



Torah for Turbulent Times

"In the Shadow of Vandalism and a Prayer for 2021"

Looking forward to a healthy 2021, there is one memory that lingers in the shadow of the last nights of Hanukkah. Here are the thoughts I shared on behalf of the community in a letter to the editor of the Upper Valley News, which was published today.

“By now many in the Upper Valley have heard the news about the vandalization of the Hanukkah menorah on the Dartmouth Green, discovered on Wednesday evening, December 16. I know that my colleague, Rabbi Moshe Gray, was in shock as he prepared to light the menorah for the 7th night of Hanukkah. This act of vandalism has incensed and angered the entire community and it’s not what I would expect from the Upper Valley. As Rabbi of the Upper Valley Jewish Community (*Kol Ha’Emek*) in Hanover, NH, I write today to share my sadness, solidarity and support for the entire Jewish community and all of its neighbors. We are all connected - what happens to one of us, happens to us all.

My earliest memory of experiencing anti-semitism was standing in front of the still dripping wet, red spray painted, larger than life swastika that desecrated the beautiful wooden doors to my synagogue, as I arrived for Hebrew school in Mobile, AL. That feeling of vulnerability and violation will never go away. This latest act of anti-Semitic vandalism cannot be normalized or accepted. The destruction of the lights of the menorah, a sacred and timeless symbol of our people, is a reminder of that deep pain from many years ago.

Just as the lights of the menorah continued to burn through all 8 nights of Hanukkah despite the vandalism, I pray that the light will continue to shine and inspire us to work together and to stand in solidarity for the freedom of religious expression for all. One way we can do this is by creating an open and inter-faith dialogue among our neighboring communities in the upcoming New Year. This is how we as an Upper Valley community can continue to shine a light in the darkness. It’s up to all of us to be a ‘light unto the nations...shining light in all places of darkness.’ (Isaiah 42:6-7) - With strength and courage, light and peace.”

Turning now towards 2021, I share this prayer with you. It’s excerpted and adapted from the High Holiday liturgy at the precipice of a new year, and was said specifically by

the High Priest in ancient times on Yom Kippur. It expresses a sacred and ancient, yet contemporary, hope for a healthy and auspicious year.

“We pray from the Holy of Holies in our hearts: Universal Spirit of all generations before us, may it be Your will in the coming year to grant us: a year of abundance and of blessings bestowed and received, a year of community and compassion, a year of friendship and forgiveness, a year of inner strength, good health and well being, a year of nature protected and enjoyed, a year of optimism and hope, a year of peace, quiet and tranquility, a year of song and spiritual growth, a year of understanding and unity, a year of co-existence among the families of the earth, and a year of young and old reaching out to one another.” (*Mishkan Hanefesh*)

Raise a toast to the end of 2020 and to the beginning of a better and healthier 2021, see you in the new year, *L'chayim*, to life!

Rabbi Mark