

Do Justly. Love Mercy. Walk Humbly. The founding members of Temple Micah could not have chosen a better name when they began this endeavor some 50 years ago. These values set forth by the prophet Micah more than two thousand years ago have effectively capture this synagogue's ethos during these 50 years. As we strive to express who we are and what we want to become I can think of no better words than, Do Justly, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly. As we enter the second year of our relationship, between rabbi and congregation, I have been giving a great deal of thought to the question, how will we do justly, love mercy, walk humbly? My response to this question begins simply with this idea: We must Kill Reb Zalman.

Who is Reb Zalman and, why, must we kill him in order to realize our values and vision as a community? I first met Reb Zalman at the Goldman Union Camp in Zionsville, Indiana. Each Friday night the entire camp gathers at the campfire to conclude the evening's spirited Shabbat celebration. The highlight of the campfire is when the camp director and master storyteller, Rabbi Ron Klotz, stands before the camp to share a story. The story that is most famous and most requested is that of the fattest man in the world, Reb Zalman.

The Baal Shem Tov, the great 18th c. Chasidic master, dreams that in the world to come, Reb Zalman will be the Baal Shem Tov's neighbor. He decides that he must meet this man to see why Reb Zalman is so special and why he merits this place in the world to come. The Besht arrives just as Shabbat is coming and expects Reb Zalman to welcome him for the day. Instead the Besht finds Reb Zalman in all his grandeur, seated at a table filled with ridiculous amounts of food. Reb Zalman is so busy feeding his face that he does not even stop to acknowledge the Besht. Suffice it to say that this continues on for the entire Shabbat - the Besht trying to interact with Reb Zalman, and Reb Zalman maintaining his solitary interest in stuffing his face. Finally, as Shabbat ends and the Besht makes his way to leave, he is able to get Reb Zalman to acknowledge him and is able to ask why Reb Zalman acts in this manner. Reb Zalman explains that when he was a boy the Cossacks came to take his father ... and they tied him up and burnt him at the stake. When they did so, the fire that emanated from his father's body was trivial and brief. From that day, Reb Zalman swore that when they came to take him and tied him to the stake, there would be a fire so great that the entire world would know that a Jew had been killed.

The story ends here ... with the Besht being awed by Reb Zalman's commitment to his people ... and the camp enthralled and entertained with Rabbi Ron's playful telling of Reb Zalman's habits and the Besht's response. As we seem to celebrate and honor Reb Zalman for his faith and commitment

I am left with a sick feeling in my stomach and a sense that something is not quite right ... which never fails to develop into the urge to Kill Reb Zalman.

Why kill Reb Zalman? What is so wrong with him and his story? It boils down to three things: First, Reb Zalman is all about reacting to his father's death and preparing for his own, for the one moment of telling the world that a Jew has been killed. He lives his life singularly reacting to potential and perceived persecution and oppression, and so there is no room for other things that his tradition or the world may offer to him like joy, wisdom or growth. Second, Reb Zalman is so concerned only with himself and his own needs or concerns, that he ignores not only the honored Baal Shem Tov, but probably the entire world. His life is so consumed by this narrow view of the world that he acts only for himself with no regard as to how he could act to mend or better the rest of the world. Third, Reb Zalman only does one thing and one thing only to realize his dream; he eats and eats and eats. He is so focused on his way of doing things that his mind and heart are closed to considering other ways of doing things that may be different, meaningful and influential.

If these are the things for which Reb Zalman stands, then killing him would mean killing those remnants of his spirit that we find in the Jewish community. Yes, we may call Reb Zalman passionate or we may call him disciplined and focused, but these three remnants of his spirit are things that we as a community can do without. Despite his passion and commitment to his cause, despite the great fire that would have wowed the Cossacks when Reb Zalman would have been burnt at the stake ... the Cossacks still won and Reb Zalman lost the moment that his entire existence embraced this destructive goal and ignored the world, ignored the potential on change and growth and ignored the grace, beauty and wisdom of the Jewish tradition.

In order for us to realize the true heights of Micah's call (Do Justly, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly.) we cannot continue to celebrate heroes like Reb Zalman or his spirit that pervades our community today. We see evidence of Reb Zalman's spirit as we examine our community's anxious and severe reactions to things like Mel Gibson's Passion of the Christ or the presence of Jews for Jesus in our community. We see evidence of Reb Zalman's spirit when we are so blinded by our Jewish jingoism that we turn a cold heart to the tragic conditions of Palistinian Arabs and our share of the responsibility in creating these conditions. We see evidence of Reb Zalman's spirit in our world when our view of the Jewish family becomes so rigid and limiting that it excludes so many of them who nurture caring and vibrant Jewish souls. We must kill Reb Zalman and the way of approaching Judaism and the world that he represents.

'Killing Reb Zalman' means that we must see a Judaism that looks beyond being simply about surviving or an identity that is rooted solely in discrimination and oppression. 'Killing Reb Zalman' means directing our passion toward learning about, cultivating and sharing with those around us the truths, joy and wisdom of our tradition.

Killing Reb Zalman means that we must adopt a Judaism that concerns itself with more than just the Jewish community. Killing Reb Zalman means working toward seeing and creating an entire world, in which we do justly, love mercy and walk humbly.

Killing Reb Zalman means that we must not do what we do or think what we think simply because that is what we have always done or thought. Killing Reb Zalman means creating an experience in our community that openly welcomes the best of our tradition and the new, different and exciting changes found within it and our world.

As I stand before you on this holiest of nights, it is time for us to look back at how we have thought, acted and lived ... but it is also the time for us to look ahead. As we look ahead, I look ahead to the future of our community with Micah's vision (Do Justly, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly) in mind and with the desire to move out from the shadow of Reb Zalman's pervasive spirit. What does this future look like? While no one can say with certainty what our future holds, we must begin to envision, exchange ideas and express where it is we want to go and how we want to get there. By doing so, we will begin to determine the nature of our path. In this spirit I humbly submit a few glimpses of my vision as I gaze into our future and imagine what we want to become.

An integral part of Killing Reb Zalman and realizing Micah's vision will be developing a culture of Social Justice within our community. We must be a community who values and expects its members to be active partners of repairing the world. We need to heed the most basic call of our tradition - to empathize with the widow, orphan and stranger - educating ourselves about places in our world in which our society forgets or even oppresses them and working to create ways to support and empower them. Being a part of the Temple Micah community must be more than attending services, Religious School or enjoying a life cycle event ... it must have this aspect of Tzedakah, of Justice for us to be true to the entirety of our heritage.

While I have an idea of how I want this culture of Social Justice to look, the truth of the matter is that I need your helping in figuring out how to get there.

How will we instill into everything that we do, the sense that we must be working toward a just and compassionate world? In the past few years Temple Micah's Social Action committee, led by Patti Parson, has been active in collecting many needed items for the needy of Denver and we need to build upon this tradition. This culture of Social Justice may look like choosing products and food that is environmentally and society responsible and educating our community how to do the same; it may look like integrating a action aspect to our Religious Education -- expecting families not just to show up with their children on Sunday mornings to learn, but also at other times to feed the hungry or care for the sick; it may look like choosing an injustice in the world (like the health insurance crisis) and learning how to educate and be a part of changing the system that inhibits justice and compassion. We need to create a culture in which not only do we have a committee of people who work toward creating Social Action opportunities, but our entire synagogue is the Social Action committee. We must look to our ancestors who fought for the rights of Jewish and non-Jewish workers; who fought for the civil liberties of Jews and non-Jews. We must be able to feel the same urgency they felt about improving the world and work toward improving our world, and not just improving our part of it. Contact our new Social Action chair, Howard Belon and share your ideas or thoughts as to how we need to build upon what we already do and implement this culture of Social Justice so that we may realize Micah's vision and Kill Reb Zalman.

An integral part of Killing Reb Zalman and realizing Micah's vision will be being an active part of the Reform Jewish summer camp movement. We must find and establish relationships and participate in those institutions and programs that are about experiencing the joy, grace and beauty of our tradition. We can give our children no greater gift than immersion for a few weeks over the summer in an atmosphere where Judaism is joyous, relevant and the catalyst toward friendships and other relationships that shape their souls. We can give our children no greater gift than to immerse them in an atmosphere that celebrates and promotes the kind of creativity, flexibility and openness that we cherish about being Reform/Liberal Jews. They can give us no greater gift than to bring that passion and way of perceiving Judaism and the world back to us -- in our homes in the way we do Shabbat, in our sanctuary in the way we pray, in our relationship in the way we love.

There are many great Jewish summer camp opportunities for our kids -- our own area offers JCC Ranch Camp and Emanuel's Camp Schwayder -- and any Jewish summer camp experience is a positive one. However, a relationship and commitment with the Reform movement's regional summer camps opens our community and our children to unique possibilities that reflect our values and vision. The camp in our region is the one that I

mentioned earlier this morning and if you know me, many times in addition. It is the Goldman Union Camp Institute in Zionsville, Indiana (a.k.a. G.U.C.I.). As a Reform congregation and rabbi it is both obligation and privilege to give of my time to help foster the development of GUCI (or any of its sister camps) each summer. I will be there this coming summer, in mid July -- being part of creating its magic and working to bring some of it home here. I know that it may feel early to consider plans for summer camp right now -- it is not early at all to begin to create opportunities and relationships that will add to our community and change lives -- GUCI can be that experience for us. Grab a brochure outside, talk to me about it and allow the magic of camp to help us respond to Micah's vision and Kill Reb Zalman.

An integral part of Killing Reb Zalman and realizing Micah's vision will be establishing and dwelling in a facility that belongs to us. We must reside in a building that reflects the progressive, joyous and uplifting nature that draws us to being Jews and a part of this community. In order for us to realize our loftiest of vision for ourselves, we need to partner with a facility that enables us the flexibility and freedom to create the Jewish experience we cherish. Its location, appearance, design and structure all must meet our desires to not sequester ourselves away from the Denver community; to be an open, attractive, affirming and accessible place to all kinds of Jews and Jewish families and to utilize the advances and technologies available in our world to enhance the Jewish experience we seek to create.

For example, whether we build a new facility or purchase an existing one, our communal prayer space must allow for flexible seating, video and audio accessibility and the kind of structure and adornments that allow us to create a setting in which we FIND GOD HERE in many kinds of prayer, educational and communal programs and experiences. If at times of prayer we want a traditional set-up, or a service in the round, or even wish to have a live feed of the Wailing Wall in our sights while we pray -- we need the capacity to create those different settings. If we want to host a large communal forum on an important issue; learn about Judaisms of different countries by sitting in our media center with a 3rd grade class of Australian Jews on a live video feed via the internet, or host a program in which families study about, fashion and create their own chuppah or tallitot in our arts center -- we need a facility that is able to provide these different settings. There are different ideas and options before us, and we must consider them all with our vision and our financial reality in mind. We need to be able to ask and answer the appropriate question about what is best for us and determine, for example, if it is best for us to share a facility; what human and financial resources we need to make this dream or part of this dream come true; and how exactly we go about doing it. Within the next 2-4 years our community needs to be

residing or have concrete plans to reside in our own facility. Help us by working so that we will grow in numbers. Help us by working so that we are able to add more financial resources to our efforts. Help us by and sharing your ideas with Hal Bruno and the rest of the Building Task Force. Help us envision and establish a facility, so that it will be one of our tools in realizing the prophet Micah's vision and Killing Reb Zalman.

There are many aspects to our communal life that we may sit and envision together. We must have a shared vision of expressing the way that we do the business of being a synagogue; educational efforts; youth programming; communal prayer experiences and on and on. Tonight, these ten days are about better understanding ourselves and creating a vision of where we want to go in the next year. We must do so as a community, so that we share the responsibilities, benefits and risks of getting there. As I share pieces of my vision with you here tonight, I look to begin the dialogue of creating our vision and making it a reality. I have ideas, thoughts to share and questions to ask about where we want to go together - about how we want to realize Micah's vision and Kill Reb Zalman. In the coming year I want to share with you and look forward to your sharing with me our vision. I look toward seeing this discussion take place this New Year informally via email discussions or over a cup of coffee with me or the leadership of our community and more formally in focus groups. These opportunities will provide us the chance to dialogue, discuss and debate vision of our community. They will empower us to move forward together toward realizing Micah's vision and effectively Killing Reb Zalman.

Whether it is these three glimpses of our possible future that I have shared with you this evening that will stay on your mind; or other areas that you are eager to discuss and imagine; or the desire to minimize the presence of Reb Zalman's spirit; or the pervasive and inspiring ideals of Micah ... let our visions inspire us tonight. May we be inspired to look back and see Micah's rich and varied history of imagining and then realizing so many dreams. May we be inspired to look ahead and see the exciting and energizing possibilities of the ways that we may continue to realize the vision of the prophet Micah and of the Temple Micah. As we continue on this path together, may we commit ourselves to a passion toward learning about, cultivating and sharing with those around us the truths, joy and wisdom of our tradition. May we work toward seeing and creating an entire world, in which we do justly, love mercy and walk humbly. May we create an experience in our community that openly welcomes the best of our tradition and the new, different and exciting changes found within it and our world. In 5765 and beyond, may we kill Reb Zalman and most of all, may we do justly, love mercy and walk humbly.