

\*\*Note: This service began with a prologue. I told the congregation about how I had just spent the past week with my family in Pittsburgh. Whereas I had not lost any relatives in the shooting at Tree of Life, in the sheteyl of a Jewish community that is Pittsburgh, we all knew someone who knew someone .. I explained my shirt (“Stronger Than Hate” coupled with an altered Pittsburgh Steeler symbol with a gold Jewish star) and how I acquired it at a Peaceful and Mournful March. We began our service with our choir, Chaverim v’Shirim, singing the song I sang on the march as elected officials and various faith leaders lit eleven yartzeit candles while I read the names of the eleven departed.

## #ShowUpForShabbat November 2, 2018

Did you know that Mr. Rogers Neighborhood was in fact the picturesque neighborhood of Squirrel Hill Pittsburgh? Did you know that Fred Rogers was a Presbyterian Minister who created his loving Land of Make Believe just doors down from Congregation Rodef Shalom, the synagogue to host the very first of the funerals for the eleven slaughtered souls of Tree of Life Synagogue on Tuesday? Did you also know that I attended that ceremony to honor and remember David and Cecil Rosenthal at that exquisite and mammoth synagogue with some 1,200 other mourners? And, did you know that after the entire city has been mourning for the past

week, the final funeral was this morning, and the banner atop today's cover of the Pittsburgh Post Gazette was printed in bold Hebrew text stating: Yitgadal v'yitchadash sh'mei rabbah? My Uncle Sylvan sent us a picture of this historic front page and blood still stains the bimah where he became a Bar Mitzvah at Tree of Life.

Did you know that in an effort to let the city grieve as a united community, a significant number of progressive rabbis wrote an open letter to our President telling him that until he denounces White Supremacy and Hate Speech that he was not welcome in Pittsburgh? AND, he did not. And, he came anyway. The Mayor asked him not to come now fearing that he did not have enough resources to protect him properly. Indeed Police were out in great force for the funerals, rallies, and marches. Regardless of the request and honest warning, again, he came anyway.

Only two hours after the Rosenthal brothers funeral, I participated in a peaceful march of mourning and remembrance with thousands of people who sang Psalms, observed a modified ritual of kriah (instead of ribbons, we ribbed black squares of paper), and carried signs with messages of love, peace, and a call for the denouncement of hate speech. Sadly, too many fellow Americans find nothing wrong with such rhetoric. Even more

troubling, it would seem that our President doesn't either. So when his motorcade drove by our blocks, and blocks, and blocks of marchers, we all turned our backs away. No one yelled, no one threw anything; we just coalesced to show our disappointment and distrust.

Why couldn't he wait? The sanctuary is still a crime scene. It was lovely that he, The First Lady, Ivanka, and Jared brought stones and flowers from the White House grounds. That was a powerful and respectful combination of traditions, but the timing was disrespectful. To mix metaphors: the optics were tone-deaf.

It wasn't the time for a photo-op.

It was the time to bury our dead.

And it wasn't the time to flippantly pontificate how the slaughter would have been averted if someone had a gun in the sanctuary.

And so we mourn for an America that is under attack. Our modern weapons of mass destruction are not hidden in some foreign land, but are here -- even legally.                   NO MORE!

The time has been over for way too long --- from the moment of the massacres at Sandy Hook to Los Vegas to Parkland and beyond we all must say that enough is enough. To our politicians who say, "our thoughts and

prayers are with the victims and their families,” we must show them that we mean: NO MORE! The most powerful and pressing way to demonstrate what we mean is to vote! Vote for officials who have the courage to take a stand and acknowledge that no single revolver handgun can cause the carnage we have seen throughout our land, and neither can it guarantee protection against military grade weaponry. Not all guns are created equally.

Our morning liturgy includes a prayer blessing God who has given us the ability to distinguish day from night. This *b'racha* reminds us that we have a God given gift to know the difference between dissimilar circumstances and objects. Thank God we all can distinguish the difference between a single firearm manufactured for self defense, as guaranteed by the Second Amendment, AND an arsenal of automatic assault weapons. May we all employ the God given ability to distinguish between candidates who will and will not do that.

We need to demand that our leaders acknowledge the difference so that we can tell our children and grandchildren that we did all that we could do to prevent more mass shootings and lock downs and the need to receive active-shooter training. Chief Officer Coleman of Florida called me this

week to tell me that we would receive that training by the Sheriff's office soon. I know that this is good news, but my *kishkes* tell me that the only instruction that ought to be taking place here should be about Hebrew, Judaism, Israel, etc., but sadly we no longer live in such a world.

The ADL tells us that the world in which we now live is one where incidents of anti-Semitism have raised by almost 60% in the past two years.

It is no accident that such events come at the same time of increased hate speech and rancor. Charlottesville has become emblematic of both the acrimony and acceptance that has become the current culture of America.

NO MORE! I wonder what would have been if the spiritual leaders of that city wrote an open letter to The Leader of the Free World to demand that in no way could neo-Nazis who chanted, "Jews will not replace us," be called 'good people.' We can no longer stand idly by and be indifferent to such hate speech and the refusal to denounce it.

Nobel Laureate, Eli Wiesel, taught that etymologically, indifference means "no difference." It is, "a strange and unnatural state in which the lines blur between light and darkness . . . cruelty and compassion, good and evil."

Ironically, as we were reminded earlier, God gave us the ability to do just that. Wiesel asserted that indifference helps the oppressor against the

oppressed rather than taking moral action. The time for such action is now.

In last week's ADL workshop, we told our middle schoolers about the need to say something when they experience or witness anti-Semitism or hateful language or iconography. Friends, we all must do the same.

In Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood everyone was special and encouraged to treat their neighbors with dignity and respect. May we all take that lesson once broadcast from Squirrel Hill and demand that be the gold standard not just in The Land of Make Believe, but in America, the Land of The Free.

The land where our founding fathers envisioned a home of opportunity, religious freedom, and peace. *Oseh Shalom*, May the One who causes peace to rain down from the heavens, descend peace upon us, all Israel, and all the inhabitants of the earth. And let us say, Amen.

*Choir sings Oseh Shalom*