

HINENI

Scripture used: Exodus 3:1-4 (Everet Fox translation); Genesis 22:1-5 (Robert Alter translation); Genesis 22:11-14; Exodus 25:21-23; and Isaiah 58:6-9 (Jewish Publication Society translation).

OVERVIEW

A very common blessing in our shared Judeo-Christian sacred texts is “Hineni”, meaning “Here I Am.” It indicates intention and full presence in the moment. Rabbi Nathaniel has been anchoring Congregation Beth Jacob for 24 years. It was his first time preaching to a Christian congregation. It is an opportunity to celebrate what we share (including our building) which goes far beyond what a single faith can achieve. NBCC does not “rent” the facility, nor are we “hosted” here - this is our home too! We worship the same God, and our different approaches to worship inform, challenge, and lift us.

KEY POINTS

- 1) CBJ got its start in the 1930s when twenty mid-Peninsula Jewish households (mostly of Polish and Russian backgrounds) banded together to form the first Jewish congregation between San Jose and San Francisco. The previous rabbi served for 38 years and walked with Dr King in Selma. The congregation was known for its warmth, learning, innovation, and emphasis on social justice.
- 2) In 1979, the synagogue fell victim to a criminal arsonist. The CBJ Cantor who had witnessed Kristallnacht saw a Redwood City police officer run into the burning building to rescue the Torah. Afterward, the community-at-large rallied around the congregation, and a Christian church hosted the congregants and services. When Moses faced the bush which was burning but not consumed; when Abraham was tested with the sacrifice of his son - their response was to pay attention, be present, trust, and develop their relationship with God. CBJ did just that during the crisis. God dwells in the empty space between humans facing each other.
- 3) A life well-lived is one of full presence every day; of greeting our fellow human beings; seeing them for who they are, and not who we want them to be. It's about making room for God. Rabbi Nathaniel collapsed from a heart attack at age 41; his beloved wife subsequently developed breast cancer. The congregation responded with abundant kindness and generosity, although some had to learn to do “Hineni” with grace, as in not sharing bad advice or bad news, invoking their own stories or fears, acting distracted, or wanting to fix and control things.
- 4) Hineni today is about looking for improvements and transcending divisions. When eleven innocents (who were extraordinary human beings with remarkable life stories) were killed in the Pittsburgh synagogue, the Jewish community was deeply traumatized. Violence came on top of an atmosphere of increased hatred, racism, and antisemitism. NBCC poured its support, caring, prayer, presence at vigils and rallies. Together we affirmed an America that rejects hatred, and sees every human life as sacred. When we cry out, God says Hineni!

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - Discern your heart. “I Am Here” - what is your commitment to presence and intention?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - Think of people in your life it's difficult to be present for.
- 3) **DO** - Outline how you will live a full Hineni life in 2019.