

Rabbi Noah Arnow
Kol Rinah
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Early Sunday morning at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, Omar Mateen shot and killed 49 people and injured 53 more. This week, we've been learning more about this attack, about its planning and its perpetrator, and about the people who were killed, some quickly, some after hours of terror. We've seen the last text messages people have sent. And we've seen and heard about the families and people whose souls and bodies have been broken by this attack. I've found myself in tears repeatedly since Sunday morning.

I want to speak this morning about what this attack was—an attack on America and human beings, for sure, but also an attack on every LGBTQ person in America. And I want to speak about what I've learned about how we can respond to this attack—how we should have responded, how we still can respond, and how we can respond in the future if, God forbid, any other such attack should occur. I'm not going to speak about political or policy responses, but rather, about human, or humane, responses. And I'll share with you the voices—the reactions, the pleas, from a few of my queer friends.

But before we really get started, let's review a little terminology or vocabulary: LGBTQ and Latinx.

The L is for "lesbian." "Lesbian" refers to women who are attracted to women. G, Gay, refers usually to men attracted to men. B, Bisexual refers to people attracted to people of either gender. T, Transgender means people who have a gender identity different from the sex with which they were born. And Q, Queer, is an umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual and/or not cisgender, which means having a gender identity that matches their assigned sex. Queer used to be a pejorative term for gays and lesbians, but it has been reclaimed to establish community and assert a politicized identity distinct from the gay political identity.

There's one more word you might have seen recently, that was new to me this week as well. Latinx. It's spelled L-a-t-i-n-x, and pronounced, "Lateen-ex." It is a gender-neutral way of referring to Latinos and Latinas, or people of Latin American descent. It also encompasses genders outside of what some see as "a limiting man-woman binary." (See <http://www.latina.com/lifestyle/our-issues/why-we-say-latinx-trans-gender-non-conforming-people-explain>.)

Now that we are clear on terminology, we have to speak about Orlando. First, what was this an attack on? It was an attack on America, on the West, on American values of liberty, freedom, and democracy. In that sense, it was attack on all of us. And if any of us feel more unsafe, or threatened, it is legitimate and for good reason.

And processing this attack is complicated, and perhaps confusing, because it was multilayered. It was an attack on America, an act of homegrown terrorism. It was radical Islamic terrorism. It was ISIS or ISIL. Mental illness may have been component. And the fact Omar Mateen used guns makes it about guns and the debate about gun control. And it is also about LGBTQ people. The fact is, it's multilayered.

But this was not merely an attack on human beings, or a desecration in God's name of God's name.

This was an attack on people who love or are attracted to people of the same gender, and people who do not conform to traditional gender boundaries. This was an attack on LGBTQ people. And particularly, it was an attack in Latinx people.

If Omar Mateen had killed a random assortment of 49 people at a Walmart or a Walgreen's, we could say he killed human beings, he killed Americans, and leave it at that.

But he killed 49 human beings who were dancing at a well-known gay nightclub. He saw them as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer—they were his targets. The LGBTQ community feels ownership and pride for those descriptors. If killer and victim can be clear about who was killed, then so can we, and so must we.

I want to emphasize this in one more way. What if, God forbid, 49 Jews had been killed at a synagogue. You would know that the fact that they were Jews mattered. You would know that they were targeted, and killed because they were Jewish. And you would feel personally hurt, injured, threatened, targeted, and targeted.

But what if media, elected officials, and our community and friends ignored the fact that the people killed were Jews, and ignored the fact that it was a synagogue, how would you feel? In addition to feeling targeted, threatened, attacked, you might also feel invisible, alone, ignored, and even more scared.

That's exactly how people I know have described feeling these last few days.

And, by the way, it was only the most successful, the most effective attack on LGBTQ people. But at least 13 other people have been murdered in America in this year because of their gender non-conforming identity, and countless others physically and sexually assaulted, bullied and harassed and abandoned to the point of taking their own lives.

So what should we have done and what can we still do to respond?

Rick, a good friend of mine from college, posted the following Wednesday on Facebook. He wrote, "I'm truly disappointed in the lack of personal contact. Parents aside, not a SINGLE friend or family member has called me to check in. Not a single co-worker has asked how I'm doing unless I've brought it up. I've gotten a few texts, which I appreciate. It's not the same as a phone call. Look - I get it - I'm a really, really resilient person. I project an air of confidence and control, and I'm able to channel fear and hurt and grief into confident, self-righteous anger possibly better than anyone else I know. But I'm hurting right now. EVERY GAY FRIEND YOU HAVE IS HURTING RIGHT NOW. As another friend posted this afternoon, 'Nope. We are still not doing ok.'"

What Rick reminded me of is a basic of pastoral care—checking in. When someone's going through something, check in—acknowledge that this may be a hard time, and check in and see how they're doing. What I, as a straight person, didn't initially realize, was the way that virtually every single LGBTQ person felt personally targeted, threatened, victimized, and hurt by this attack.

This gesture of checking in was reinforced by my friend and colleague Rabbi Aaron Weininger, whom some of you know from the time he spent in St. Louis as a student at Wash U. In thinking about how to deal with things that are hard, with grim and sad and difficult news and situations, Aaron wrote on Thursday on Facebook, "We can get stuck. Maybe keeping pace with each person is a good place to start. Check in, especially with our kids, our teens, and then

check in again. Follow the story and don't become the story. Create space for the pain to be, step in gently to feel it without prescribing your solution to fix it."

He continued, "Some of us know what it means to sit shiva or to enter a shiva home to be present with loss. That kind of space is where many in the LGBTQ community, in the Latinx community, are. Sitting. Torn. The loss doesn't go away but hopefully the loneliness subsides."

What we should have done, what I should have done, as soon as Shavuot ended Monday night, was pick up the phone and call all my friends and family who are gay and check in with them. Not because I thought maybe they were at Pulse in Orlando. But just because this was an attack on them too.

I've started to make those calls, to do that checking in. And it's not too late for me, or for you either, because as I quoted earlier, "Nope. We are still not doing ok."

We have another important opportunity not only to speak with our LGBTQ friends and community, but also to stand with them. And that's at Pridefest 2016, the St. Louis Pride Festival. There will be a group from the Jewish community marching in the parade on Sunday, June 26. It'll be downtown, around Soldier's Arch. We'll have more details next week on exact locations and times to meet to march, as well as a location to cheer and watch.

I will be there. My family will be there. And I hope every single one of you will be there, whether marching, or watching. This is an opportunity for you, for us as Kol Rinah, for the entire Jewish community, and for all of St. Louis to say to the LGBTQ people we know and to the LGBTQ community, that we love you, we care about, you stand with you, and we are with you.

Please join me there. Details will come via e-mail next week.

So please come. But as another close LGBTQ friend wrote to me today, "It's not only about coming to one parade and festival, it's about being part of making the world more survivable for us. There are large and small ways to do that, and every single one of them matters."

He goes on to say, "The small acts of hate that lead to the amount of violence against us are still going on. Some anti-LGBT laws, anti-hate crimes protections laws are still being voted on and supported. And people don't want to acknowledge how those things are directly connected to violence, that it's not enough to feel shocked that such a tragedy could happen, not enough to just say 'we're sorry and we're praying for you.' There's this disconnect between even the compassionate responses and the context that made for this horror in the first place."

Finally, I want to step back for a moment. This was an attack particularly on one community in America. I hope and pray there will not be more, but if and when they come, may we all have the good sense, and the humanity, to pick up the phone and call the people who will be feeling the most vulnerable that we know, whoever they may be. May we give them hugs, check in with them, and let them know that we see them, we acknowledge them, we love them, and we are with them.

Shabbat shalom.