

January 19, 2018/3rd Sh'vat, 5778

Dear chevreh,

In 2012, Rabbi Tamara Cohen interning at HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) brought in Fernanda Marroquin, then a leader of DreamActivists Pennsylvania, to KHN for a Shabbat evening discussion. Born in Peru, she arrived in the US with her parents when she was 11, on a tourist visa. She spoke movingly about her experience and advocacy as an undocumented Dreamer in the United States. Many of us recalled our own Jewish families' sometimes harrowing tales of being refugees and immigrants.

This past Wednesday, in one of the largest Jewish-led acts of civil disobedience on the U.S. Capitol grounds in a generation, 86 rabbis and other Jewish activists led by Bend the Arc Jewish Action were arrested while demanding that Congress include a clean DREAM Act in the government funding bill.

The goal of the civil disobedience was to demand passage of the DREAM Act, which will protect undocumented immigrants brought to the US as minors from deportation. This action coincides with our reading of Exodus, when Moses demands, "Let my people go." Bend the Arc Jewish Action grassroots volunteers joined leaders and volunteers from 17 other Jewish organizations, including the Reconstructionist Movement, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC) to chant, "Let my people STAY." 6 of these 86 rabbis and activists were Reconstructionist rabbis. Here are some voices from the movement:

Rabbi Deborah Waxman, president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College/Jewish Reconstructionist Communities (RRC/JRC), said: "We join all people of conscience to resist in solidarity with DREAMers and all of our undocumented neighbors. As Jews, we are compelled to welcome the stranger, and to remember that we were also strangers — not only in Egypt but at many times throughout our history. As Reconstructionists, we know that the Jewish community thrives when we stand with dispossessed peoples whose stories echo as our own."

Rabbi Elyse Wechterman, Executive Director, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, who was among the arrestees, said: "As Jews, we know the 'heart of the stranger.' How can we stand idly by while people who have lived among us, built homes, families and careers, are carted off as if they were not part of our human family? Just as Moses demanded of Pharaoh to 'Let our people go' from enslavement to freedom, we are here today demanding, 'Let our people stay' to live their lives in freedom in our country."

Rabbi Barbara Pezner, co-chair of the New England chapter of the Jewish Labor Committee and rabbi of Temple Hillel B'nai Torah in West Roxbury, MA, who was among the arrestees, said: "As Jews we know the United States of America to be a wondrous place where people can build a better life. We are not a country that would abandon children or separate families. We must not become an America of steel or concrete walls and broken dreams — such an America insults the ideals of our parents and our grandparents. The Jewish community and the labor movement have

a responsibility to defend Dreamers and their families as they pursue the American dream of a decent, safe and secure life.”

Rabbi Mordechai Leibling, my teacher and the person who installed me at KHN, who was among the arrestees, said on Thursday,

This morning at the debrief of yesterday's action, six Dreamers spontaneously came who were among the 50 plus Dreamers who were in the balcony yesterday witnessing the action. They came to share their appreciation, nearly all of them started crying when they spoke. They said, "I can't believe you would do this for us, when you don't need to."

"I felt peace. I felt safe."

"I was surprised, I didn't know why you were there and then when I heard you sing I realized it was for us." They shared how isolated undocumented people feel and how this broke through. Many of us hearing them began crying as well. While I was sitting in the rotunda singing, waiting to get arrested, I kept thinking of my parents, Holocaust survivors, and who sat in for them. I knew that in part I was doing it because of our history of oppression, but to hear the Dreamers say how important it was to them for us to show up, really touched me. They especially talked about the singing. We sang Olam Hesed Yibaneh [We will build this world with love] and Ozi V'zimrat Yah [The Lord is my strength and song.] The whole action was conducted as sacred ritual, and it moved the Dreamers. It is so important for us to show up as Jews with our religious identities.

As we enter this Shabbat, whether as a day of rest, or for some, a day of action at a Women's March, let us have gratitude for having the freedoms that we enjoy as American Jews and fellow travelers. Let us heed our Jewish teachings which inspire us to work toward freedom for ourselves and others, internally and externally. As Rabbi Arthur Green teaches, "The American Jewish experience has taught us that our presence as a moral voice, when we use it well, can add much to the broader society in which we live, even when we are only a small fraction of the population...Caring for the needy and raising the banner of human dignity are *mitzvot*, part of what we are most essentially obliged to do as Jews...We do them not because they are a courrant or represent the best of liberal politics; we do them because they are the very foundation of Torah..." (Radical Judaism, pg. 156.)

Scott and I will be hosting a Tu B'Shevat Seder at our home on the evening of Tuesday, January 30th. We would love for you to come. We have limited space, so please let me know ASAP if you can attend. Please email me at: rabbidianamiller@gmail.com

See you at 7:30 pm this evening!

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Diana