



Parashat Behukotai - May 27, 2022 - 27 Iyyar 5782

Dear TBE Family and Friends,

On a normal weekday morning, my husband and I start the day by readying our children for school. We prepare their lunches, lay out their breakfast, select their clothes (or critique their selections). Then I load my younger son onto the bus and prepare to walk with my older son to school.

Throughout the whole process, my focus is on keeping to the clock: making sure my kindergartener will be on the porch before the bus pulls up; making sure my fifth-grader is ready to set out in time to arrive at school before the morning announcements. I don't give a moment's thought to the possibility that in bidding them farewell, I might really be saying, "Farewell." As in "forever".

To do so would be, literally, unthinkable. How could any parent bear to see off their child on a school morning without being sure that there would be an after-school reunion in a few hours? How could any partners or friends bear to part after their morning coffee if they believed that separation might extend ... indefinitely? How could we step into a house of worship to pray? How could we go to a grocery store to shop? How could we even step outside our homes if we seriously entertained the thought that to do so might set in motion events that ended in death?

Yet that is the reality that we have seen unfold before our eyes, in meticulously reported detail, over the past fortnight. That is the reality that a growing share of the American public has lived personally over the past two decades as the pace of gun-related violence - mass shootings, but not only (or even primarily) - has accelerated as lethal weapons of war have become ever easier to acquire.

In the prayer with which we usher in Shabbat - indeed the words with which

we greet the twilight every night - we reference God as the One who "sets the succession of the seasons" and establishes the order of the day(s) "rolling light away from darkness and darkness away from light." In uttering these words, we acknowledge that all other human endeavors, among them the aspiration to holiness, depend upon a certain degree of predictability, a certain faith that, for ourselves and those we care about, the sun will indeed rise to usher in another day.

But though God decreed the initial conditions that made such a safe and orderly a universe possible, its maintenance was left in our hands. It is up to us, to humanity, to preserve the world's stability - indeed to repair and enhance it such that all human beings can reliably enjoy an adequate supply of food, protection from the elements, and security from the predatory intentions of those, in every society, who are inclined to victimize their fellows. In this we have failed tragically.

As we head into this Shabbat, the brokenness of the world with which we have been entrusted yawns before us, scrawled in the blood of the innocent men, women and, most tragically, children whose lives were taken, in random, senseless violence, in the past two weeks.

It is not as if we have not been given adequate opportunity or ample warning. For decades now, in the face of innumerable senseless tragedies, politicians have made empty declarations and mouthed mealy promises about addressing the identifiable factors contributing to the more than 100 gun-related deaths that this country experiences daily, and for just as long the voting public has failed to hold them accountable for their inaction.

Perhaps this Shabbat as our dead lay before us, perhaps this week as we prepare to close the Book of Vayiqra, the Book of Holiness, we may search, in sadness but with renewed determination, for ways to realize our people's eternal commitment to upholding the sanctity of life by finding ways to create life-affirming, life sustaining conditions in our every corner of our country so that our dreams, our children, our souls might not only survive but thrive.

Shabbat shalom,
- Rabbi Rachel Safman

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