



VALLEY BETH SHALOM

One Nation Under God

The events in Charlottesville this week are many things - ugly, despicable, horrifying. But not surprising. Not to those who know Jewish history. We've seen this story many times before: A rapidly changing world leaves people feeling lost and powerless. An eruption of fierce nationalism vowing allegiance to "blood and soil," to "purity" of race, faith and culture. A world reduced to crude binaries - us and them; our people and those people. The mindless mob whipped into a violent frenzy. Innocent lives destroyed. In our parlance, we call this a pogrom. These events are horrifying, but not surprising. Not to us.

We Americans have apparently forgotten that democracy is fragile. That is the surprise. At the heart of American democracy is our aspiration to build an inclusive, accepting national community, welcoming differences and embracing hyphenated identities. On my street live Jewish-Americans, African-Americans, Persian-Americans, Asian-Americans, Armenian-Americans, Latino-Americans. A dozen languages are spoken in our homes. Neighborhoods sparkle with Christmas, Sukkot and Halloween decorations. We enjoy sushi, samosas, burritos and blintzes. The pluralism brings color to our community. America's great project is to bring the pluralism together into one -- e pluribus unum. This is our continuing project. It is daunting. And all the more so when we take it for granted.

The tribalism of Charlottesville is natural. It is democracy that is not natural, not part of our nature. Democracy is learned. Democracy is an expression of

our sacred aspiration to rise above our nature, to rise above our reflex to fear the unfamiliar, to blame the outsider, to destroy the Other. Democracy must be taught, re-taught, rehearsed, and renewed daily. Democracy is an ongoing project aimed at reshaping our basic human impulses. It is never finished. It is always demanding more of us. And this week, after the events we have witnessed, it demands more still.

We pray for the victims. We hold in our hearts the families of Heather Heyer, and Virginia State Troopers, Lt. H. Jay Cullen and Trooper Berke M.M. Bates.

We pray that our children will not come to perceive any of this week's events as normal.

We pray for the strength and resolve to push back the hate and reclaim the American project of democracy. We pray that we might one day really be "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

B'Shalom,



Rabbi Ed Feinstein



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