

Iftar 2024

Our fate, B'nai Yaakov, the Children of Jacob and B'nai Ishmael, the children of Ismael is entangled.

We are brothers. We are cousins. We are all children of Abraham.

As is true of most sibling relationships, it is complicated. As is true of most siblings, there may be a feeling of a need to compete for the parent's love. And as is true of most parents, the thing any parent most wants is for their children to get along.

And so tonight, as we gather together in a spirit of friendship and mutual respect, I would like to think that our parent, *Aveenu shebeshamayim*, our God in Heaven, *Adonai, Allah*, whatever we choose to call the Holy One, the Merciful One the one who we call *HaRahaman* in Hebrew, and who is known in Arabic as *Ar-Rahman*, is looking down on us tonight, in this small corner of the world, and is pleased.

Unlike last year, this year our Muslim brothers and sisters are not the only ones who are fasting. We join and partake of a fast as well, for today coincides with Ta'Anit Esther, the Fast of Esther, a day set aside to commemorate when she asked her fellow Jews to pray on her behalf as she was about to intercede with the king and ask him to revoke Haman's plan to destroy the Jews. She asked the nation to fast and pray for her because she did not want to face the King alone. Knowing there were others who cared about her fate gave her the confidence and courage she needed.

Being here should not be an act of courage, but it is.

We gather together here tonight, with the confidence that comes from knowing we are not alone, and that we can draw strength from each other.

I pray that our fast will make us hungry for peace. Hungry for truth. Hungry for understanding and compassion. And may we be granted the strength, will, wisdom, determination and courage to pursue it.

We are not, nor do we wish to appear to be ignorant or naïve, or oblivious to what is happening in the world. The forces of hate are all around us, and sadly, they are growing louder every day. They seek to drown out the voices of tolerance. They wish to smash the bridges of understanding that we seek to create.

Our presence at this Interfaith Iftar is an antidote to those efforts. We will not let the voices of hatred, animosity, or prejudice prevail.

We do this, not by ignoring or setting aside our differences, but by celebrating what we have in common and cherishing what makes us unique and how we are different.

In our own quiet way, we are lighting a candle and thereby bringing light to the very hope the haters seek to extinguish. We illuminate the darkness they so desperately wish would envelop the entire world.

Our world has changed a great deal since the interfaith Iftar we held last year. We all mourn the tragic loss of innocent lives and abhor terror and the repressive forces aligned with it.

In June I led a delegation of rabbis as guests of the governments of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. I was able to see first-hand the product of what can happen when a people and its leaders choose to embark on the path of enlightenment, and how people can flourish and thrive in an open environment.

Reflecting on the promise that I saw and witnessed, I imagined and thought to myself -- this must be how Moses must have felt when he looked out and saw the Promised Land. I feel I have been blessed. I have been to the mountaintop. I have been able to glimpse the promise of peace; to see what a society based on tolerance and understanding can look like, and what it can accomplish. Let us work for to expand the circle of peace, of those who unite and join hands in the Abraham Accords.

I pray that we may see the day when the vision of the prophet shall come to pass: When nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. When the lion shall lie down with the lamb, and none shall be afraid.

Kein Yehi Retzono. So may it be Thy Will. Im Shallah.
Amen

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