

Presenting Issues

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June 13, 2020

When people used to come and meet with me in the office, often what they told me they wanted to talk about was only the tip of the iceberg. That continues to be the case on the phone now, where the presenting issue may or may not be the important thing.

In the Torah reading that Mia chanted so beautifully this morning, we see that Moses's wife—first, second, or otherwise—was not the real issue. The problems among the three siblings were much deeper than that.

Since Shavuot, as I have attempted to catch up with our American society that plunged into chaos while I was otherwise engaged, I have come to believe that something similar is happening here. I have spent time on the phone and on Zoom with my colleagues on the east side of San Jose, and with clergy and religious leaders from around the country grappling with what is happening right now.

At first, there was an attempt at some of our meetings to deal in a concrete manner with the issue of police brutality. This is something that PACT has been working on locally for several years. How can we improve police–community relations? How can police actions be better monitored with the use of body cameras? What can be done to strengthen the role of the Independent Police Auditor? How can we be sure that the legislation we fought so hard for, to

provide transparency to the records of individual police officers, isn't subverted as police departments attempt to argue that this only includes things that have happened since the law was passed? We have discussed letters to the mayor and police chief, delegations, and actions. But what I have noticed is that the enthusiasm for this concrete action comes from the west side of town and those at our meetings from the more impacted community see things in a much more global way. They don't separate issues with the police from issues with medical care in their community, or from issues of housing, of poverty, of the continuing education gap. That is difficult for some of us and makes things harder to address, harder to see an end to the protests with some concrete accomplishment.

In my mind I saw a parallel with the early Zionist movement and the issue of Uganda. During the years when the pogroms were hitting Eastern European communities hardest and the prospect of a Jewish homeland in Turkish Palestine seemed so far away, the British offered Uganda as a place of refuge for Jews. The Western European delegates to the Zionist Conference entertained this possibility, but those more deeply affected by the pogroms refused even to discuss this option. They wanted a Jewish homeland in the historic home of the Jewish people, not merely a safety valve of refuge.

I am trying to listen to my colleagues from those areas which have been deeply impacted by our society's systemic racism and to hear their insistence that this isn't one issue, but all issues. I am not sure where this will lead and am still pushing for some concrete outcomes, but in this case too, the presenting issue is just the tip of the iceberg.