



January 11, 2024

Dear members of the Kerem Shalom Community,

I am writing to let you know that we will soon be hanging this new banner at our entrance on Elm Street and to let you know about how and why Kerem Shalom's Board of Directors chose these words and this design.

The October 7<sup>th</sup> Hamas attack and the cascade of anguishing events, both domestically and in the region, that followed, inspired the KS Board to conduct a deep dive on what the temple should or could communicate to the public outside our building. The signage question was a key agenda item in late October when Kerem Shalom's Board of Directors met for the first time since October 7. At that meeting, Board members and professional staff considered three interrelated questions: (1) should we have any banner at all, (2) if so, what the banner might display, and (3) whether any new sign should add to or replace the existing T'ruah (Black Lives Matter) sign?

The Board did not come to any decision at that meeting; instead, it was agreed that the Executive Committee would come back to the Board with a specific proposal. However, the Board conversation generated a number of themes that were picked up in the more detailed, subsequent discussions by the Executive Committee and Rabbi Darby. For example, by the end of the meeting, there was broad agreement that, in light of the Hamas attack in Israel and the contemporaneous rise in antisemitic attacks in the US and around the globe, we should try to replace the sign on Elm Street with a banner that communicated our support for Israel (but not necessarily the current Israeli government or policies), makes a statement against both antisemitism and other forms of hate and intolerance; and highlights the fact that Kerem Shalom is and will continue to be a Jewish institution serving Concord and surrounding communities.

Based on the Board discussion, the Executive Committee met several times to discuss the wording and design of a new banner. Rabbi Darby participated in several of those meetings and shared his very insightful thoughts on the subject of a new sign. We also took into account some unsolicited input that had been provided by several congregants to both staff and Board members.

The Executive Committee members initially came to the table with different opinions about what to communicate through a new sign, and how to present the message. I think it's fair to say that those different opinions together largely represented the views of our entire congregation. We were guided by the overarching principle that the sign could not express the beliefs of any one individual or group, but rather needed to represent a collective, unified voice. We also agreed that a new banner had to be concise and easy to understand, especially because it will face a busy street with generally fast-moving traffic.

While the Executive Committee discussed using the new sign to explicitly express support for the people of Israel, we determined that it would be next to impossible to do so without appearing, however unintentionally, to express support for the current Israeli government or the Israeli position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Given the wide range of opinions in the KS community on the domestic Israeli political scene, the Israel/Palestinian issue, and the rapid change in the situation for Gazan civilians, we concluded that such a sign risked alienating a substantial portion of our congregation and therefore would divide rather than unite our community. We decided that prominently including a Jewish star similar to the one on the Israeli flag would convey our support for the Israeli people.

In addition, we all agreed, while a new banner should make a statement about antisemitism, it should do so in a way that expressed our community's stand against other forms of hate and intolerance; in other words, the new sign should build on, and universalize, the statement against racial hatred expressed in our current T'ruah sign, rather than replacing one stand against hateful conduct with another. As a result, we agreed the sign should simply say, "We stand against hate." (In this

context the Jewish star also emphasizes our concern with antisemitism.) Finally, we agreed the banner should include Kerem Shalom's distinctive logo, which would both highlight our long-time presence in Concord and underscore our desire for peace.

With these ideas in mind, the board turned to longtime KS member Robert Levers, an experienced and talented graphic designer who created Kerem Shalom's current logo. Robert produced several designs that combined the banner's three key elements – the KS logo, the Jewish star, and the words “we stand against hate.” The Executive Committee and Rabbi Darby quickly agreed on one design, which the Board unanimously and enthusiastically approved. The Board also expressed its deep gratitude to Robert for taking on this challenging task.

I hope that this explanation provides some context around our decision to hang this banner at our entrance. As you consider the Board process described above, and take in the sign once it is installed, it is also my hope that you will welcome its presence and the multiple messages it is meant to deliver on behalf of the Kerem Shalom community.

As always, feel to reach out to me or other Board members if you'd like to discuss any of this in more detail.

Best

Mark Stein, President