

Vigil in Solidarity with Tree of Life Congregation &
the Jewish Community of Pittsburgh
Congregation Har Shalom, Potomac, MD
Rabbi Adam Raskin & Hazzan Henrique Ozur Bass
October 28, 2018; 19 Heshvan 5779

We stand in grief
with the devastated families of Pittsburgh
We weep
over the incomprehensible loss of life.
We cry out
with shock, confusion, and pain.
We mourn together
over this senseless act of violence and destruction.

Be with us, God, in this time of sorrow and fear.
Help us, God, to offer comfort
to those whose hearts are shattered.
Rekindle hope and trust and courage within us and them.
Help us, God, to sustain our belief in the promise
that even in the darkest times -
even when we feel the most discouraged -
there is reason to trust
that love is never extinguished
that light and spirit will prevail.
Help us, God, to rededicate ourselves
to building a world that is safer for our children.
Help us, God, to rededicate ourselves
to building a world that is safer for all people.
During these difficult days and nights, God,
bring comfort and peace and hope and light
to broken hearts and a broken world.
(Adapted from Rabbi Edythe Meucher's prayer, After National or Communal Tragedies)

אֲשָׂא עֵינַי אֶל-הַהָרִים מֵאֵין יָבֹא עֲזָרִי:
עֲזָרִי מֵעַם יְיָ עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:

*Esa Einai El He'Harim Mei'ayin Yavo Ezri, Ezri me'im Adonai, Oseh
shamayim va'aretz.*

I lift up my eyes to the mountains; where does my help come from? My help comes from God,
Creator of the heavens and the earth. (Psalm 121:1)

Dispatch from Squirrel Hill: Dread in a peaceful place
David Shribman
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Oct 27, 2018

We knew it could happen here — any here, anywhere — when we learned that nine people were killed three years ago in the historic Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C. We knew it could happen here — any here, anywhere — when we learned that six were killed in the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City last year.

Now we know it can happen here, as anywhere, because it has.

Here, this weekend, is Squirrel Hill, home of a dozen synagogues and for more than a century and a half not only the spiritual center of Pittsburgh Judaism but also a vital landmark in the history of Jews in America, along with New York's Lower East Side and Boston's Blue Hill Avenue, one of the vital centers of Jewish identity since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

And here — amid the kosher grocery and the kosher restaurant and the kosher-style deli, and where the knotted fringes of tzitzit are familiar features at the corners of the garments of the Orthodox who walk through the area just before sundown Friday evenings -- it didn't require social media for the news of the shooting at the Tree of Life to spread.

The news was in the air, along with the shock and the sadness, the grief and the gruesome details, the worst of which were confirmed within hours. You could hear it in the sirens that broke the stillness of the morning and shattered the serenity of the Saturday routines at the cleaners, at the shoe store, at the hotcake house. No need, of course, in a place like this to identify the name of the cleaners, the shoe store, the hotcake house. Everyone knows them, just as they know the names of almost everyone along Forbes Avenue at any time of the day.

And precisely because everyone knows everyone around here — the one immutable Squirrel Hill truth that is at once irritating and comforting -- the news that raced down the street as noon approached Saturday was about a rare stranger in this peaceful place: dread.

Dread that someone you knew was in morning prayers marking the beginning of a baby's new life.

Dread that the police officers who sped to the scene — truly there were scores of them, almost as if it were a police funeral, for it was clear that soon there could be one — were in danger.

Dread, too, that our country, our city, our neighborhood, our lives have come to this, and that this has come home...

The Downtown businessman, a Squirrel Hill resident since he was three days old...headed...home, down Wilkins Avenue and toward Fifth, and this is what he saw:

“There were four, maybe six officers, and they rushed into the synagogue with guns. Then I saw the officers start to fire and back out and I saw what looked like gunfire from the synagogue. And I saw an officer holding his arm being escorted out. And the next thing I knew there were cops all over the place.”

...And soon Rabbi James A. Gibson of Temple Sinai, the Reform synagogue that is nearly a neighbor of Tree of Life, was on the phone. “We're stunned that the peace of Shabbat was destroyed by murderous intent and act,” he said, the words spilling forth in a Niagara of disbelief unusual for a man of devout belief. “We cannot comprehend what happened. It's a tragedy for us all, and especially for those who are victims.”

This was, to be sure, a 21st century event. Gunfire in a house of worship. Text messages flying at the speed of bullets....And of course: Confusion, and then clarity, over how many dead, how many wounded....

Because this was our neighborhood, caught in the crossfire of the strains of the global village, and for once — sadly, so very sadly — the hurt was ours, and the victims were ours, and the need to heal is ours. For now it has happened here; for millions across this wounded nation, we are the focus of anguish and anger and solace, the it-can-happen-anywhere place of the moment. And we know, given the tempo of tragedy in these times that are ours, that the title won't be ours for long.

In our grief — shared across all faiths — we need something to lean on, to steady us. We might reflect on the passage from Proverbs that lent its name to this place of tragedy, a reference to the metaphor describing Judaism's most sacred text, the Torah, as a tree of life, or, in transliterated Hebrew, *Etz hayyim*:

It is a tree of life to all who hold fast to it; its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.

עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחְזִיקִים בָּהּ, וְתִמְכֶיהָ מֵאֲשֶׁר. דְּרָכֶיהָ דְרָכֵי נֹעַם, וְכֹל
נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם. הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה, חֲדָשׁ יַמֵּינוּ כְּקֶדֶם.

Etz hayyim hi, le'mahazikim bah, ve'tomkheiha m'ushar. D'rakheiha darkhei noam, ve'khol netivoteiha shalom. Hashiveinu Adonai eilekha v'nashuva, hadeish yameinu k'kedem.

It is a Tree of Life to those who cling to it, and all who support it are happy. Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace. Return us, Adonai, unto You, and we shall return. Renew are days as they once were. (Siddur)

Author of life

Source and Creator,

Grant perfect rest under Your tabernacle of peace

To the victims of the massacre

in Pittsburgh,

Whose lives were cut off by violence,

A rampage of senseless aggression beyond understanding.

Their hopes were severed.

Their dreams were lost to brutality.

May their souls be bound up in the bond of life,

May they rest in peace.

God of justice and mercy,

Remember too the survivors of this attack,

Witnesses of shock, horror, and dismay.

Ease their suffering and release their trauma.
Grant them Your shelter and solace,
Blessing and renewal.
Grant them the endurance to survive,
Strength to rebuild,
Faith to mourn,
And courage to heal.
Remember the families and friends
Of the dead and the wounded.
With comfort and consolation.
Grant them Your protection,
Your wholeness and healing.
May they find hope and renewal.
Source of love,
Put an end to anger, hatred, and fear,
And lead us to a time when
No one will suffer at the hand of another.
Speedily, and in our day.

(Adapted from Alden Solovy's prayer "After a Deadly Rampage")

כָּל-הָעוֹלָם בְּלוּ גֶשֶׁר צָר מְאוֹד,
וְהַעֲקָר לֹא לִפְחַד כָּלָל.

*Kol ha'olam kulo gesher tzar me'od,
ve'haikar lo lefaheid klal.*

The whole world is a very narrow bridge,
And the main thing is not to be afraid.

(Rabbi Nahman of Breslov)

Thank you God for giving strength to first responders
that exceeds all measure.

Thank you God for giving first responders the courage
that allows them to run towards danger
so that others can be safe.

Thank you God for showing us all, through them,
what it means to put others first.

Thank you God for showing us your bright light in the darkest of times.

Today and everyday may our first responders
feel the love and support of those whose lives they have protected and saved,
of the community they protect,
and of the God who gives us all strength.

(Adapted from: First Responders - Thank You Prayer, www.angelinmyphone.com)

שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל, שְׁמֹר שְׂאֵרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֵל יֹוֹבַד יִשְׂרָאֵל, הָאוֹמְדִים
שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל.

שׁוֹמֵר גּוֹי אֶחָד, שְׁמֹר שְׂאֵרֵי עַם אֶחָד, וְאֵל יֹוֹבַד גּוֹי אֶחָד, הַמְיַחֲדִים
שְׁמָךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֶחָד.

שׁוֹמֵר גּוֹי קְדוֹשׁ, שְׁמֹר שְׂאֵרֵי עַם קְדוֹשׁ, וְאֵל יֹוֹבַד גּוֹי קְדוֹשׁ,
הַמְשַׁלְּשִׁים בְּשִׁלְשׁ קְדוּשׁוֹת לְקְדוֹשׁ.

*Shomer Yisrael, sh'mor sh'eireet Yisrael, v'al yovad Yisrael, ha'omdim
Sh'ma Yisrael.*

*Shomer goy ehad, Sh'mor sh'eireet am ehad, v'al yovad goy ehad,
ha'meyahadim shimkha Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Ehad.*

*Shomer goy kadosh, sh'mor sh'eireet am kadosh, v'al yovad goy kadosh,
ham'shalshim b'shalosh k'dushot l'kadosh. (Siddur)*

Guardian of Israel, guard the remnant of Israel;
and preserve the people Israel, who proclaim: Sh'ma Yisrael
Guardian of a unique people, guard the remnant
of that people; and preserve that people who affirm:
Adonai is our God, Adonai alone.
Guardian of a holy people, guard the remnant
of the holy people; and preserve that holy people
who chant in praise to the Holy One:
Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh.

קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיֶה כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אָנֹכִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: לֹא־תִקְלַל חֵרֶשׁ וְלִפְנֵי עִוֵּר לֹא תִתֵּן
מַכְשָׁל וְיִרְאֵת מֵאֲלֹהֶיךָ אָנֹכִי יְיָ: לֹא־תַעֲשׂוּ עוֹל בְּמִשְׁפָּט לֹא־תִשָּׂא פְנֵי־דָל וְלֹא
תִהְדָּר פְּנֵי גָדוֹל בְּצַדֵּק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתְךָ: לֹא־תִלְךָ רֶכֶל בְּעַמִּיתְךָ לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל־דַּם
רֵעֶךָ אָנֹכִי יְיָ: לֹא־תִשְׁנֵא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ הוֹכַח תוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא
עָלָיו חֲטָא: לֹא־תִטּוֹר וְלֹא־תִטּוֹר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאֶהְבֵּת לְרֵעֶךָ כַּמּוֹךָ אָנֹכִי יְיָ:

You shall be holy, for I, Adonai your God, am holy. You shall not insult the deaf, nor put
a stumbling block before the blind, You shall not render an unjust decision: Do not be
partial to the poor nor show deference to the rich. Judge your neighbor fairly. Do not
stand idly by the blood of your neighbor. You shall not hate your brother or sister in your
heart. Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

(Lev. 19:2, 4-6)

Mourner's Kaddish

וְתַגְדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא. בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כְרַעוּתְהָ, וְיִמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתְהָ
בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּעַגְלָא וּבְזַמַּן קָרִיב, וְאָמְרוּ
אָמֵן.

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלְמָא וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמֵיָא.
וְתַבְרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל
שְׁמֵהּ דְּקֻדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא, לְעֵלְמָא מִן כָּל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא תְּשַׁבְּחַתָּא
וְנַחֲמַתָּא, דְּאָמְרוּ בְּעֵלְמָא, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמֵיָא, וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.
עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל
כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

