



ISBCC Remarks Rabbi Matthew Soffer

In our community and in Jewish tradition—especially in our most trying historical moments—the Jewish people have turned to humor in order to cope and make sense of the world. Recently a congregant and I were discussing how dark these days are.... I said to him that’s why we pray. And he shared with me a story:

... about a Reverend, an Imam, and a Rabbi who were discussing the best positions to pray in. Meanwhile, as they were talking there was a telephone repairman in the back the room, pretending not to listen.

The pastor said I find that I can pray most authentically when I elevate my hands upward toward the heavens. The rabbi said, we pray by bowing and moving side to side, a reminder that prayer is connected to action. The Imam said, we pray by bowing completely to the ground, an act of pure humility before God. The boy in the back couldn’t take it any more – he blurted out to the clergy—

“That’s all well and good, but the most powerful prayer I ever made was while I was dangling upside down by my heels forty feet above ground.”

There is a deep and haunting truth here. We find prayer when we need it most. Sheikh Yasir, Yusufi Vali, my friends and neighbors, I thank you for inviting me to join you in prayer on this day. I carry with me the love & blessings from my clergy colleagues and community at Temple Israel of Boston.

As the sun sets this evening our community will gather for prayer, as we bring in our Sabbath Day. We call prayer in Hebrew, “*T’filah*,” which comes from the Hebrew word *palel*. But *palel*, in its root, doesn’t really mean “prayer,” what it means is to *stand present* before someone who is discerning. This is why when our most important prayer is called “*Amida*” - the “standing” prayer. Literally, we all rise and *stand present* with each other—before God.

And in this moment of pain and suffering, of fear, of pernicious Islamophobia, there is no greater place for me to be than here with you, *STANDING* humbly before you.

Because the Jewish people of Temple Israel of Boston stand with you. You are our brothers and sisters, our partners in God’s holy work of healing the world. We embrace our similarities, *and we treasure our differences*. We all pray differently, but I’m here with you, in prayer, to say that YOU ARE NOT ALONE. That Temple Israel of Boston stands with you. And that we love you.

May blessings and peace be upon you all.