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In the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, Americans, for the most part, drew together with a sense of common purpose. We realized that the aim of the terrorists who perpetrated this evil was to use the ultimate weapon—fear—to divide, and thereby weaken, our nation, and we denied them that victory. Accounts of this brutal attack duly noted that Jews and Muslims, Christians and Buddhists, and Hindus and non-believers were all among the victims, and people of all faiths heroically guided and assisted one another amidst the rubble. To his great credit, President Bush adamantly refused to cast aspersions on America's Islamic community. He asserted unequivocally, "The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. Islam is a religion of peace." In this spirit, all across our nation, we gathered to listen and learn from one another. It was during this season of both grief and unity that the two of us writing this article first met. Then, as now, we did not agree on all of the great issues of the day. But we recognized one another as neighbors and began to forge a friendship that has continued to grow and deepen over the passing years.

Alas, nearly a decade later, an ill wind of anger and intolerance threatens to unravel America's social fabric and thereby deliver the terrorists a belated victory. We are both deeply troubled by those who would diminish our nation's precious legacy of religious liberty by blocking the construction of an Islamic Center and mosque two blocks north of Ground Zero. Like Rabbi David Ellenson, writing in the Washington Post, we believe that while visceral feelings around this tragically sacred site are understandable, "to refuse to allow this project to go forward would suggest that all Muslims are terrorists or covert supporters of terrorism, and that an Islamic House of God cannot preach and practice divinely inspired values of justice, freedom and human dignity for all races and religions. This is patently un-American and should not be tolerated." We are distressed by cynical and opportunistic politicians and media outlets that are using this controversy to fan the flames of xenophobia and bigotry. It is imperative that we do not allow their demagogic statements to go unchallenged, or to poison our own communities.

Our founders came to the new world in search of religious liberty, and established this nation on a foundation of hope. In their wisdom, they enshrined freedom of religion in the Bill of Rights that defines the mission of America. Many of our people—Jews and Muslims—came to these shores because of that promise of religious liberty, and many have died to defend it. We therefore feel called to speak out when that defining national virtue is threatened. Once we start to circumscribe one group's free religious expression on the basis of "not in my backyard," we risk losing that freedom everywhere.

At the root of our current national unrest lies a great deal of fear and insecurity. We live, in many ways, in troubled times. But let us take note: rage and bitterness cannot assuage our fears by scapegoating an entire group that is part and parcel of our national fabric. The only way to move past them is to acknowledge and address them, honestly and openly, and in so doing, cultivate fear's opposite: courage and faith. We desperately

need real faith, not the narrow-minded triumphalism that would deny to other religious communities the rights and privileges we claim for our own, but the generous spirit at the heart of every great religious community which teaches that we are all equally children of the Merciful One.

And so, standing together as Muslim and Jew, we say plainly and unambiguously: build the mosque. And build synagogues and churches and ashrams and temples and meditation halls and humanist gathering places. Build them all, houses of worship of every faith and creed. And then recognize that it is only after they are built that the real work begins—the sacred labor of inviting one another into our respective homes and sharing our traditions. As we build sanctuaries, let us also build bridges, listening to and learning from one another.

The great Sufi poet Rumi wrote: “Why do you stay in prison when the door is so wide open? Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking.” May the citizens of Boise and beyond lead by example, moving from fear to faith, and from angry divisiveness to the unity that we call shalom and salaam and peace.