

## **Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself**

**Rabbi Jeffrey Lipschultz**

As I sit down to write this letter to my congregation I feel it's a tough one to write as we contemplate the events of last Shabbat. Eleven of our brothers and sisters were massacred while attending Shabbat morning service at Tree of Life Or L'Simchah congregation. This is a tough situation for us Jews to face. America was the one country that seemed immune from Anti Semitic violence. America seems a little different today after last Saturday.

I would often say that if you wrote down a short blurb on each country and the violent massacres we have experienced in our two millennia history, there would need to be a semi truck to load all the material. We Jews know of this type of bigotry and violence, our history is filled with it but, America, well America was different. In all the countries across the globe at one time or another, after years of safety, there were horrible periods of violence and oppression. There are so many I can't list them here but America was different where there was never a forced expulsion or massacre of a Jewish community. America truly seemed to be the Golden Medina, treasured land. But now, I see something dark in this country and it scares me.

We have seen an uptick in Anti Semitic acts in the last decade, each year getting a little worse. The hate also seems to be non partisan, fitting both left and right. Jews are attacked because of our link to the state of Israel and we are attacked for other conspiracy theories. We are defined as too liberal or too conservative, Too assimilated or not assimilated enough. Jews seem to be the one Chosen people that everyone seems to find a reason to hate. Even Europe which experienced one of the bloodiest events in the last century, the Holocaust, is now seeing synagogues in flames as violent mobs again attack Jews, this time citing a new hatred, Anti Zionism.

America was supposed to be a different place where we compete not on ethnicity but on the streams of ideas linked by that sacred document, the US constitution, which guarantees all a place in our society by enshrining the first amendment, assuring our right to free speech and to offer disagreement. Recently we seemed to have lost a special quality in our country, our ability to disagree with one another without seeing the other as evil. The ability to argue is what makes our religious character unique. Believing that we can only find truth through disagreement, the great sages of the Mishnah and the Talmud made sure to keep the arguments and disagreements in the holy text so we, as future generations, could figure out

God's path in each generation. America was the one country that helped us share that aspect of our faith to the world.

Now, I sense a darkness that is spreading across this country and it frightens me both as a Jew and as a father of three boys. I wonder what world are they inheriting and what I have done to break this aspect of our world. I now realize we need to fix this both as Jews and Americans. We need to find a way to talk to one another without declaring those we disagree with as the enemy.

Our sages, Hillel and Shammai, had intense disagreements on how best to live as a Jew yet they each recognized the humanity of the other. We need to share that with our country again and recognize that we are one family and that we love the same thing, we only see differently how best to keep and protect her.

We American Jews are proud Americans and have a right and responsibility to offer ideas to our country while still expressing love for our faith and our tradition. On the left, recognize that we love justice but also love Israel and our faith places Aretz Yisrael, the land of Israel, as something holy and special and that Israel's rebirth in 1948, even with all her flaws is a special place to us and she will always be in our hearts. To those on the right, recognize that we Jews have seen the darkness and violence of history and we will always advocate through our prophetic vision to care for the outcast, the widow, and the stranger, and our compassion through those ideals not only makes us better Jews but also better Americans. We Jews hold to our ideas and express them openly as well as diversely and it does not make us any less American to defend the values we feel are important for our country and our world.

America is supposed to be different and the fact that last Saturday she entered the lexicon of Jewish history makes me sad and angry. I don't want to let this happen here so I ask all who read this to find a way to embrace the good in others, even those who you disagree with. This is our opportunity to teach the world of tikkun, repair, which is to fix a world so broken that is why God blessed his people with his holy word, the Torah. The Torah commands we love thy neighbor as thyself. We are to fix this broken world and it begins by listening to those we disagree with and more importantly hearing others even when we don't like what they say. Please bless this moment with the words of the Sh'mah, to hear and listen to others. Let us embrace the best of our inclinations and bring more love into the world. *May God grant comfort to all the mourners in the gates of Zion and Jerusalem!*

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