

Behold

(November 3, 2018)

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Step into our temple. Hear our voices rise  
in the Hebrew hymn for the Sabbath service—  
*Hine ma tov*—Behold how good  
*Umah Na-im*—and how pleasing  
*Shevet achim gam yachad*—if brothers and sisters  
could sit together in peace.

This is what was fractured by the *ack-ack-ack*  
of gunfire in Pittsburgh's Tree of Life temple,  
this done to a people who were forced to strip, and kneel  
to be shot down into a ravine in Babi Yar,  
who were murdered in pogroms,  
burnt in ovens, this to a people forced to wander,  
this to a people who were targeted for being  
open-armed to strangers in a strange land.

Imagine a sixteen-year-old boy disguised as a carpenter,  
not wearing the star on his arm as he biked  
through Berlin on Kristallnacht to gather information  
for the Dutch underground. Imagine him  
witnessing the *polizei*, the police, turning their backs  
or joining in while the Nazi paramilitary and citizens  
torched synagogues, smashed  
Jewish businesses, and murdered Jews.

Imagine this boy, Bernard, who survived  
Auschwitz, and became my uncle through marriage,  
learning that non-Jewish police were shot rushing  
into The Tree of Life to save Jews.

Imagine Bernard sitting next to me  
in The Gates of Heaven Synagogue this Sabbath,  
his surprise that among our mourners  
are Muslims, Christians, Buddhists.

Imagine his awe at seeing people of color,  
not Sephardim or Ethiopian Jews, but community  
members opening their arms to us.

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