

**D'var Torah for Shabbat Morning, November 3, 2018**  
**#ShowUpForShabbat**  
**Rabbi Ita Paskind**  
**Congregation Beth El Norwalk**

Rabbi Alvin Berkun's wife has been sick. She's got an infection, she's getting meds, and she will be ok in due time. Thank God for her infection. It's the reason he was in her hospital room last Saturday morning and not at Tree of Life synagogue, where he is the rabbi emeritus. Ever since his retirement, Rabbi Berkun has enjoyed coming to shul--on time, of course--and sitting in the back with the regulars. Now, all of his back-of-the-shul comrades are dead. All of them.

By all accounts, Rabbi Berkun should be one of the ones receiving comfort and consolation at this awful time. Instead, as you can imagine, he has been glued to his phone--responding to requests for interviews, offering comfort to 11 grief-stricken families, helping the entire Pittsburgh Jewish community to process and mourn.

The murders took place on the Shabbat when Jews around the world read of Abraham and Sarah welcoming 3 strangers into their tent with open arms. They fed them, washed their feet, and gave them a place to rest on their journey. Likewise, the doors of Tree of Life were open to anyone who wanted to enter, just like all synagogues are eager to welcome guests.

This morning, we are reading the portion that opens with the death of Sarah and concludes with the death of Abraham.

Friends, this Shabbat of Chayei Sarah, we join Rabbi Berkun and all those in Pittsburgh in the middle of shiva for the 11 sweet Jews who were murdered last Shabbat morning in the Tree of Life synagogue, which houses the Dor Hadash and New Light congregations. It's a time of deep sadness, yes. At the same time, our tradition teaches us that the Shabbat during the week of shiva feels different than the rest of the week. During the weekdays of shiva, the community gathers at the family home to offer condolences; on Shabbat, the mourners come to the synagogue. During the week, the mourners wear the telltale sign of shiva--either the torn black ribbon or a torn piece of clothing; on Shabbat, they wear clothing that is whole. During the week, mourners may sit on chairs that are low down to the ground, an ancient sign of mourning; on Shabbat, they may sit on the same chairs as the rest of us. The Shabbat of a shiva period contains both sacred joy and profound grief.

I think it's crucial at this difficult time to note that Jewish tradition never focuses on one emotion alone. The Shabbat during shiva is just one example. I'll give you a couple of others. At a Jewish wedding, the quintessential happy time, a glass is shattered, since we are never to forget that the world contains so much brokenness. And we can hold both the joy and the sadness at the same time. On Passover, as we sit around the seder table and celebrate God's redemption of our ancestors from slavery in Egypt, we acknowledge the suffering of the Egyptian people because of the 10 plagues by pouring out a bit of our wine for each one. We can hold both of those things at the same time as well. This push-and-pull is described so poignantly in Israeli poet and songwriter Naomi Shemer's *Al Kol Eleh*,

which blesses God for both the honey and the sting, for the bitter and the sweet--*al hadvash ve'al ha'oketz, al hamar vehamatok.*

Certainly there is no blessing in the horrific rampage and loss of life. No. There's no justification for that. However, there have been countless acts of sweetness, chesed/lovingkindness, and unity in the 7 days since that moment. And we must appreciate them, honor them, and seek to follow their lead today, tomorrow, and going forward. The outpouring of love and connection and support--*this is the true America.* This is why we are proud to be American Jews. We need to lift up these good deeds in order to balance out the grief we feel today.

Let us count the blessings.

We are blessed by a police force that is committed to protecting all citizens of this country, and today we pray for the healing of the 6 officers wounded doing just that last Shabbat morning. We know it wasn't all that many years ago when the police in Germany stood by as thugs shattered the glass storefronts of Jewish businesses and set fire to them. Even more, they encouraged them. What a contrast we saw last week. The police in our own city and across the country stepped up immediately to protect shuls and other houses of worship. The Norwalk Police were sitting in our parking lot even before we could call them. We are deeply appreciative.

We are blessed by our brothers and sisters of other faiths. Across our country, across Fairfield county, and right here in Norwalk, small groups are committed to interfaith relationships on a regular basis, and it's these relationships that have enabled the national show of support and unity that we have seen since last Shabbat morning. We've seen it right in Pittsburgh, from the first vigils on Saturday night, where clergy and members of all stripes came together to cry. We have seen it in our own community, as leaders from churches and mosques took to the bimah last Sunday afternoon with rabbis of all Jewish streams to sing Oseh Shalom. I shared with you the emails and calls I received from clergy friends in our city (point out Peter), and subsequently have received condolences from the Sikh community through our involvement in CONECT. And we see it this morning, right here in our shul, as our brothers and sisters have joined us in #Show(ing)UpforShabbat. It's one of the most heartening things I've ever seen or experienced.

We are blessed in particular by the compassion and efforts of the American Muslim community. I'm sure you've seen Wasi Mohamed, executive director of the Pittsburgh Islamic Center, announce that the Muslim community had begun raising funds for the victims of the synagogue attack and their families. As of Friday afternoon, the community has raised a stunning \$230,724. Mohamed said on Sunday in Pittsburgh: 'We just want to know what you need ... If it's people outside your next service protecting you, let us know. We'll be there.' Indeed, the Muslim community in Toronto is, right now, encircling 5 synagogues in what they're calling a Ring of Peace, a reflection of the Jewish community's encircling of the Imdadul Islamic Centre in Toronto in 2017 after the shooting in a Quebec City mosque. These are relationships that we honor and value, and we must nourish them as we do the friendships we have with one another. As a whole and right here at home, we are blessed.

Indeed, the show of unity among faith communities during these 7 days mirrors the conclusion of this morning's Torah reading, as Abraham's sons Isaac and Yishmael reunite after many years of estrangement to bury their father. Each of them had suffered a loss, and the only one who could understand it was their brother. They found a way to put aside their differences and be there for each other. Unfortunately, communities of faith understand all too well what the Jewish people are experiencing right now. Each of our faiths have been the targets of violence in recent years, not to mention throughout history. To our Christian and Muslim friends who have joined us today: thank you.

And so today we hold both sadness and blessing, joy and pain, the honey and the sting. While we will always mourn this loss, let us remember: We are safe here. We are proud to be Jewish. We will ensure that love wins. Amen.