

Reflections on Charlottesville

August 17, 2017

Like so many of you, I feel shaken by this past week's events in Charlottesville.

While I am comforted by the firm and strong response from many community leaders who have reaffirmed our higher moral purpose, rooted in generosity of spirit and compassion, I approach Shabbat with a broken heart, angry, shuddering from hearing the voices of such devastating hatred so close to us. "Blood and soil," they called out, echoing Hitler's "blut and boden," which meant only Aryan blood belonged on German soil.

I try to preserve this space for brief insights into the Torah readings, and blessings for our community. This space does not lend itself well to broader discussion. But what we saw and heard this week forces a religious response to be broadly conveyed. Judaism is built on one foundational belief: every person - every person! - is made b'tzelem Elohim, in the image of God. That's it. Everything else is commentary.

Developing this foundational religious insight, our ancient rabbis then insisted: whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. How our world felt a little more destroyed this week.

Our Torah reading, Parashat Re'eh, begins with these words: "See this day I set before you blessing and curse: blessing if you observe the mitzvot, curse if you do not." These words demand that we fill the world with a radically different voice than we heard recently, restoring the earth with compassion and loving kindness. We have some work to do. Let's come together and begin.