This week's parasha, Acharei Mot, deals with the rituals of the High Priest on Yom Kippur. Levi will speak about a particularly curious part of the ritual in his drasha tomorrow. Tonight, I want to discuss a line that appears, in reference to the concept of atonement, in Leviticus Chapter 16:30: "For on this day, atonement shall be made for you; you shall be purified from all of your sins; before God you shall be pure."

Commentators wonder why the verse seems so redundant. In Mishnah Yoma, at the end of Chapter 8, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria points out that if you punctuate it differently, it reads: "For on this day, atonement shall be made for you: You shall be purified from all your sins before God. (period) You shall purify yourselves." He uses this as a proof-text to affirm a famous principle: For sins against God, Yom Kippur atones, but for the harm one person does another, Yom Kippur cannot atone until the perpetrator appeases the person they wronged and receives forgiveness from them. Rereading our verse: You will be cleansed from your sins before God - and from your other crimes, you will have to go to the effort of purifying yourselves.

This particular line struck me as I thought about two events from this week.

The first is Yom haShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, which was just yesterday. I was reading Simon Weisenthal's memoir and philosophical treatise, *The Sunflower.* How many of you are familiar with it? For those who aren't, the story hinges on one very troubling encounter that Simon had, while he was concentration camp inmate, with a dying Nazi SS officer. The SS officer requested that a Jew be brought to him, and Simon happened to be the closest one. The SS officer confessed to Simon a particular instance of murdering a Jewish family, which was weighing on his heart as he neared death, and asked for Simon's forgiveness as a Jew. Simon sat with the man, held his hand - but did not offer words of forgiveness, and left in silence, returning to the camp, where he expected to die, himself, any day. But Simon survived. He asks his readers, and dozens of philosophers to respond to the question: Did he do the right thing?

That is an interesting question, though the aforementioned mishnah about Yom Kippur would imply that he didn't have right to forgive the murder of others, particularly those he never knew. But if we are going to ask who can forgive, the other side of that question is, "Who is guilty of the crime?"

How far does the condemnation spread? That one SS officer, dying at age 21, was, perhaps, the finger that pulled the trigger. But the murder of six million Jews was the product of vastly more effort. That SS officer accomplished neither the murder nor his own descent into inhumanity by himself. Even the Nazis as a whole group didn't accomplish it by themselves.

It took the complicity of the German people and, in some sense the whole world.

In a novel I love, *The Dream of Scipio*, a writer living in Nazi-occupied France, after learning that his Jewish fiancee has been rounded up and taken away, probably to her death, muses: "How do you annihilate so many people? You need contributions from many quarters. Scientists to prove the Jews are inferior; theologians to provide the moral tone. Industrialists to build the trains and the camps. Technicians to design the guns. Administrators to solve the vast problems of identifying and moving so many people. Writers and artists to make sure no one notices or cares. . . "

And he notes that it takes a whole world of silence and complicity:

"When all this is over, people will try to blame the Germans alone, and the Germans will try to blame the Nazis alone, and the Nazis will try to blame Hitler alone. . . But it's not true…"

Hitler was doing exactly what he had told the world he would since he came to power in the early 1930s. And while the light of each righteous Gentile, each resistor, shines like a beam breaking through stormy clouds, the vast majority were indifferent or even upset but chose not to sacrifice their comfort for the sake of saving lives.

A minority of people can create a genocide when the majority are willing to do nothing more than allow it. That is how the Holocaust happened. So what are we to learn from this?

I am hesitant to say we should learn anything, that we should try to make any meaning, or redemption from the Shoah. But we don't have luxury of *not* learning from one of the greatest collective crimes that has ever occurred.

I reflect on this in light of the other event that was troubling me all week, a political rally that is taking place as I speak, right here in Eugene.

I am not here to tell you how to vote, but it is important to entertain some hypotheticals. If a candidate who has threatened to shut down the free press if elected; who has overtly incited his supporters to violence against protesters; and who has campaigned on a platform that includes registering all Muslims and deporting eleven million undocumented immigrants - if that candidate comes to power, will he do those things? I don't know. I do know that the prospect of him *trying* is no more ridiculous than the prospect of Hitler coming to power in Germany in 1932.

If this candidate becomes president, I suspect that whether or not those things are accomplished will depend on whether the vast majority of Americans allow it.

And we American Jews have a particular opportunity here. Because it is imminently clear that this time, we are not the scapegoat - at least not the first one. Levi will talk more tomorrow about what exactly a scapegoat is. But even if "they" (and I use a hazy, amorphous "they" on purpose) come for the Jews, they will not come for us first. The agenda is already clear - the Muslims, the Mexicans and other Latinos will be the targets before we will. Which means we will have the opportunity to be either collaborators, silently complicit, or to be righteous. Which will we choose?

Of course, we are not a homogenous mass, we Jews. Each of us individually, I suspect, will have the opportunity to either be safe and complicit - at least for a while - or to take the more righteous, and perhaps more dangerous, path of dissent and resistance.

Of course, we do not know what the outcome of November's election will be. But I am speaking today in light of the rally, in light of Yom Hashoah, and in light of the limits of forgiveness that Parashat Acharei Mot reveals, because we might very well need to practice speaking out and resisting, to prepare for more dangerous times.

I hope it will never come to this, but if it does, I hope that this community will be a shining beam of light.