



From Rabbi Nancy Wechsler



Words of Comfort: Then and Now

Shabbat Nachamu / שבת נחמו

Then. This coming Shabbat is called Shabbat Nachamu ("Sabbath of comfort/ing). It takes its name from the Haftarah from Isaiah in the Book of Isaiah 40:1-26 that speaks of "comforting" the Jewish people for their suffering. It is the first of seven Haftarah of consolation leading up to the holiday of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. These writings are meant to console us after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and reassure us that things will evolve into a time of harmony.

Isaiah preaches these words: *Comfort my people. Comfort them.* In ancient Judaism, there are two basic responses to crisis: 1) mourning 2) repentance. Tisha B'Av, observed in the Jewish calendar this past Monday is a traditional time of mourning the destruction of the Temple. Isaiah's words provide consolation. In addition, the crisis of the Temple's destruction includes an element of repentance, lessons of the past that can be learned in order to avoid any repetition.

Now. Locally, we have been deeply upset by the reports of Imam Amman Shahin of the Islamic Center of Davis from last Friday's sermon. His sermon included a fervent prayer for the liberation of the Al-Asqa Mosque from the "filth of the Jews." Incendiary Koranic texts were preached from his pulpit meant to unify his Muslim community in response to the installation of metal detectors at the entrance of the Jerusalem Mosque. The metal detectors, which have been dismantled this week, were assembled after the murder of two Israeli Druze security officers outside the Mosque.

What seemed like a practical action from Israel to prevent further violence created outrage amongst many Muslims who saw this act as Israeli oppression and regulation. Filled with rage, the Davis Imam utilized texts which in some settings are known to incite violence against Jews.

Many leaders of both the Muslim and Jewish community responded promptly and meetings with the Imam and leaders helping him understand the impact of his words upon our community. A press conference was held last week where Imam Shahin apologized and demonstrated that he clearly recognized that hateful words have consequences.

T'shuvah. Due to the wonderful and courageous interfaith work in our community, there is strength and solidarity between our communities. At Congregation Beth Shalom, we have had guest speakers and programs from Salam Islamic Center and we are particularly grateful for this year's teen events with BSTY, our CBS youth group and teens from Salam and St. Marks Church. The ongoing effort for interfaith collaboration in Davis and Sacramento has created an environment where we are able to take this crisis and turn it into an opportunity for greater understanding.

Imam Shahin, the Davis cleric said: "I said things that were hurtful to Jews. This was unacceptable. I am deeply sorry for the pain I have caused. The last thing I would do is intentionally hurt anyone, Muslim, Jewish or otherwise. It is not in my heart."

Seth Brysk, Director of the ADL's San Francisco Office wrote:

"We hope that the imam will continue to learn from others about why his words were so dangerous. We further hope that he will be able to use his leadership role to speak out against anti-Semitism and work with others in the community to build bridges of mutual understanding and respect.

Muslim Hands, is an independent organization of Muslims in Davis, wrote the following letter. Like Isaiah's words brought comfort to our people long ago, the sincere apology and compassion brings comfort to us today.

Shalom,

Rabbi Nancy Wechsler



Davis, California August 1, 2017

Davis Muslim Hands publicly states that we strongly repudiate the hurtful and inexcusable anti-Semitic words that were delivered July 21 in the sermon at the Islamic Center of Davis. Our hearts go out to the Jewish community here and worldwide for the deep pain this sermon has caused you, your family, and your friends. We can only imagine how terrifying it must feel for a community that faced genocide to hear such vitriolic and dangerous words.

Brothers and sisters of the Jewish community of Davis and beyond, as soon as this distressing crisis broke out a week ago, many Jewish and Muslim community leaders actively came together to work behind the scenes to contain and correct the situation, and restore peace and harmony to our precious

hometown. We are grateful that their diligent efforts bore fruit last Friday July 28 with the public and unequivocal apology of the Imam of the Islamic Center of Davis. We are even more grateful that Davis and Sacramento Jewish community leaders have accepted his apology as a first step, to be followed by actions in the weeks and months to come.

We are truly blessed to live in Davis where we have amazing community organizations like the Celebration of Abraham and the Phoenix Coalition, as well as political leaders who promote understanding and peaceful co-existence. When the Islamic Center of Davis was vandalized, you were all there to support the Center. In light of that support, to say that we have been ashamed and disgraced by this sad crisis is an understatement.

These past several days have been dark, but let us use this as a pivotal moment to be a shining beacon to the world, such that when anti-Semitic or other violent words or actions occur, we do not stay silent, but rather speak up and stand for what is right, correct what is wrong, and reach out to each other to heal and strengthen the solid unity of our beloved Davis and its beautiful citizens.

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