

Erev Shabbat Shuva Drash
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After my Bat Mitzvah in the mid 1980's as a teenager I often volunteered to read Torah at my shul on Shabbat mornings. As I became a young adult in college and developed a feminist consciousness; I made (at the time) what felt like a crucial moral decision. I would no longer read Torah because I did not want to sing Hebrew words that when translated were full of sexism & homophobia, an angry and jealous G-d and the uses of violence as a solution. I wanted no part in it. I stopped going to Shabbat morning services or to anything that involved discussion of the Torah portion. I was angry, but underneath it I was hurt. It pained me to know the literal translations in the Chumash.

For a few years it was a position I took as an advocate, then after a while it just became habit. Over the years I have been lovingly challenged by progressive Jewish mentors and friends to work on my Torah shutdown. Whether it was Roni Posner in the mid 90's introducing me to the concept of us as Jews needing to be a "G-d wrestling" people; encouraging me during a one on one conversation on a Yom Kippur afternoon to not simply stop at the literal translations. I could do it with reworded siddurs, why not with Torah? Or in 1999 when I moved to Seattle and became involved in Jewish Renewal for the first time, and experienced the Torah interpreted through the soul of a powerful visiting Rabbi one Shabbat. Or to the 2000's when my dear co-leader this Shabbat Shuva, Scott Reiter, gave me the name of a book he thought I would find helpful, *Torah Journey's, The Inner Path to the Promised Land*, by Rabbi Shefa Gold; who as it turned out happened to be that same powerful Jewish Renewal Rabbi in Seattle. Who did ANYTHING but stop at the literal, she saw it as the thin ice layer surface that it was and dove in crashing apart, crumbling the frozen letters, swimming down deep gathering wisdom then rising up again in Waves rocking the boat, my boat, like I had never seen before.

This experience I just shared was part of my Erev Shabbat Shuvah drash 4 yrs ago today with my same co-leader Scott Reiter. I was reminded of it today when Eva Freund spoke starkly in her Rosh Hashonah drash about the multitude of violence against women in the Torah accepted as the norm. Calling us during these Holy Days of Awe to **ROCK THE BOAT AND ROCK IT LOUDLY.**

A Secular American Steady Boat that I was exposed to growing up in white middle class suburbia was named the Police. We called it 911 and its steady still water message rang out on the foghorn loud and clear. Police make us safe, Police keep us safe. If you're ever in trouble find Captain Police Officer and you will be safe. As I got older and my racial consciousness grew, I learned the water was not steady everywhere. Captain 911 was not always a friendly face; instead of bringing safety, at times bringing danger & death to Black lives, to people of color's lives.

Earlier this week during Elul, the month of soul searching preparation for Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur, I participated in a workshop called "Alternatives to Calling the Police." I had

missed the last few that were offered and knew deeply how much I needed to be there. I felt like I had no answers. The first activity they engaged us in was with the question: What are situations in which you would never call the police? I drew a total blank. The only scenario that came to mind was of witnessing violence & the only option I knew to do was call the police, that's why I was there at the workshop, to learn.

As people raised their hands and answered, I listened to them share scenarios in which I was already NOT calling the police and didn't even realize it! Things like loud music, groups of African American teenagers hanging out on the corner, or neighbors smoking marijuana on their porch. These are everyday occurrences living in a city for the past 15-20 years, to which it doesn't even cross my mind to call the police. Admittedly, if I had gone to this workshop 15-20 yrs ago pre city-living I would have had been surprised to hear some of these on a list of times *not* to call the police.

The workshop offered a 5 step exercise to ask ourselves about a situation before calling the police**

1. Is this merely an inconvenience to me? Can I put up with this and be okay?
2. If No, I need to respond. Can I handle this on my own, is this something I could try to talk out with the person?
3. No, I need backup. Is there a friend, neighbor or someone who I could call to help me?
4. No, I need a professional. Can we use mediation to talk through what's happening, or is there an emergency support hotline I could call?
5. No. If I call the police do I understand how involving the police could impact me and the other persons involved?

During these days of Awe I ask myself how can I as a white woman, living in a predominantly Black neighborhood in DC as a gentrifier, continue to rock the boat of white privilege? How can I as a white social worker working with majority Black clients practice with the highest level of integrity? What boats do you need to rock individually? What boats do we need to rock as a community? As Americans, Jewish, LGBTQ? During these Days of Awe, May we all return to our true rockin souls. Shana Tovah!

** *Source: Petworth Immigrants' Rights & Police Accountability*