

## ***Searching for National Healing in the Time of Corona***

Racism is as old as time. In last week's Torah portion, we learned that Miriam attacked her brother Moses for marrying a "Kushite" woman. The word "kushite" is understood to mean black. In other words, he married someone who was different. Who didn't fit in to their customs and traditions. His wife was "the other". Quickly Miriam was punished and with leprosy no less. The rabbis said that gossip is akin to leprosy because it strips away the reputation and often the very soul of another human being.

Words have a great power to hurt and to heal. To direct and misdirect. We have been hearing a lot about Black Lives Matter these past couple of weeks. Perhaps from our point of view we want to say, "*Hey, ALL lives matter!*" But in doing so we miss the point. This isn't a movement to address the ills of every person in society. It is a movement to redress the ills impacting the people of color in our community. To deflect by implying that caring about another specific group means that we can't care about ourselves is to simply avoid the issue. As Jews we focus on issues of hatred and bigotry all the time as they impact our community. But that doesn't mean we don't care about others. Hillel said it best, "*If I am only for myself, what am I?*" No, if anything, our personal history has made us sensitive to the plight of others. And this has translated to a historic partnership with the African American community. Many of you are aware that my father Rabbi Sidney Akselrad, z"l proudly talked about his experiences with Martin Luther King Jr. and his involvement in the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Since that time, we have come so far... and yet, *we still have so much further to go.*

The Union for Reform Judaism recently came out with a strong statement in support of the Black Lives Movement:

**Our Jewish tradition is replete with instances of moral reckoning when we are asked to be present and accounted for. "Ayecha?," we are asked. "Where are you?" We respond with a full throated, "Hineinu." "We are here."**

**As Reform Jews committed to the spirit of this teaching, we say unequivocally, Black Lives Matter...**

While we are aware of the strong disagreement, we have with this movement's stance on Israel and BDS, there is a recognition that now is not the time to fight that battle. The country is not focused on issues impacting our community right now. Now is not about the battle that we fought not too long ago when the Tree of Life synagogue suffered the largest act of anti-Semitic violence in our country's history. No, anti-Semitism has not disappeared. Far from it. But for now, our nation is focus on something of equal if not greater importance. As Jews, as people committed to equal rights for all, as people ***who do in fact know that all life matters***, we need to speak up in support of societal changes that have been ignored for too long.

We can do this while understanding that most police are good cops. But we don't have to be dismissive either by saying what is happening is the fault of a "few bad apples". The problem is deeper and more pervasive. And we can support this cause while also decrying the violence that has been unleashed. Opportunists, arsonists, and looters do nothing to advance the cause of justice. In fact, the impact is quite the opposite. It gives those who are resistant to change an excuse to refuse to change.

What is going on now in cities all across America, with renewed anger in Atlanta will not be wished away. It is going to take a national conversation. It is going to take bi-partisan legislation. And it is going to take each community to address its own individual situation city by city.

In forgiving his sister Miriam, Moses turned to God and pleaded for her. "*El Na Refa Na La!*" "*Please God, heal her now!*" Moses understood, that for the nation of Israel to be united, people had to get beyond the racism and divisiveness that threatened to destroy the Israelite nation before its journey to the Promised Land even began. Interestingly enough, Moses' call for justice began with words of healing. With a decisive call for action, combined with introspection, understanding, and empathy, let us march towards a path of healing. *El Na, Refaenu... please God bring healing to us all.*