

My friends, I was listening to one of my favorite radio shows via podcast, and I was listening to the show several days after it had been broadcast. To my surprise and delight, one of the segments was devoted to the documentary *100 Voices: A Journey Home*. I had seen the movie only a day or so before hearing the show. I found myself moved literally to tears by the movie. It's the story of 100 members of the Cantor's Assembly who travel to Poland to tell the history of Jewish culture in Poland. It highlights the current resurgence of Jewish culture through the personal reflections and musical selections of a group of cantors and the famous composer Charles Fox. I saw the names of a couple of friends in the list of 100 participating cantors, but it was especially exciting to see Cantor Rebecca Carmi, who is the sister of Cynthia Weiner. Cantor Carmi was featured extensively during the movie. I meant what I said. I was literally moved to tears. The radio host reported having the same experience.

These was a beautiful, powerful scene of the *hazzanim* holding services at Auschwitz. It was a deeply moving moment. But it was interesting—experiencing the beauty of Jewish prayer at Auschwitz called to mind an image of nuns at prayer at Auschwitz.

Do you remember the Carmelite nuns building a convent at Auschwitz in 1984? A major part of the Jewish world objected strongly to the presence of the nuns. What they had intended as a holy act to come to that place and pray offended many American and other Jews. Much of the negative feeling came from the belief that the Catholic Church could have done much more to save the Jews of Europe. The reality is not clear. I have read *Hitler's Pope*, and *The Myth of Hitler's Pope*, written by a rabbi I respect named David Dallen. But no matter the root cause, there was a Jewish outcry over the presence of the Carmelite nuns at Auschwitz.

Do you remember what happened? The nuns had a perfect right to be where they were. Great numbers of non-Jews, including Catholics, died at Auschwitz in addition to the Jewish victims. But a very great man, Pope John Paul II, asked the nuns to vacate the convent, simply because he wanted to be sensitive to the reaction of those who felt the convent was inappropriate.

As I thought about that story, I realized that at this moment, there is an almost unparalleled opportunity to begin to bring real change to the world, to bring what might be the most necessary change for the world to reality. I am not saying it will happen—I don't think it will. But just fantasize with me for a few moments. First, consciously put aside your feelings about the Cordoba House, the proposed Islamic center near Ground Zero. It does not matter if you are pro or con with regard to this fantasy.

Imagine Imam Rauf decided to follow in the footsteps of Pope John Paul II.

Imagine if Imam Rauf were to say, “My dear fellow Americans, here is my response to those who feel that the Cordoba House should not be built on the Burlington Coat Factory site. While I may not agree, I must be sensitive to the fact that only two blocks from here, thousands of our fellow Americans were incinerated in the name of my religion. They distort and bastardize our religion but they did commit this terrible act in the name of Islam. Therefore, as a show of solidarity with my fellow Americans, I will accept Mr. Trump’s offer to buy the property at a 25% profit for us, and we will find another location.”

And then imagine he went on like this:

“To my dear Muslim brothers and sisters around the world, do not mistake my action as evidence that Islam is under attack in America. On the contrary, we choose to make this gesture precisely because America is so open and welcoming to us. In America, Muslims live next door to Jews and Christians with virtually no problems. I beg you not to react with violence, but rather accept that we Muslim Americans deplore the acts of September 11, 2001. We do care about the feelings of our fellow Americans, and when you attack the United States, you attack us as well.”

And finally, imagine if he concluded as follows: “And now, I call on all my fellow Muslims who want to live in peace with our neighbors to repudiate and reject those who perpetrate violence in the name of our religion. We side not with the lovers of death, but with those who choose life.”

Imagine that.

That could change the world. Not overnight. But it would be the single biggest step we have taken in a long time. Imam Rauf would go down in history. There is a very real possibility that he could do so in the same way as Anwar Sadat. I have to acknowledge that.

But that is what it will take to bring peace to this world. There will have to emerge from the Islamic world a Pope John Paul II. Is that man Imam Rauf? You should only know how much I hope so.