

***Created in the Image of God: Continuing to fight against U.S.-sponsored torture***

***Sermon Talking Points for Human Rights Shabbat***

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This Shabbat, we are celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was ratified 61 years ago. The UDHR affirmed on an international level what Judaism had long maintained: that every human being was created *b'tzelem elohim*, in the image of God. *K'vod Habriot*, human dignity, needed to guide our interactions with other people, because to deny that divine spark in the other is in essence to shame or deny God. The prevention of torture and the right to due process are enshrined both in the UDHR and in Jewish tradition.

From the UDHR:

Article 5.

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment:

Article 8.

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

For Jewish resources, see:

Mishnah Sandedrin 4:5

Deuteronomy 16:18-20.

Genesis Rabbah 24

A year ago, it seemed that we had turned a corner on U.S.-sponsored torture. On January 22, President Obama signed a historic series of Executive Orders ending the practices of torture and extraordinary rendition, ordering the closing of Guantanamo, and establishing a review of existing military and intelligence agency interrogation practices. In practice, however, much has not changed. The Obama administration has asserted its right to hold prisoners in indefinite detention in Afghanistan and to detain without trial those suspected of being terrorists. It has continued the Bush-era argument that the Executive Branch can limit lawsuits in the name of national security, and resisted the release of photographs showing the abuse of detainees in Afghanistan and Iraq by American soldiers. Moreover, the Attorney General's decision this spring to investigate the use of torture by the Bush Administration is so limited in scope—ignoring those who authorized torture at the highest levels—as to be virtually meaningless. Those who authorized the breaking of American and international law—who deemed the Geneva Conventions “quaint” must be held accountable.

It is not just that the Obama Administration has failed to act—it is that it has actively pursued continuing these dangerous policies.

The fight to ensure that the United States restores the standing of the Constitution is not over. We must fight for American values and to restore American moral standing around the world. This would be true change. This Human Rights Shabbat, pledge to continue this important fight.

**Some good resources on the current situation:**

[Entangled Giant](#), Gary Wills. Wills looks at the difficulty faced by any Administration in dismantling aspects of the industrial-military complex and uses that lens to explain why the Obama Administration has not differed significantly from its predecessor on issues of national security and civil liberties.

[Prosecuting Terrorism in U.S. Federal Courts](#). Two excellent reports from Human Rights First about the importance of using the existing American justice system to prosecute terrorists.

[Guantanamo Detainees Trapped by Inaction](#). An excellent report from the Center for Constitutional Rights on detainees who have been cleared for release from Guantanamo and yet languish in detention.

Two information resources from the American Civil Liberties Union: on [Torture](#) and on [Detention](#).

[The Cover-Up Continues](#). A scathing editorial from the New York Times condemns the Obama Administration for not just failing to overturn Bush-era policies on national security and civil liberties, but for actively trying to continue them. Salon's Glenn Greenwald analyzes the editorial [here](#).

[A National Disgrace](#). This editorial from the New York Times compares the recent Italian court decision to convict American officials accused of kidnapping a terror suspect who was tortured in Egypt vs. the recent American court decision that a Canadian who was wrongly detained in New York and sent to Syria to be tortured has no right to sue in American civil courts.

New York Times topic page on [torture](#).

**From the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT):**

[Call for a Commission of Inquiry](#) to investigate American use of torture.

Watch the video ["Ending Torture Forever."](#) A copy of the Jewish discussion guide is included with the Human Rights Shabbat material.