

Rabbi Efram Goldberg
Boca Raton Synagogue
7900 Montoya Circle
Boca Raton, FL 33433

February 15, 2017

Dear Rabbi Efram Goldberg,

It is with a profound sadness that I write to you today to inform you that I have decided not to present to your community this coming Sunday.

Over the past month, at an ever increasing rate, I have been receiving phone calls, emails, social media messages, and YouTube video messages warning me not to come. To summarize, I have been accused of being an "anti-Semitic idol worshipping missionary bozo."

This harassment at first felt like a simple disagreement between people who love God. As this hate campaign continued it has grown in quantity, disrespect, and intensity: disagreements became harassment, harassment became bullying, bullying turned into threats lightly veiled as warnings, and finally, the warnings became all out threats. But woven into every message I have received is fear not courage, and hate not love. What we do out of fear should always be questioned and discerned. What we do without love always has a lesson to teach us.

At first, my concern was for your safety due the hateful words that were directed towards you, but it is now very clear that there is a dark cloud over my own safety. As a result, I no longer feel that it is safe to appear and speak at the Boca Raton Synagogue this weekend.

These critics have lied, taken extreme positions, refused to be distracted by the facts, and promoted the defamation of one good man, and another who is striving to be a good man. You are the former, Rabbi.

One of the particular criticisms that has been often repeated over the past month is my use of the phrase "the-best-version-of-yourself." This struck me as strange. Does anyone who believes in God think that God created him/her to be less than all he created us to be? This reminds of a parable that I have often used in my speeches. I do not know if it is true, but it holds truth.

Before his death, Rabbi Zusya said, In the coming world, if I get to meet God, he will not say to me, "Zusya, why were you not more like Moses?" God will ask me, "Zusya, why were you not more like Zusya?"

Just as we as parents dream for our children to embrace their full potential, God dreams of each and every single one of us becoming perfectly who he created us to be: the-very-best-version-of-ourselves. We have this same dream for our children, because it is the Divine parental dream that God places deep in the soul of every parent, friend, and lover.

It is perplexing that such criticisms were leveled at you and me, given that my presentation was to be in the area of professional development. For more than two decades I have been speaking to people of all faiths and people with no faith. I have spoken to groups of politicians, school children and college students, and the Fortune 500 business community has welcomed my presentations with open arms. In every instance, I have been respectful of the audience and tried to exercise the emotional intelligence necessary to avoid alienating or offending anyone.

But the critics in this situation seem to have focus exclusively on my spiritual convictions, and have attacked me in a way that I would never dream of attacking someone else.

We have so much in common and it pains me that I would be falsely accused of seeking to dissuade the people you lead from the beauties of Judaism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

As I have prayed and reflected upon this situation, my mind has returned over and over again to wonder: What would the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of Moses, the God of Adam and Eve, Noah and Joseph, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, and Joshua say about all this?

What would the God of hope, the God of Passover protection, the God who parted the Red Sea to lead us out of slavery, into the dessert, and finally into the promised land think about all this?

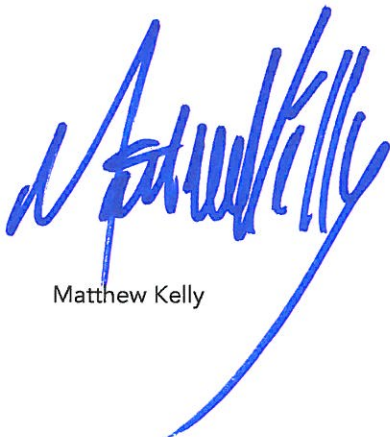
How would the God who calls us to all goodness and deserves the complete and unfailing love we are incapable of giving him because of our laziness, selfishness, and lust for this world, counsel us all in this situation? I wonder.

Let me leave you with this thought:

I am no prophet, but let me assure you that in the coming years, both Jews and Christians will find themselves staring at a very bleak future. This bleak future will come in the form of a common enemy. The sooner we can learn to respect each other and work with each other for our mutual advantage, the better chance we have of defeating this common enemy.

Throughout this past month I have been praying and fasting for you Rabbi, and your community. I will continue to do so, hoping always that God will use these events to renew you in your ancient and beautiful faith.

May the one true God bless you and your community with wisdom that grows every day,



Matthew Kelly