

**December 9, 2015**

## Yes, I Am Afraid

I am afraid. As someone who has devoted my life to respecting and urging others to respect differences, I find these to be dark days. Days that leave me frightened.

Yes, I am frightened of random acts of terror perpetrated by people who claim the mantle of Islam. I am alarmed by what I see overseas. Including the slaughter, beheadings and targeted destruction of ancient Yazidi and Christian communities in the Middle East. Paris scared me. As did Beirut. And daily bombings in Nigeria, Iraq and Afghanistan. But because I'm like most people, I am even more frightened by what is happening around the corner.

Yes, I admit to being frightened by the radicalized version of Islam that motivated the killers in San Bernardino. I'm scared that this seems similar to what happened in Fort Hood and at the Boston Marathon Bombing.

But as a person who is Jewish, I am also frightened by white Christian men who claim the mantle of white supremacy. And who are still acknowledged to be the largest number of domestic terrorists. Growing up, I knew about the Ku Klux Klan and that its members would get me if they could. Today, the KKK is not my only source of fear. After all, white supremacists come in many different configurations. And their targets are not only the Black community. They still have no room for Jews, either.

I am also frightened by the crowds of cheering Americans – people who are excited by prospective leaders of our country who are stirring hate and trying to frighten us. Not of violent, extremist men and women who take action in the name of Islam and seek to kill us. But of all the diverse women, men and children who are Muslim. I am frightened by the speeches about keeping Muslims out of this country. And how the cheering crowds look so much like the scary films of cheering crowds in Germany in the 1930s.

I am terrified because we seem unable to remember the recent past. Hitler systematically dehumanizing Jews until it seemed like a good idea to kill them all. Taking away the right to own businesses, requiring Jews to be identifiable with yellow stars, using demonic language – and adding other groups – gays, Romas, Catholics. Why don't more people remember how we succumbed to fear during World War II and rounded up Americans of Japanese descent– and how that legacy still haunts us? How we found others to stereotype and target with McCarthyism? Fear is an illness that has been the stimuli for some of our worst behavior toward one another. It's an axiom that those who forget history will be doomed to repeat it. So let us not forget.

I know it is a human inclination to react when threatened and to want to protect ourselves and our families. Sometimes this causes people to retreat to the familiar, stay close to “our own” and push out others. But the real solution is not to somehow isolate our families nor see an enemy around every corner. If we are truly to protect those we love most, we must live in an open and integrated way with the full diversity of our humanity.

And that leads me to what frightens me most. It's the future for my grandchildren. Not only do I want them to grow up in a world that is peaceful. But I also want them to grow up as good people. I imagine them as caring and compassionate, honoring the stranger and treating people as they wish to be treated. I want them to be people who exemplify the highest traditions not only in my religion, but across all our different ways of believing. But I'm scared. If they grow up in the world surrounded by hate and practices that dehumanize others, how can they help but become infected by those around them?

So yes, I am frightened, but courage is acting in the face of fear. I've named my fears and refuse to let them blind me. I will not be swayed by fear-mongering leaders and their cheering followers who seek to further divide our nation based on stereotypes. I will stand against the isolation of our Muslim neighbors and refuse to see every Muslim as a potential terrorist. I'm not going to be afraid. And neither should you.

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Chief Executive Officer

*Tanenbaum is a secular, non-sectarian nonprofit that systematically dismantles religious violence and hatred through Peacemakers in armed conflicts and by tackling religious bullying of students, harassment in workplaces and disparate health treatment for people based on their beliefs. More information about Tanenbaum's offerings can be found here: <https://tanenbaum.org/>*