

**Erev Yom Kippur 5771
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Since it seems to be in vogue to publicly share abhorrent quotes from religious texts, I would like to share with you some quotes that should scare us all.

Beware of making an agreement with the inhabitants of the land in which you live lest they be a snare in your midst. You must tear down their altars, smash their pillars, and cut down their sacred posts (Exodus 34: 12-13)

When you dispossess a nation you must destroy all the sites at which they worship... Tear down their altars, smash their pillars, put their sacred posts to the fire and... obliterate their name from that place.

(Deuteronomy 12:2)

We are human beings, but those not of our faith are not humans. They are beasts. (Talmud, Baba Metzia 114b)

Any non-believer who does not accept the laws which include the prohibition against idolatry receives capital punishment. (Maimonides Laws of Kings and Wars Ch. 8)

Know that this Christian nation...all of them are idolaters... We deal with them as we would deal with any idolaters. (Maimonides Commentary on the Mishnah)

Christians are worshippers of idols (Maimonides Avodah Zara 9:4)

**And this contemporary statement by a religious leader:
It is forbidden to be merciful to them.. You must send
missiles to them and annihilate them. They are evil and
damnable. (Rabbi Ovadia Yosef)**

**These come not from the holy scriptures of Islam or
Christianity, but rather from our Torah, our Talmud,
and our greatest philosopher and legal scholar,
Maimonides. The contemporary quote comes from a
Passover sermon by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the spiritual
leader of many Sephardic Jew in Israel describing how
Israel should deal with the Palestinians.**

**I would posit that, like me, you reject these statements,
ancient, medieval and current as being a part of our
understanding of Judaism just as we reject the image of
God as an old white man sitting on a throne. As**

individuals, as a congregation and as a community, we loudly proclaim that these statements do not define us or our Judaism. They are out of the mainstream and those that still cling to them as truths are radicals.

When anti-Semites point to these quotes and others (and there are many others, some worse than these) as defining Judaism, we rise up to defend ourselves. We say things like: “These were true for our ancestors but not for us.” Or “We understand them differently today.” Or “People like Rabbi Ovadia Yosef should be condemned as radicals and pose a danger not only to Palestinians and Muslims but to Jews as well.

When Baruch Goldstein attacked Muslims in Hebron killing more than a dozen and wounding a 100 plus claiming Jewish law and tradition as his justification, we stood as a community and condemned him. When a Jew,

Yigal Amir assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin and claimed Jewish law and tradition as his justification, we stood as a community and condemned him. When West Bank Jewish settlers attacked Palestinian women and children walking down the road claiming Jewish law and tradition as their justification, we condemned them. And in every case we say, in all honesty and forthrightness: “They are radicals who pervert Judaism.”

And in each case our judgement is accurate, They are radicals who pervert justice and our saying so publicly brings credit to our people.

And yet, we sin. Each week I receive at least one email or reference to an article or website from members of our congregation or someone in our Western New York Jewish community which proclaims that a verse in the

Koran or a statement or act by a Muslim defines all of Islam as a religion of hatred filled with radicals, terrorists and killers. Each week I receive at least one email or reference to an article or website from members of our congregation or someone in our Western New York Jewish community which claims that Muslims who publicly state that they reject those statements of the Koran or Hadith (Muslim tradition) and condemn the members of their community who hate and kill, are not only liars, they are trying to look civilized while planning to destroy us all.

So, when we reach the Vidui, the confession, in tomorrow's service, reach deep into yourself when you ask forgiveness for: "passing judgement without knowledge of the facts, and for distorting facts to fit our

theories.” And, “The sin we have committed against You by our hypocrisy.”

For that is what we are, hypocrites who demand to be believed but when those we disagree ask to be believed, we do not. We are the people of the book, we do not understand those who burn books, we have had our books burned so when a minister threatens to burn the Koran we are appalled. But when someone says they want to build a community center as a gesture of reconciliation and peace, we assume they are lying and slap them away.

If someone actually is out to hurt, oppress or destroy us, then absolutely, we must stand against them and defend ourselves.

Are there Muslims who hate Jews and Christians and would like to see Israel and America fall, - you bet there are. Are there Christians who feel the same way about Jews and Muslims - you bet there are. Are there Jews who feel the same way about Christians, and Muslims - you bet there are. Are there Jews who hate us at TBZ for being Reform Jews - you bet there are.

For the past several months, I have been in quiet, private dialogue with a member of the Muslim community. We disagree vehemently on virtually every aspect of Israel and the Palestinians. He wants a one state solution which would mean the death of Israel as a Jewish home. I want a two state solution so that everyone has a home. We agree passionately on American values, rights, and liberties. We know with certainty that there are those in our country who would like to deny those rights to

Muslims and/or Jews. We respectfully discuss our disagreements. We respectfully accept our agreements.

We are both afraid. Afraid? Not of each other but of those in our respective communities who would ostricize us and verbally crucify us for even speaking with each other.

How can we have these discussions? Only because we are open and forthright with each other when we disagree can we have faith we are being honest with each other when we agree. It is no different than any other dialog you would have with a friend, co-worker or family member.

You see, while Rabbi Ovadia Yosef chooses to preach hate and destruction on Pesach, Passover, I choose to focus on the great, true and real lesson of the holiday -

Remember you were strangers in the Land of Egypt. This lesson is concretized in tomorrow afternoon's Torah reading as part of what it means to be "holy as God is holy": "When strangers live with you in your land, you must not oppress them. The strangers who live with you shall be to you like citizens, and you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I Adonai, am your God."

We Jews came to this country as strangers. It has taken us generations to be "mostly" accepted. Only in the past 50 years have we been allowed to live anywhere, belong to any club or organization and be confident that not only are we considered full Americans, but that most Americans stand with us when a vocal few dispute our right to be Jews. We Jews came to this country as strangers and now we count as natives of this land.

BUT as we are commanded, we need to always remember that we were strangers and it is ESPECIALLY incumbent upon us to to open our doors, our minds, and the doors and minds of others to the possibility that the strangers in our midst can be to us as the native. In this our ancient Jewish texts are clear: the rights we hold for ourselves, are rights for all who live among us. To condemn, prejudice or oppress any individual in our midst, or any group who lives with us, IS A SIN. Jews who violate our deepest held value and law and do not protect the rights of the stranger and the oppressed is, regardless of race, religion, age, or any aspect of gender, without question sins.

On Yom Kippur we look deep into our selves and our souls. We judge OUR thoughts and deeds and we commit to do better in the coming year.

I call upon each member of our community to strive to uphold this highest of our principles.

G'mar Chatimah Tovah,