

The Hardest Question:

Eikha, How can this still be happening?

As we begin reading Deuteronomy, the fifth and final book of the Torah, we are confronted with that haunting question: *eikha, how?* It is a question that resonates throughout this week and through this Shabbat.

In the beginning of *parashat D'varim* (Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22) we find Moses, groaning under the weight of his responsibilities, cry out in exasperation to his people: “(*Eikha*), *How can I alone bear your trouble, your burden and your strife*” (Deut 1:12). In this week’s *Haftarah*, we’ll read the lament of the prophet Isaiah as he is confronted with the desecration of Jerusalem: “(*Eikha*), *How has the faithful city become shameless, the faithful city that was once filled with justice*” (Isaiah 1:21). And then again, on *motza’ei Shabbat*, Saturday evening, as we usher in the mourning fast day of *Tisha B’Av*, we’ll read from the Book of *Eikha/Lamentations*: “How (*Eikha*), alas! Lonely sits the city once great with people!” (1.1).

Indeed, this is a week for us to ask: *Eikha*, how have we let things spin so dangerously out of control? We ask but we will find no easy answers as we confront, once again, mass shootings and the destructive power of hatred. A far right wing white racist targeted Hispanics in El Paso. A raging leftist murdered innocents in Dayton. The poison of violence knows no boundary of politics. We all are targets: Jews, Christians and Muslims; Gays and Straights, people of different ethnic and racial and national backgrounds; we all are vulnerable. The rage of hate is non-discriminatory; those twisted with anger will find some group for their obsession; some “other” upon which to pour their wrath.

Eikha, How? Alas! The exasperation expressed by our ancestors is felt by all of us today. Forgive me for not trying to mollify our horror by asking all to pray for the victims. For the victims, our prayers are too late. Forgive me for not foisting on you yet another tired cliché in pretense of a cure-all. The hatred that burns within some humans will not be “fixed” by a new piece of legislation or prayer vigil. Rather, we simply have to acknowledge that hate is and will continue to be a presence. The real question is: *Eikha*, how will we address it? How will we fight it? Though hatred is, apparently, hardwired into our brutish DNA, how can we overcome it? Or more accurately, how can the vast majority of us rally together to create the defenses necessary to protect one another without creating an overbearing Orwellian state that suppresses personal freedom?

Eikha, How? The question has challenged and perplexed every generation. Chances are, our generation will not solve the problem of racist bigotry, anti-Semitism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia, and misanthropy. However, we can start by asserting again and again, louder and louder, that God has made each and every human being *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the Divine Image. Every life resonates with the Eternal spirit. And an attack on anyone is an attack on everyone.

Eikha, how long will it take for our human species to finally evolve into true sapiens, beings of thought, sensitivity, and compassion?

Shabbat Shalom,

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