

Invocation for 2009 Kristalnacht Commemoration City Hall, November 1, 2009

אָנוֹשׁ וְתַחֲשֹׁבֵהוּ? לַדָּם וְתִדְעֵהוּ, בֶּן אָנוֹשׁ וְתַחֲשֹׁבֵהוּ? *Lord, what is man that you know him; son of man, that you should think of him?*¹ מִי כְּצֶל עוֹבֵר *Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.*² Dear God, we gather here today, to stand in awe of a calamity that is beyond our comprehension. What words can we speak, what deeds can we do, that could even begin to respond to an evil that is beyond imagination? Standing in the shadow of the day where profound darkness fell upon your earth, we recognize that we represent but a small flicker of light.

We pray, dear God, that the recognition of our smallness inspire our humility, but not our complacency. As Rabbi Tarfon taught, “לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין ליבטל ממנה”³ *it is not your responsibility to complete the work, but nor are you free to abstain from it.* Let our lives be lives in which we demand justice in our world and righteousness in our midst. Let our voices join in a chorus demanding peace and prosperity, health and happiness for all of your creations. Teach us to dedicate our lives to deeds of charity and acts of kindness.

In the face of an unspeakable tragedy that could make us feel insignificant, teach us that our actions are never insignificant to the lives that we touch. As Mother Theresa taught, “We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.” In the great sea of humanity, let ours be a drop of hope.

Indeed, there are no words, there are no deeds that can mitigate our sense of horror at the Holocaust – a horror that itself pales in comparison to the reality of those days. Instead, we pray that our words, and our deeds, help us to keep the memory of yesterday alive, and that the memory of yesterday cause us to demand of ourselves, and of others, that we work together create a better tomorrow. And let us say, Amen.

¹ Psalms 144:3

² Psalms 144:4

³ Ethics of the Fathers 2:16.