

7/9/22 Kol Nidre - Being the Change

We thought after Sandy Hook things would change. We thought after the Tree of Life Synagogue things would change. We thought after Parkland, Florida things would change. After July 4th in Highland Park, how much are guns worth in our society? How much is one bullet worth? Our good guys with guns did everything right except check the rooftops. They did everything right and still couldn't stop a bad guy with guns.

In Uvalde, Texas the good guys with guns couldn't stop one bad guy with a gun. We have video of them standing around wondering how many bullets the bad guy had. All of them stood around thinking someone else was in charge of giving orders to save lives. That 18 year old put the fear of God into them and none of them wanted to risk their lives while a mother of two got out of handcuffs, ran into that school and risked her life to remove her children from that building.

In Buffalo, NY the bad guy had body armor and a defensive helmet that made it nearly impossible to stop him. The good guy with a gun, Aaron Salter Jr., gave his life trying to do his job. His hand gun was no match against an assault rifle.

Why do citizens need to own assault rifles? If it is for sport, then lock them up at the range or rent them there. Now, of course, at the same time a Highland Park lawsuit is moving against Smith and Wesson, the gun shops who shipped the guns to an address where those guns were illegal, and against the parents of the shooter, we have a Highland Park citizen suing Highland Park local government because she can't keep her assault rifles in her home here.

If it is in fear of the apocalypse or pending revolution, what makes any of us think an assault rifle will be enough to save us and why live here if there really is a chance for apocalypse or revolution?

If this country actually sinks into this pending civil war our divisions are

pointing to, it means we've failed as a society. All of us here have worked for over 80 years to build a country with room and protections for all citizens of incredible diversity and differences, and yet how many of us feel safe?

Highland Park has seen the most death, murder and violence since July 4th in over 20 years. What is happening to us, to our community, to our neighbors, that people are losing their lives because someone else's rights or beliefs are more important than our safety and the safety of our beautiful town?

We live during one of the safest eras throughout history. And yet as Jews our fears are always stoked because a segment of society refuses to put away their hatred of us. But this is bigger than all of us. We are witnessing pain and hatred being weaponized into action against innocent civilians time and time again. Our society has altered to not if this will ever happen in my city, but when it will happen in my city, and devastatingly Highland Park found ourselves experiencing our tragic turn with a mass shooting this July fourth.

July 8th I asked our police officer who runs security at Temple Beth El his opinion on assault rifles. He could only say that the horse was already out of the barn and he was more concerned with home printed ghost guns. I worry about his safety and the safety of law enforcement officers who must contend with the guns out there. Even they don't feel we can do enough to stop the individuals intent on causing a massacre with assault rifles.

For a time in our society people didn't really cause such tragedies until they did. From the Texas Bell Tower to the San Ysidro McDonald's massacre to Columbine, slowly events like July 4th became part of our culture. Back then they seemed like rarities. Societal anomalies. Now they happen every week if not every day.

When it happens elsewhere we always think it can't happen here, or they

live in a dangerous area. But Buffalo, Uvalde and Highland Park are not dangerous areas. They are warm and caring communities where people were just going about their days looking forward to going home at the end of the day.

The answers seem simple to me, to many of us. Ban assault rifles as a start. Non-military, non-law enforcement civilians have no use for a military assault rifle. Limit bullets or raise their prices to an exorbitant amount where most people can't afford a thousand of them. Chris Rock joked 20 years ago that a bullet should cost \$10,000 each to make people think about the cost of their anger and the cost of their desire to shoot someone.

I don't see anything like this happening. We no longer control our politicians. They work for corporations. A large portion of society doesn't want any such bans. Tragedies like ours just make them believe everyone should have a gun. But those of us who attended the parade, attended countless vigils and memorial services afterwards, those of us who witnessed everything discussed on the news know that even if everyone at the parade had a weapon, it wouldn't have prevented anything. The only thing that could have prevented this was a parent saying, "no, I won't sign this affidavit for you."

The price of the lives lost in these senseless tragedies is insurmountable. Uvalde seemed far away in Texas where it seemed inevitable that this would happen again and again. But in Highland Park? To have one of our own betray all of us and desecrate our safe space because all of his family ignored the signs or refused to seek the help for their son that was clearly needed. The signs all seem obvious to the rest of us, but way too late.

I wish I had answers that weren't extreme and divisive. I wish I didn't have to give another sermon like this. But this time many of us actually had to escape with our family and friends, lucky to survive such violence. This time we all had to surround our neighbors and close family friends comforting each other and comforting those whose loved ones didn't

survive. This is home for us. This hit home for all of us and we remain divided on where to go from here, and that is also a tragedy of these times.

In the Torah Abraham's cousin, Lot, offers his daughters up to an angry mob to quell their demands to ravage his guests (Genesis 19:8). He offers his own flesh and blood for violence, rape and certain death to protect strangers. Is our country as bad as Sodom as we continue to offer up our children and innocent civilians to quell the hunger of those who believe they can be denied no weapons according to the second amendment while failing to receive or seek the proper mental health care they so clearly need?

People stand on the principles of the Constitution like it's a holy document written by God, when it was only written by old, white, Christian men who didn't give the right to vote to women, people of color or men who didn't own land and slavery was legal. The Constitution is not the Torah.

Even with the Torah, the majority of us who sit here as reform Jews, don't keep kosher. We know that the Torah clearly states that we should not eat milk and meat. We know somewhere it says we should not eat animals that don't chew their cud and have a cloven hoof. It says we should only eat fish with scales, no crabs, shrimp, lobster or swordfish. But we eat what we want. We live to be judged by our deeds and our values, not our diets.

As modern Jews we certainly believe in the Sixth Commandment, Thou Shalt Not Kill. Christians claim to abide by the bible but they don't follow the dietary rules and have spent millenia desecrating the Sixth Commandment in "god's" name killing countless Jews and Muslims. In fact they only hold up rules they want to be angry and hateful about to parts of society they don't agree with.

It was my colleague, classmate and friend, Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, who was held hostage in the temple in Dallas earlier this year.. It was my friend, the assistant chief of police in Orange, Connecticut, who had to be there for his colleagues after they had to clean up the carnage in the school

in Sandy Hook. It was my classmate who had to officiate the funeral of one of her confirmation students after they were murdered in Parkland, Florida and of course my classmates and colleagues here in town had to officiate the funerals of their congregants and friends who were gunned down on July 4th.

It is sad that our Constitution is abused in such a way as to make our nation less safe for all citizens. But it took until 1865 for the Government to add the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery. But since the second amendment is so sacred to some of our citizens, why aren't all amendments so sacred? The Fifteenth Amendment, passed in 1869 and ratified in 1870 "SECTION 1 states that: The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. And SECTION 2 states: The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>

But we've never had a period in our history where every individual could access their legal right to vote and we still find ourselves fighting for every citizen of the United States to have proper access to vote and elect the officials of their choice. This is 2022, not 1870.

The second amendment is about a well regulated Militia. The majority of legal arms bearing citizens are not part of any well regulated militia. The majority of individuals who cause these tragedies weekly aren't part of any well regulated militia and cannot even regulate their own mental health.

I have no answers. I feel powerless to enact the change that to me seems like common sense. I have no power to protect all of you and all of my family and friends. I have one single vote and one voice. It is a loud voice, but it never seems to be enough, and my wife often chastises me for yelling at the television. She says they can't hear me. I disagree.

Those of us who want a safer nation and a safer world must raise our voices as one. We must fight those who think protecting themselves will protect all of us. We must strengthen the protections in our system to insure the safety of our cities and our citizens. We must be a unified voice in order to create the change we wish to see in the world.

The majority of us will grieve over July 4th for a lifetime, doing our best to heal from the experience, the aftermath and our personal losses. No city who suffers like this sits silently afterwards doing nothing to create positive change. We just need to draw in all the cities who have not had their turn yet to save them from our experience, to convince them that they never want a turn burying their dead because someone didn't say no at the right time to the right person.

I pray for a world where violence is a distant memory. I pray for a world where weapons only live in pictures on museum walls showing how far we've come to create a world of safety and mutual respect. I pray for all the families still feeling the pain and fear from being forced to flee for their lives on July 4th and those in pain from being at home forced to witness from a distance all of our friends and families flee for their very lives. I pray for a better year, a better tomorrow, a healthier nation, healthier citizens who see the humanity in one another. I pray for the world we must all work together to create. May we see its light in our lifetime.

May the memories of Jacki Sundheim, Irina and Kevin McCarthy, Katherine Goldstein, Nicholas Toledo, Steve Straus and Eduardo Uvaldo always push us to fight for the right to live safe and violence free lives.

Cayn yehi ratzon - May this Be God's Will

L'Shanah Tovah u'metukah - wishing you all a light fast

ANTHEM - [Andy Grammar - Don't Give Up On Me](#)