

June 11, 2009

Dear Congregants,

Today I sent the following message to my congregants here in Hilton Head, and wanted to share my thoughts with my new community as well. Although my time at Beth Tikvah has not yet begun, and Rabbi Weiss is still in town and available to you, he did graciously give me permission to share with you my feelings at a difficult time:

Yesterday's tragedy at the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. has saddened our community. The name of security guard Stephen Tyrone Johns is added to the growing list of Jewish and gentile martyrs who have lost their lives defending the Jews' right to exist. In addition to our sorrow, members of our community, as well as all minority groups, have reason to be increasingly concerned about the swell in hate crimes, domestic terrorism, and acts of violence on the part of those who oppose justice, tolerance, and diversity.

While our worries cannot be completely eliminated, they can be somewhat alleviated by the knowledge that we live in a country whose government and majority of population seek to protect the rights of equality for all people. We may also be consoled by the idea that we, Am Yisrael - the people of Israel, have survived worse through our faith in God, through our commitment to life, and through our connection to each other. So long as there are at least two Jews in the world, each has someone to lean on.

In light of this current tragedy, all the tragedies of the past, and all of the tragedies unfortunately yet to come, we may recognize that the best response is to stand tall, stand together, and refuse to allow those who oppose righteousness to dictate how we live or when we die. Am Yisrael Chai - the people of Israel lives.

I'D LIKE TO GO ALONE

Alena Synkova, Holocaust victim, 6 years old

*I'd like to go away alone
Where there are other, nicer people,
Somewhere in the far unknown,*

There where no one kills another.

*Maybe more of us
A thousand strong,
Will reach this goal
Before too long.*

Know that at times like these your spiritual leaders and your community are always here for you. May we all continue to be present for each other, lending courage and strength at the darkest times.

With a heavy heart and hope for the future,

Rabbi Mark L. Covitz