

## Acceptance and Action

If not now, when?

*Prepared by Robert Goodis in 2004 for the occasion of Confirmation at Temple Beth Israel*

We pray silently...but silent prayer is not always enough. Our community is at war. We are at war with terrorism and tyranny and violence. We are at war with ourselves. You may hear this and think of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan or the war in Iraq. You probably think of the suicide bombings in Israel and the controversial wall constructed to stop such bombings.

These are just a few of the issues facing us, though. We are Americans; we are Israel.

The American society is torn over many matters ranging from war to taxes to gay marriage. Our society has even broken down over our own pledge of allegiance. These are times of change; these are times of trouble.

The Jewish community is plagued with wars and attacks, both physical and political. It seems as though things have been this way for us since Abraham's time. This time of trouble is in desperate need of change.

When writing this, Rabbi Goldenberg asked me what we need to change and how we can make these changes. I respond now by saying that we need to change societal values. We, along with every other community in the world, Jewish or otherwise, can no longer sit back and watch hatred spread round the world.

I have been unfortunate enough to meet anti-Semitic people, to meet bigots biased against people of different races and against people practicing every belief from atheism to Zen Buddhism to Islam. Regretfully, I never did a thing about it.

Usually I ignored their harsh remarks and ignorant behaviour and went on with my life. This is what I- what we need to change. No longer can we go on in life ignoring these injustices. No longer can we stand idle while our beliefs and the beliefs of others are so brutally attacked verbally and physically. We shall not stand idle while our neighbours bleed.

The Jewish community of York and the world alike is past due for such a change. We, as Jews, know all too well the pain of prejudice. We have felt firsthand what its like to be judged on our beliefs and traditions. Sadly, we are as guilty as anyone. This, too, is what we must change.

We cannot go on like this, judging and being judged. The community is broadening, as

must our acceptance. Invite friends of other faiths to synagogue. Go to mosque, to church. While I still believe strongly in aveirut, a Jew's obligations towards other Jews around the world, I know that we cannot limit ourselves to just our community.

Reverend Martin Niemoeller, a Holocaust survivor, is credited with saying: "In Germany they came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up."

Speak up, I say. Do something. Be involved.

This isn't to say that we should give up on our heritage and our individuality. As Rabbi Hillel said in the famous quote "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" So be yourself. Simply remember not to be limited to our heritage and our traditional community. Hillel continued by saying "If I am for myself alone, what am I?" This seems to summarize quite well what Niemoeller described of the Holocaust. I now ask you the most important part of Hillel's famed words, "If not now, when?"

At Panim el Panim, a program that educates Jewish youth on American politics, our religion, and how they relate, political action is encouraged. Now I see why. The message probably sounds familiar by now. For years people of this world have learned more about each other. People are more accepting of others and often more active in "important" issues. This we can see; but all is not right.

Our community has yet to improve. We are all guilty in some way, whether guilty of the hatred ourselves or of standing idle while we and our neighbours bleed, we are guilty. It is time now for this community to open up, to speak up, and to wake up. Israel must show that it has grown, not only in numbers but also in wisdom. These wars must end; we must make a change. We are Israel. We pray for Israel. Let our voices be heard and our actions be witnessed.

*Open the blue Gates of Prayer (Reform) to page 687 and read from "You shall do no injustice in judgement." to "Seek justice; correct oppression;...widow." Or, depending on desired length, page 693 at the split.*