



## **The Tree of Life Shelters Us All**

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The massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh hurt deep in the hearts of my family, because our daily lives are so filled with good friends in the Jewish American community where we live.

My wife, Senem, daughter Lara, and son Arda, and I represent a second- generation Turkish American family who is deeply dedicated to our homeland America and motherland Turkey. We are Muslims who have chosen a secular lifestyle. We have many Turkish friends like us, as well as Turkish Friends who lead pious lives. We stand in solidarity with diversity.

My children have friends of diverse heritages, among them Jewish boys and girls. My son, only 9, said that he wants to marry the girl down the block "because she has beautiful eyes and a good heart." What more can one want from life? That girl is Jewish. For five years, every summer, my daughter who is now 13 has gone to a Jewish girls camp. She robustly and beautifully sings the Hebrew prayers every morning and at Friday Shabbat, in-between camp swimming, softball, lacrosse, cooking, painting, pottery, jewelry making, drama, dancing and other activities. Over these precious years, she has grown up with and into a loving, accepting, and nurturing sisterhood which we hope will last a lifetime.

The friends of my children have become our children, and their parents have become our family. This is my village. As my daughter's friends reached their early teens, my family has joined in their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, a Jewish celebration of one's transition to woman and manhood. Each has included religious services at various synagogues in or region and a grand celebration with dinner, dancing and prizes. It's really the only time I have ever spent reading the Old Testament.

Sadly, we live in times when parents drop off their children at school not just with a kiss and hug, but with an earnest hope that an armed attacker bent on bloodshed will just stay home that day and seek help. Oblivious to our worries, our children file into school past the security guards, often retired police officers. After they disappear into the school building, I drive away praying, "May God Bless and Protect my family, my children, their friends and families, our teachers and law enforcement officers, and our country."

Ethnic and religious supremacists target people of diverse heritages. The racist killer at the Tree of Life Synagogue targeted the congregation because he hated Jews. With the same hatred, he also targeted the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society for helping immigrants to the United States. His terrorism was apparently motivated by what he wanted for America. Of course his beliefs and acts spit on the notion that we are "one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." <http://www.ushistory.org/documents/pledge.htm>

That's why when the Tree of Life Synagogue was attacked, my mind saw the faces, laughter, and joy of the children, their parents, their grandparents, and family friends at each of the Bar and Bat Mitzvahs my family celebrated over the years. I saw good people doing the best they can, and sharing their joy. I imagined the pain of losing them to violence and hatred, and it was as unbearable, it was devastating.

Our leaders must immediately and affirmatively set the tone to support solidarity in diversity.

We are all the Tree of Life. As some may cut the branches, other branches will grow, so long as the roots of humanity are wide and deep in our hearts.