

## April 2016 Message from Rabbi Dubin

On Friday night, March 18, we at the JCNWJ gathered for *Shabbat Zachor* (“Shabbat of Remembrance”). During this service, which immediately precedes Purim every year, we read from Deuteronomy 25:17-19, the portion in which we are commanded to remember (*zachor*) what Amalek did to us on our journey through the desert, when he and his warriors viciously attacked the most vulnerable among us from the rear. The connection, of course, is that we see Haman as a later-day manifestation of Amalek. The difference, though, is that in the *Story of Esther*, Haman is soundly defeated. And for this we rejoice with great fun and amusement.

As part of the Purim fun, when it came time for the expected sermon that Friday night, I began my remarks in a way that would have been completely unremarkable had it been delivered on any Shabbat other than this one, during which we were honoring the miracle of Purim.

“The rabbis of our Tradition,” I began, “teach that on Purim, the world is *nahafoku* (“upside down, inside out”). I fear we have come to a point in American political discourse that our country itself has become *nahafoku*. Look around and listen. It’s not hard to discern. As it stands today, roughly half of us are no longer willing or able to talk peacefully with the other half.

"How have we come to the point where differences in opinion result in violent confrontation? More importantly, what can we do to reverse this disappointing and terrifying trend?

"This, my friends, is the sermon that needs to be given tonight, because this is single biggest challenge confronting the future of our society today..."

It was at the point that our beloved President Howie so “rudely” interrupted me (on cue, as planned) to remind me of the “memo” that had been disseminated by the URJ, advising that in the best interest of our congregants’ spiritual lives, “the Union of Reform Judaism is calling upon member synagogues to eliminate the spiritually harmful practice of rabbinic sermonizing.” It was great fun, of course, and totally in keeping with the spirit of Purim, but it also begged the question: “What about the sermon that I started but didn’t finish?”

Unfortunately, a simple scan of the horizon provides every reason to assume our nation stands nowhere near our being able to heal this rift any time soon. It’s distressing and it’s worrisome. Unfortunately, yes, it does seem that I’ll have plenty more opportunity to give this sermon before we as a nation begin to figure it out how and why to be civil with one another.

But Friday, March 18, 2016 was a banner day not only because it marked the beginning of *Shabbat Zachor*. It was a banner day in the history of American culture also because it marked the 38th birthday of a true American icon, for it was on this

very day in, 1978, that Kim, Debbie, and Joni Sledge (Sister Sledge) released their chart smashing record, “We Are Family!”

We at The Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey are, first and foremost, family. We care for one another, we support one another, and we take pride in one another. At the same time, as with all families, there are times when we also disagree with one another. There are even times when we vociferously disagree with one another! What the rest of the nation might want to learn from us, though, is that no matter how staunch our political positions may be, no matter how passionate our differences are, we always put family first.

We love one another and we respect each other’s right to arrive at our own individual conclusions, even if those conclusions oppose our own. It’s no secret that our country is as painfully divided today as it has been since at least the 1960s, and maybe even since the 1860s. Unfortunately, we have a appalling dearth of role models to demonstrate the benefits of civility. But the JCNWJ is different. We are a family united in sacred purpose. We have conservatives and we have liberals. We have Democrats and we have Republicans. We have hawks and we have doves.

And we have everything in between. But through it all, no matter our commonalities or our differences, to quote three wise sisters, “Just let me state for the record, We’re giving love in a family dose.” Just think of it. If the rest of the nation would just follow suit, how beautiful that would be, and how many fewer sermons would I have to write! Talk about a win-win situation!

L’Shalom,

Rabbi Dubin

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