

A few words of Outrage. Then a few words of Mourning.

What took place yesterday morning in Pittsburgh was not a tragedy. It was not a calamity, not a catastrophe, not a sad and unfortunate event, not a misfortune. It was a slaughter. Let us be clear about that.

There has never been a slaughter in an American synagogue before. The last shooting took place 50 years ago, when a rabbi was shot by a mentally ill teenage congregant. Tragic, but not the same. Yesterday's slaughter was unique. The question we must pose...was it coincidence that it took place now?

My own answer is an unequivocal no. There was no coincidence. Every measure of anti-Semitic incidents shows a rise in recent years. Every measure of bias incidents of any kind shows a rise in recent years. There is no coincidence.

When the most important, loudest voice in American life says of a Congressman who assaults a journalist, "any guy that can do a body slam...he's my kind of guy." When that same voice repeatedly says, "lock her up." When that same voice, witnessing a massive march of loud, aggressive Nazis proclaiming, "Blood and soil, Jews will not replace us," says that there are "good people on both sides."

There is no coincidence.

The best definition of anti-Semitism is opposition to Jews as Jews. The Pittsburgh shooter knowingly and deliberately engaged in an act of anti-Semitism. But he was no lone crazy. He acted with the confidence of someone who knew they were part of something bigger than themselves. In the current environment, it is easy to imagine how that confidence came to be.

There are many elected officials with us this morning, and many who aspire to be elected. We can yell, we can scream, we can cry. And we have, and we will. But you are the ones who can actually do something. So here's a very simple message. Do it.

If you are not actively opposing the voices that made the shooter feel he had the license to do what he did, then you are complicit in his act. You are guilty. If you are not working actively to keep guns out of the wrong hands, you are guilty. Leviticus says, "Do not stand idly by while your neighbor bleeds." We are bleeding. What will you do to staunch the flow?

Jews are a family. The slaughter in Pittsburgh reverberates even here. Gregg and Pam Adelsheimer grew up at Tree of Life. The rabbi officiated at their wedding. Carter Dutch's brother in law's father is the president of the congregation. By coincidence, he was sick yesterday, and thus not in shul.

As we were reminded with Parkland, where so many had personal ties, we are a family. You hurt one part of us, the rest of us all feel it. It is a kind of tribal moment. You hurt my people, my community, my family. You hurt me.

And while this nasty, foul act of anti-Semitism stands on its own, we cannot view it in isolation. We are, quite literally, in the cross hairs. But so are others. We as a community must take care of ourselves, but we must do our part to take care of everyone assailed by violent bigotry and prejudice; through our activism, our generosity, our love. The more bridges we build, the less we are alone.

Words of Mourning.

This is a sacred place. I feel violated. I mourn the innocence lost. I mourn yesterday's victims.

And of those victims, here is my hope.

In Hebrew, the word for sky and heaven is the same. Shamayim. And in the few weeks we will read the beginning of the story of Joseph, and his dream of eleven stars in the shamayim.

I hope our eleven stars, our eleven souls, are also in shamayim. I hope that they are warm, and at peace. I pray that we bask in the glow of the light they shine, and our deeds honor their lives and their deaths. May their memories be a blessing.