

Shabbat Update September 11, 2021

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20 Years After 9/11: The Power of Tiny Acts To Create a Moral Universe

Rabbi Michael G. Holzman and
Imam Mohamed Magid

The horrific attack of September 11, 2001 was an attack on all of humanity, and we remember all the victims and first responders who died that day.

In the world of the terrorists, the presence of outsiders in their homeland —including Americans, Europeans, and non-Muslims generally -- was a mortal threat. In reprisal, they chose violence. We might be tempted to see this medieval world view of theirs as the root of the violence, but that outlook would ignore the deeper and more universal truth of xenophobia. The events of that day showed us the danger of this truth—that humans tend to fear



September Calendar of Events

*B'er Chayim
Temple is open for
in-person
services.
Same safeguards
will be in place.*

*ZOOM services
continue*

Friday

outsiders. Our experience over the last 20 years has taught us how to overcome that fear.

On 9/11, one of us was a student at the Hebrew Union College campus in New York, while the other was leading one of the largest Muslim communities in America -- the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS). A few hours after Rabbi Holzman watched humans jumping from the collapsing buildings, Imam Magid decided to close his religious school because he feared reprisal attacks against Muslims. As Rabbi Holzman volunteered to help arrange funerals for members of the New York Fire Department, Imam Magid counseled ADAMS congregants who lost a daughter and son-in-law in the World Trade Center.

The reprisals that Imam Magid anticipated did arrive, as too many Americans fell into the moral trap of fearing all Muslims, and some Americans went so far as to label all of Islam as a religion of violent hatred. Hateful graffiti appeared on Imam Magid's current building, and the sign on the future ADAMS building site was burned. But then, on the first Sunday after the attacks, the local interfaith community, led by members of the Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation (NVHC), arrived in force to reject the hatred. Children from NVHC's religious school produced an enormous banner with messages of love. Imam Magid realized something special was afoot in his corner of America.

Nationwide, Americans embraced a fortress mentality, increasing surveillance of American Muslims, enacting travel restrictions, creating no-fly lists, and inventing the term "Islamofascism." As Imam Magid was confronting increased profiling and stereotyping of Muslims, he could see that our local community was taking a different direction: Muslims were now part of the social fabric, and the faith community, led by Jews, would not tolerate Islamophobia in our neighborhood.

Embedded in our faith traditions is the power of the prophetic voice, the imperative that God expects more from humanity than mere survival and security. Perhaps this yearning for humanity's better instincts led Muslims to flock to join ADAMS in those years, fueling an expansion that required satellite locations for Friday prayers. And perhaps it was that same yearning that inspired NVHC to open its doors and welcome ADAMS members weekly and every night

September 10
6:00 pm
Erev Shabbat
Service

Wednesday
September 15
7:00 pm
Yom Kippur
begins
(Kol Nidre)

Thursday
September 16
10:00 am
Yom Kippur
Morning Service
and Yizkor

3:00 pm
Afternoon
Service

5:00 pm
Ne'ilah Service

Friday
September 17
7:30 pm
Erev Shabbat
Service
In person &
ZOOM

Saturday
September 18
10:00 am
Torah Study



Yahrzeits for

during Ramadan to pray in a synagogue.

The story of this partnership has been covered in 101 news stories, and every time the cameras show up at NVHC's crowded parking lot on a Friday, we receive a flood of emails in the following days. People from all over the world thank us for giving them hope and setting an example of peace and fellowship. After a recent story, Rabbi Holzman received 198 messages of gratitude and only 1 hateful message.

What accounts for this reaction? The answer is something tiny, yet powerful—something exemplified in an incident Rabbi Holzman witnessed on 9/11. As he walked from Hebrew Union College to his home on the Upper West Side of Manhattan along a route that began over a mile from the Twin Towers, he witnessed people still running north in the deserted streets. He saw one man who had stopped to catch his breath, along with a crowd of people who had gathered to help him. The man gestured that he could not hear because his ears were clogged with gray ash. A woman ran into a drug store, returned with cotton swabs, and began cleaning the man's ears as he broke down in tears. In the days that followed, Rabbi Holzman saw many such tiny, spontaneous acts of human connection all over New York.

Compared with the enormity of the 9/11 attacks, acts like these seem minuscule. But through the hands of the woman with the cotton swabs acted the power of God that the terrorists had pushed away as they steered planes into buildings. Over the past twenty years, this same power brought members of each of our congregations to rally in support of each other in times of crisis: when a young member of ADAMS was murdered, during the wars in Gaza, when the Muslim travel ban was enacted, after the Charlottesville "United the Right" march, and following the Tree of Life synagogue shooting.

As the story of the partnership between NVHC and ADAMS has rippled around the world, we have come to believe that tiny acts—like the installation of a Muslim foot bath in a synagogue bathroom—have the power to overcome the xenophobia that has been one of humanity's failings since the beginning of time. We have both seen it. After hearing an antisemitic sermon, Imam Magid approached the

week ending

**September 11,
2021**

5 Tishrei 5782

Sarah Gerson

Abe Feldstein

Samuel Schwab

Belle Beneman

Nathan Feigus

Ken Jablon

Maurice Milberg

Charles Price

Lenor Ber

Rosanne
Bernstein

David Gottlieb



Happy Birthday

September 1
Beth Goldstein

September 19
Irma Dezen

speaker and described the synagogue where his members pray. The man immediately admitted his mistake. When Rabbi Holzman recently sat with 8 Muslim men in an Arab Israeli town, they eyed him with suspicion until he showed them a BBC video on his phone of Friday afternoon Jumma prayers at the shul.

Though seemingly insignificant compared to the security of our nation--or even of our local houses of worship-- tiny acts are the most significant thing we can do to create a moral universe. When a Jew stands in the parking lot welcoming a Muslim to pray in a synagogue, or Muslims host Jews for an interfaith Passover seder at the Masjid, we cannot know where or how those acts will reverberate. But we can know that after the next incident of antisemitism or Islamophobia, those Jews and Muslims who engaged in those tiny acts will have the authority, expertise, and conviction to recognize that the "other" is no longer anonymous. And that is enormous.



This Week's Torah Portion

Vayeilech

ויֵלֶךְ

[Moses] Went

Deuteronomy 31:1–30

Summary

- Moses prepares the people for his death

September 21

Mark Perman

**Happy
Anniversary**

September 2

Tamar & Alan
Clarke

September 3

Gayle Griffith &
Lee Schwartz

September 28

Larry & Dottie
Hohing

[share your birthday
and anniversaries
dates with our friends
and families...contact
info@berchayim.org](#)



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and announces that Joshua will succeed him. (31:1–8)

- Moses instructs the priests and the elders regarding the importance of reading the Torah. (31:9–13)
- God informs Moses that upon his death, the people will commit idolatry and "many evils and troubles shall befall them." God tells Moses to teach the people a poem that will "be My witness." (31:14–30)

"Virtual" instructions -

To watch on Zoom - send an email to admin@berchayim.org and the ID and Password will be emailed back to you. The ZOOM Id and Password will be the same each Friday evening. Please remember that Rebecca is part time, and leave yourself enough time.

Following along in prayerbooks for ZOOM services:

Links for prayerbooks are found on our website (www.berchayim.org). Those links will take you to Mishkah T'Filah for Shabbat Services.

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