

It's been a while since Shabbat got in the way of something that I really wanted to do. At the beginning this was less true; when I started becoming observant about 20 years ago, during my junior year of college, it often felt like Shabbat got in the way – of shopping or taking the bus downtown, of doing homework (which required writing and typing) or going to the movies with friends. But as the years have passed and I have settled into a routine, not to mention a community, I've come to appreciate the break from it all that Shabbat affords, the time for other things like reading or rest that Shabbat carves out, and I rarely find myself wishing that things were otherwise. Until we come to a weekend like this one. If it weren't for Shabbat, I would certainly be participating in the March for Our Lives taking place tomorrow in the city of Chicago, in Washington D.C., and in hundreds of other communities around our country.

As many of us know, March for Our Lives is a youth-led effort inspired by the recent massacre at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, with students and families taking to the streets in order to demand an end to the epidemic of gun violence and mass shootings plaguing our schools today. Some reports speculate that as many as 500,000 individuals will descend upon our nation's capital as part of Saturday's events, and more than 800 "sibling marches" have been planned worldwide in locations ranging from Hawaii to Hong Kong. Here in Illinois, the official March for Our Lives Chicago will be held at Union Park, 1501 W Randolph Street, beginning tomorrow at 11:00 AM. I know that many members of our community will be attending and that many more of us, myself included, will be there in spirit.

One of my favorite Jewish texts speaks of the *eglah arufah*, the law of the broken-necked heifer. When a dead body is found lying out in the open, the identity of the killer unknown, community elders must determine the town closest to the corpse. The leaders of that town then take a young heifer, which has never been worked, and bring it to a wadi, which has not yet been tilled or sown, and break the heifer's neck proclaiming, "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. Absolve, O Lord, Your people Israel whom You redeemed, and do not let guilt for the blood of the innocent remain among your people Israel" (Deuteronomy 21:7-8). In this (strange) way, expiation is achieved.

To be sure, there are many challenging elements of the ancient heifer ritual including, most acutely, the slaughter of an innocent animal; at another time, I look forward to studying this passage together further. But what I find meaningful in the rite of the *eglah arufah* is its emphasis on communal responsibility. The town closest to the slain individual may not have directly produced or encouraged or harbored the perpetrator of this crime; in fact, most of the community would be appalled at the violence of this act and would have sought to prevent it, had they had the chance. And yet, the very fact that such evil could occur in their midst somehow makes the entire community responsible for this tragic event; when society is sick, we all bear some of the blame. In the words of Biblical commentator Nechama Leibowitz, "We may note that the concept of 'bloodshed' is interpreted here in a very broad manner to include even indirect responsibility for the death of a human being through neglect to attend to his elementary needs....Responsibility for wrongdoing does not only lie with the perpetrator himself or even with the accessory. Lack of care and attention are also criminal. Whoever keeps to his own quiet corner and refuses to have anything to do with the 'evil world,' who observes oppression and violence but does not stir a finger in protest cannot proclaim with a clear conscience that 'our hands

have not shed this blood” (Studies in Deuteronomy, Shoftim 7). The broken-necked heifer teaches us the lesson of communal responsibility.

Children are our most valuable, our most vulnerable, and our most precious resource; until they can attend school safe from harm, we have failed to live up to our obligations both as good citizens and as Jews. If it weren't for Shabbat, I would certainly be marching tomorrow. I'm grateful for all of those individuals who will be doing so.

“Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done.” And yet we can be responsible for it all the same.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Annie Tucker