

Shabbat Re'eh 5777  
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Shir Tikvah Congregation  
18 August 2017

I remember the moment I first glimpsed my daughters: In the room, when they were born, holding them, noticing how the light streamed in for the oldest and how the youngest stopped crying as soon as I held her in my arms. The beauty in their eyes is forever etched into my memory and I can still recall how devastatingly overwhelming it was to feel such intense love that it made my body shake like an earthquake and I haven't stopped since.

So I can't imagine what Heather Heyer's parents saw.

Or Michael Brown, Junior's parents.

Or Philando Castilles' parents.

Or Sandra Blands.

Or Nelba Marquez-Green whose 6 year old daughter was murdered at Sandy Hook elementary.

Or Pearce Teft of Fargo, who publicly and powerfully, renounced his son for his participating in the White Nationalist Hate Rally last week in Charlottesville.

How do they ever not see their children bloodied and battered—and gone?

How do you unsee the worst thing imaginable?

Our parsha opens with a single word: **Re'eh**. Notice. See. Look. Pay attention.

What we have seen this past week is horrifying: Nazis and KKK and White Supremacists marching past Beth Israel synagogue in Charlottesville, Virginia shouting, "Sieg Heil," torches in one hand, Nazi flags with swastikas emblazoned in the other.

We watched as a car careened into the counter-protest in Charlottesville, murdering Heather Heyer and wounding 19 other people, who physically blocked hatred with their bodies.

We've gasped in horror as we witnessed Donald Trump claim there was violence on both sides—as if it is ever conscionable to claim that Nazis have a legitimate side—and then tweeted out his sadness at the removal of confederate statues.

We watched the Speaker of the House shameless and cynically attempt to change the subject to tax reform on the day that Heather Heyer was buried.

We saw a van drove into the path of tourists in Barcelona Spain, murdering at least 13 people and wounded upwards of 80 more.

We watched as the petulant, infantile, imbecilic leaders of the United States and North Korea taunted one another with nuclear weapons—with nuclear weapons.

I know that many of you are weary, exhausted, frightened like I am. Rabbi Rosenberg and I received your emails, your Facebook pleas, your shaken phone calls; We wept with you at the vigil on Sunday night, talked across coffee shops and tables throughout the city. We've seen your tear streaked faces, your trembling hands, your shakey steps.

We must tell the truth—as my dear friend Pastor DeWayne Davis preaches—we must tell the truth of what we've seen.

We have seen ugliness.

We have seen hatred.

We have seen violence.

We have seen the President of the United States defend Nazis and remain silent when a Mosque in our own community was firebombed.

We've seen the Jewish daughter and son-in-law of the president stay silent while Nazis and White Supremacists threatened a synagogue and people of color...

We have seen racism and transphobia and violence against women and our Muslim neighbors blamed for crimes they did not commit.

We have seen enough ugliness in the past week to scar our souls and wreck our vision.

**Re'eh**, Torah reads. See. See what?

See that you will have before you curses and blessing. We will see both of them, Torah says.

You know what?

We have! We've seen blessings, too.

We watched one hate filled gathering in Charlottesville turn into more than 800 vigils in all 50 States and more than 30 countries within 48 hours, people coming together to proclaim that there is strength in our diversity, that we will love each other, fiercely, through this vile immoral swamp.

We watched Heather Heyer’s mother stand up at her daughter’s funeral and proclaim, “They tried to shut my daughter up. But they just magnified her message of love and respect and decency instead.”

We watched people of all walks of life stand up to this bigotry and decide that this is not who we want to be.

And we’ve seen good people—our friends and neighbors—decide, some for the first time in their lives, to get engaged, to work for change, to cry out that it is time our community and our nation close the gulf between our promise and our reality.

We’ve seen blessing here tonight:

Two beautiful twin baby boys.

A remarkable young man, on the threshold of adulthood, leading us in prayer tonight, preparing to teach us Torah tomorrow.

That in the midst of the chaos of the world, together, we’ve engaged in the radical and subversive theological act of proclaiming: We will bless new life! We will bless a bar mitzvah! We will bless the holiness of Shabbat. We will bless gathering together in hopeful defiance that our love, our respect, our work, our dignity, WE—You and I—WE will love a new world into being.

Yes, the Torah teaches us—be ware of false prophets who tweet lies! Don’t fall for the idols of materialism and vengeance, the small-mindedness of bigotry, the disease of racism. Do NOT forget where we’ve come from: WE WERE SLAVES in EGYPT. We were brutalized. Beaten. Murdered. And still we rise. WE KNOW WHO WE ARE.

In this same parsha, the Torah teaches us to reconstruct the social order: to leave the corners of our fields for the poor, to forgive loans, to take care for what we eat, to always treat the immigrant, stranger,

widow, and orphan with exalted dignity. Why? Precisely because we remember our enslavement. The task of being in a Divine covenant means we always rise with the trembling and the traumatized, the weary and the wonderful, the freaks and the fabulous!

Yes: Our eyes have beheld agonizing ugliness and inescapable beauty this week.

We gather on Shabbat to try to sort it all out, to begin to find words to make sense of what we've experienced in our bodies, what we've witnessed, to tell the truth of what we have seen.

We gather to create joy, to crack open our hearts in prayerful song, to look into each other's faces so that once again, we might believe.

Charlottesville, you have opened our eyes. At least some of us; as a friend of mine who is a man of color told me, "Glad y'all have woke up, Michael. We've been seeing this for a long time." So all of us now: We have opened our eyes. We cannot unsee what we've seen.

This Shabbat, pledge with me: We will tell the truth of what we've seen. We will call out bigotry and racism and sexism and Islamophobia and Transphobia and Anti-Semitism whenever and wherever we see it.

**And** we will lift up a vision of a world that is beautiful for all to see: A world where Black bodies are revered and women are respected and Jews are beloved and Transfolk adored and Hijab wearing Muslim women feel safe riding the bus and walking down the street. A world where everyone tastes the deliciousness of Shabbat: enough rest, abundant food, tranquility and creativity and affection. Together, from this ugliness we will love a beautiful world into being. We will see it.

Heather Heyer (z"l): We see you. We thank you for rising up for what is good and decent. We will remember your name.