

SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

This will be the last article that I write as Chair of the Social Action Committee. I will be stepping down from my role as Chairperson at the end of June. It is time for me to move on.

There is no drama associated with this decision, no hidden meanings or underlying conflicts. It is a personal decision.

There is no change in my passionate commitment to social justice and the connection for me with *tikkun olam* and my Judaism.

There are examples in history, and in present time, when morality as a rationale for action can be a source of great harm as well as the basis of great good. I hope, always, that we at Ohavi Zedek are guided by the principle that we are “Lovers of Justice,” that we have been guided by the best parts of our tradition, knowing the danger that those who do great harm are capable of rationalizing and justifying their actions by citing the “greater good” or religion.

I am always for questioning, educating and challenging ourselves to know that we are true to our values and beliefs and that we are taking action based on those beliefs.

I was very gratified to hear of the pervasive interest and motivation of the majority of those who participated in the focus groups for Imagine 2025 regarding social justice, and that it is and will be a continued focus of OZ as we journey forward.

We as a Jewish community take action, align with and support those who are in need, are oppressed and face injustice. We do this because it is in our interest, in order to receive the same from others when we are in need. Much more than that, we are advocates of social justice because it is right. It is a reflection of who we are as Ohavi Zedek, and because we are a part of the Jewish people.

In conclusion, allow me to quote Martin Luther King Jr. from a speech urging social scientists to be activists rather than passive participants in the quest for social justice. I hope that these words, spoken less than a year before Dr. King was assassinated ring true for us as individuals and as a synagogue that occupies a proud place in our community and in the Jewish world:

“And it is again my deep conviction that ultimately a genuine leader is not a searcher of consensus, but a molder of consensus. On some positions cowardice asks the question, 'Is it safe?!" Expediency asks the question, 'Is it politic?' Vanity asks the question, 'Is it popular?' But conscience must ask the question, 'Is it right?!" And there comes a time when one must take a stand that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular. But one must take it because it is right. And that is where I find myself today.”

Martin Luther King Jr.
Speech to American Psychological Association
September 1, 1967

~Michael P. Schaal
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