

Shabbat shalom. It is such a blessing to have landed with a community that sings with such passion, that comes together when it matters, that wants its community to be a true sanctuary for all those who seek one. In the last two weeks, I have been made breathless with the love, welcome and invitation I've received. I couldn't be more glad or grateful to be here.

This last Tuesday, I started the day standing in front of the ICE administrative office, with Rabbi Latz and my partner Noam. We had been invited to join an interfaith rally in front of the Regional Administrative Facility of ICE at Fort Snelling, where all raids are planned for the five-state region (Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North and South Dakota) and where every week, undocumented immigrants are brought for final processing before being taken to the Minneapolis Airport to be deported. We rallied with other people of faith, calling for an end to detention and deportation. We listened to the testimony of a Somali woman who has multiple family members in deportation proceedings. The 50 people gathered mourned, raged, and recommitted to resisting this country's policies of detention and deportation.

Later that same day, Noam and I stood with 1000 neighbors from around the Twin Cities at the Dar Al Farooq Islamic Center in protest and love. Speaker after speaker - from church, synagogue, mosque; from city council, State House and Senate - spoke about the need to recommit to ensuring the safety of all members of this community. A mix of tears and laughter, the gathering grounded us in a reality where all were welcome, where all were accorded dignity...and then everyone who could was welcomed to eat sambusa and spend time in community.

These were moments of crucial coming together in the context of a week that felt like a greatest hits of the worst of human action, the darkest of our fears. We don't need to go through it, but I can still feel the beat of this week: its fears, its monsters, its frustrations, its threats, throbbing in the background. We got through it. We're back in shabbat. We're

together in this palace in time. Thank God. But what do we do with weeks like this, where does it all go when we enter shabbat?

The Israelites in this week's parsha, Ekev, undergo a similar deluge of bad news: Moshe takes them through a litany of all their worst actions, their shames, their violence from the last 40 years. In chapter 9 of the book of Devarim, Deuteronomy, the people are commanded never to forget how they were troublesome and careless, harmful and disrespectful. Moshe repeats in fifteen lines an abridged story of the Israelites' journey through the desert: how they wandered in the desert, exhausted, disoriented, afraid. How their fear and alienation made them do terrible things: building idols to wealth and power, withholding care from the sick. He reminds them how they became nostalgic for slavery in Egypt, how they forgot the power of collective action.

It's a shaming list. It's a humbling list. The litany of cowardice, selfishness and destruction that Moshe unleashes is a tremendous indictment of the people. And yet, just a few verses later, the people are told to take heart. They have already been forgiven and they are encouraged to do teshuvah and transform.

At the heart of this invitation is the following line, buried in this week's parsha:

וּמִלְתֶּם אֶת עֲרֻלַת לְבַבְכֶם

The people are told to cut away the thickening of their hearts.

Commentators struggle to make sense of this charge. Rashi, 11th century French rabbi, understands it as an invitation to open closed-up hearts. Seforno, 16th century Italian rabbi, reads it as an invitation to release themselves from prejudice. Deuteronomy 10:16 reminds us: This is not the time for burn out and apathy. This is not the time to be governed by fear. Liberation is born of full, open hearts; of unrestrained, loving resistance.

The outcome of this release, of this opening, is love. The people are commanded immediately after being invited into release:

וְאַהֲבַתֶּם אֶת־הַגֵּר כִּי־גֵרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

You too must love the stranger - the migrant - for you were migrants in the land of Egypt.

Our parsha speaks of active love, of vigilant love. A love that shares food and gives charity. A love that opens the doors of our synagogues, churches and mosques to those who need sanctuary. A love that challenges hate and bigotry wherever we find them.

I thought of this challenge when watching interviews with 16 gay and trans activists who undertook a Caravana Trans-Gay Migrante, or LGBTQ migrant caravan, through Central America and Mexico this week, attempting to cross into the United States yesterday. These fierce, visionary people are asking for humanitarian asylum in the US, seeking safety and freedom here. Despite the fact that they know that they will be forced to enter the US Immigration detention system while their cases are reviewed, they have chosen to come here.

One of the migrant activists, a transwoman named Natalia from Honduras said, “It’s worth the struggle and the pain we each face, because we have faith that at the end of it all we will be safe, that we’ll have asylum and we’ll have our papers and that other trans women can see that you can make it through anything.” She continued, “I want other trans women to know that they need to keep using their voice and keep fighting. And hopefully one day things will change in Honduras, too.”

We are living in times that can cause our hearts to get coated with fear and pain. We can lose ourselves in the deluge of bad news, experience the litany as an indictment of our communities. Through it all, we get to hold onto the lesson of our parsha and the message of the Caravana

Trans-Gay Migrants and the message of the community of Dar Al Farooq Islamic Center - that in the face of suffering, we must clear off the thickening of our hearts. We must make ourselves a Sanctuary when we can, we must seek Sanctuary when we need it. We must stand together when those places of Sanctuary are threatened with violence. We must love the widow, the orphan, the migrant - with a vigilant, active love.