disastrous revolts against the Roman Empire in 66 and 132 of the Common Era, our sages moved away from the military narrative and focused on the story of the oil, the spiritual side. During the time before and during the birth of the modern State of Israel, the early Zionists reverted to the military narrative – they wanted to be brave and defeat a much larger enemy like the Maccabees did millennia ago.

Today, we may need both narratives. We are blessed to live in a strong country that has the resources and means to defend us. We are blessed that Israel is also a strong country that can defend herself.

That does not mean both Israel and America do not have serious challenges, they do; however, let us put them in perspective.

What Israel and America and the world really need now is less warmongering, less of the militaristic side of Hanukkah, and more of the light, of the hope.

That is why today is such a perfect day for a Shabbat to combat anti-Semitism, hate, violence, and terrorism.

We are filling this day with joy and hope and trust. In fact, it is multiplied many times over. Three Torah scrolls: the first from which we read about the hope of Joseph and his transformation. And from the second scroll, the renewal of Rosh Hodesh, the beginning of a new month, which means the new moon will appear in the sky bringing us more light and more hope, possibilities for more life. And the third is Hanukkah, removing the darkness, the fear, and bringing us back to a place of trust, of illumination.

Let us all be this change.

Let us all move from fear to trust, from anger to hope, from darkness to light.