

*A long long time ago  
I can still remember how  
That music used to make me smile  
And I knew if I had my chance  
That I could make those people dance  
And maybe they'd be happy for a while<sup>1</sup>*

I don't have a good poker face. I'm not a big gambler. And I'm certainly not Don McLean. But I bet . . . I bet that I can make you want to sing by saying . . . .

*I can't remember if I cried  
When I read about his widowed bride  
Something touched me deep inside  
The day the music died<sup>2</sup>*

These words etched into our DNA are as much, perhaps even more a part of the American experience than the pie they reference. But they are words written out of tragedy.

February 3rd, 1959, a plane carrying musicians Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and J.P. Richardson crashed near Clear Lake, Iowa compelling Don McLean to write:

*But February made me shiver  
With every paper I'd deliver  
Bad news on the doorstep  
I couldn't take one more step  
I can't remember if I cried  
When I read about his widowed bride  
Something touched me deep inside (point to them)  
The day the music died<sup>3</sup>*

This past year, it was not a plane crash in Iowa that made us shiver. It was the mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh.

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<sup>1</sup> Lyrics from American Pie, Don McLean

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> ibid

Don McLean claims that following the tragedy of 59, he cannot remember when he cried. I remember when I cried. I cried when the news station called my cell phone on Shabbat. That was when I realized that every synagogue in America was attacked that day. I cried when Carrie told me that our daughter Hannah had asked her what happened to the rabbi. That was the minute I realized that we would not be able to keep this moment from our children. And I cried when I showed up the very next morning to find our doorstep filled with letters and that now famous chalk drawing made by friends we do not know that read "You are Loved".

It has been said that there are sometimes moments that have the power to divide time into before a moment and after a moment.

The Tree of Life shooting in Pittsburgh was one of those moments for us

Before Pittsburgh, there was a debate about security in the Jewish community. After Pittsburgh, there was an answer.

After Columbine and Sandy Hook and Las Vegas and every other tragic mass shooting, Jewish leaders, like leaders of other organizations, would meet to have a debate I've been a part of dozens of times. On one side of the table were those wanting more security. "We need locked doors and armed guards". They would say. To which the other side of the table would reply, "We have to be a welcoming congregation. We are a synagogue, not Fort Knox"

After 9:50am on October 27th, the debate was over.

I can assure you, if you want physical security in today's world, walk into a synagogue. On October 27th of last year, Temple Israel, like our sister synagogues stopped debating security and we started becoming professionals in it.

Now, If you want to know what time services begin or when the Religious School is open, you can call the office and talk to Kylee, or you could just pull over on Market Street and ask a Bath Police officer. Oh, and if you want to hop over to Revere Road Synagogue afterwards, they can tell you that schedule too. They know our schedule. They know our faces - For the first time in my life I can say that the police watch me so closely that they know what car I drive, what clothes I wear and even when it is my

birthday! Some of them know when we have a bigger oneg on a Friday night and when there is a yizkor service on that random Wednesday in the summer when Shavuot falls. For centuries, Jews have waited for ten people to gather in order to pray. Now, it is ten people and a police officer.

There was a horrific tragedy on October 27th of last year. It scared us. That moment in Pittsburgh made us shiver. It ended an oft repeated debate and it brought us to make the synagogue arguably the most secure building in every city in this country.

But just as the debate over security is over, a debate about anti-Semitism in America has begun.

Before Charlottesville, we may say that the American Jewish community believed that anti-Semitism existed in other parts of the world, in France and Poland and the Middle East. After Charlottesville, our eyes were opened. But the truth is, while disturbing, Charlottesville was a version of anti-Semitism we are used to identifying.

In her recent book *Anti-Semitism Here and Now*, Deborah Lipstadt explains it well.

[Today], "To be an antisemite one need not be a Hitler or Nazi equivalent. You need not even be prone to violence. There are many antisemites who would never dream of even using offensive rhetoric."<sup>4</sup>

After Charlottesville, we looked at hate groups. After Pittsburgh, we looked everywhere.

And more often than not, our attention turned to our elected leaders. From our President defining the terms of Jewish loyalty to newly elected Democrats equating Jewish power to money, our eyes have been opened and we have not had to look far to see a problem we thought was mostly solved.

David Harris is CEO of the American Jewish Committee. The AJC is one of many Jewish organizations with its finger on the pulse of anti-Semitism

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<sup>4</sup> [Anti-Semitism Here and Now](#), Deborah Lipstadt

in the world and in the United States. His advice to the American Jewish community: "keep your head on the swivel"<sup>5</sup>.

In other words, be willing to look to the right and see anti-Semitism. And be willing to look to the left to see it as well. Harris explains that we should be willing to look the full 360 degrees all around us, and we should not care where the anti-Semitism is coming from, we must name it and combat it wherever it appears.

When Zionism is made partisan by the right, our head must turn to the right and our mouths must open in critique. When the voice of liberal America, the NY Times publishes a cartoon in its International paper depicting a Jewish dog leading the President of the United States by leash, our heads must turn to the left, and declare to the world, that this is anti-Semitic propaganda. And when we look around, with our head on a swivel, let us be clear, there are victims to these crimes. Politicians and publications cannot be permitted to use anti-Semitic trope to fan their base on the Right nor their base on the Left. Using the 2% of the American population who are Jewish to leverage 50% of your electorate may not make you a Nazi, but it does make you a politician willing to be anti-Semitic in order to win an election. And with our eyes open and our ears listening more closely since October of last year, we know what we have heard in generations past. And we know what we are seeing and hearing now. And, I believe, we know what to do.

We have been here before and we have not just survived we have thrived. As my colleague Rabbi Danny Burkeman likes to remind me, virtually every Jewish holiday revolves around the threefold structure: They tried to hurt us, we survived, let's eat.

Our survival is not an accident, it is because we have faced the challenges head on.

Read the Torah and you read a story about a people enslaved, but who, through Moses and Aaron learned how to speak up. And because we stood up then and marched out of Egypt, we gather every year around our seder tables to say Dayeinu, look how much we gained by doing so.

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<sup>5</sup> Conference Call with American Rabbis, September 2019

Pick up a latke or a hamenstaschen and you are picking up a food created because our ancestors pushed back, found the beauty of extending the light, and put the Hamans of their day in their place.

Every single week, we get together for Shabbat, and we say the words over the wine zecher l'yitziat mitzrayim . . . we REMEMBER that we got out of Egypt.

And is on this holiday, the first moments of a very New year, when we say Hashiveinu Adonai, hadesh yameinu k'kedem. Turn us God and return us. Return us to who we are, to what we are, to where YOU are, so that we can start this year anew.

And that is what we do now. In this moment. As we start a new year, it is time to stop any sense we have of dwelling on the past and start to seriously respond to it. Not just with security measures, but with our holidays, our food, our sense of simcha . . . our joy . . . and most importantly, with our voice.

For the next ten days, you will hear me talk too often and for too long. That is the nature of the High Holy Days. But I will be talking about one question.

How do we respond to our world after Pittsburgh? I am not going to reference Pittsburgh in every sermon. I do not think we need to relive that day over and over again. But for those who join us for the entirety of our services, I want you to know that every sermon for this year has been my first steps toward closing the door on October of last year.

From this point forward, I believe our task is to be ready to speak out, ready to speak up and ready to speak often about who we are and the world we want for our children.

So tonight, I want to tell you how I am choosing to remember October of last year moving forward and the first action I am taking in the year 5780 to start fresh.

Ask me what happened to us in October of last year and I'll tell you that there were powerful moments that changed us. The first you know about. A few remnants of the second still exist on the front door of our

synagogue. Some of the chalk markings from that drawing by our anonymous friends have remained to this day. I hope they stay there forever. But not because I want to be reminded of October 27th of last year. I want to be reminded of October 28th.

October 28th was a profoundly moving day. It was a day we were reminded that we can be touched by people who love us deeply even if it is anonymously. Of all the things we did as a Jewish community from coming together in prayer to having meetings about security policy, what made me feel most secure were the notes, phones calls and drawings left on our doorstep by strangers. People who may not even know our names, but they knew what we needed. People who stopped whatever they were doing, wrote us a letter and took the time to make sure our kids walked into Sunday school with a message that the world is better today than it was yesterday.

I had the benefit of hearing author and civil rights strategist Eric Ward speak last year. Eric was asked to speak to a group of rabbis because he recently penned a powerful article titled "Skin in the Game: How Anti-Semitism Animates White Nationalism". His thesis is essentially this. You want to fight Anti-semitism, you have to fight all 'isms'.

October 27th is a day that changed our world. October 28th was a day that showed us how we need to change.

How many times have I watched as the news reported that a man walked into an African American Church, or a mosque or a school? How many times was I supposed to stop what I was doing and make a chalk drawing on someone's doorstep, but I did not. How many times have I had the chance to do something, a little thing, that will mean the world to someone else, but I have neglected to take the 5 minutes to do it. How many times have I been stuck in my own sorrow, my own experience, my own dilemma, that I have forgotten that I can be the answer to someone else's problem. How many times have I, have we, forgotten what our holidays are really about - not eating and not even praying. They are about taking action, about doing, about impacting our world.

The rabbis teach in the Talmud that we will regret ten times more the times we keep silent than the times we speak up. It is, they teach, when we do not speak up, that we face the greatest loss of all, the loss of who we are.

There is no short answer that will stop anti-Semitism or racism or sexism. But that does not mean that we should not be speaking out, speaking up and speaking often.

When he believed that music had died in a plane crash, Don McLean wrote a song. He spoke up. And that song has remained in our head ever since. He, and all the others with him, made one of the defining features of the 60's and 70's, the amazing music that all of us know so well. He did what our ancestors have done for millenia. He turned the page, he spoke up and he made the future stronger than the past had ever been.

On the day after Pittsburgh, our friends and neighbors could not undo what had been done the day before. But they spoke up. They responded. They did not have the answer. But they did have a voice and they did not remain silent.

Today, we remind ourselves that we, of all peoples, must do the same. We have skin in this game. The truth is, we always had skin in this game. Since October 27th, 2018, we just can not deny it. And since October, 28th, we have had a long list of friends standing as exemplars of what we must do.

When we start speaking up, speaking out and speaking often, we will find that we do have the answer. We will find that we have been here before. We have been through much worse, in fact, and we have found the answers then. We will find our voice, and as the rabbis remind us, we will find ourselves.

We believe that we can teach, as we have in every generation, people how to dance, and sing, and raise their voice to make this world the Promised Land we have always kept in our sights.

A long long time ago, and recently  
We can still remember how  
That music used to make us smile  
And we know when we have the chance  
That we will make those people dance  
And they will once again be happy for a long while

For it is us who wrote the book of love  
We, who have faith in God above  
And it is our Bible that tells us so.

Shanah tovah u'metukah.

May the coming year be sweet. May it be a safe year. And may it be a year unlike the last, when anti-Semitism is silenced, when hate is eliminated and when our voice joins that of our Creator in bringing peace to settle in this world we share with so many who love us.