

FROM THE RABBI'S DESK

Sermon Chayei Sarah -- Friday Night "#showupforshabbat" 11/2/18

Good Shabbos, Shabbat Shalom. As some of you may know, this Shabbat has been designated "#showupforshabbat weekend," when Jews all over the country, including many of whom do not routinely go to shul, are showing solidarity by attending services on Friday night and Shabbat morning. People are participating in this campaign not only to honor the memory of those who were murdered in Pittsburgh, but also to show that we will never give in to fear.

It happens to be that last week's Parsha ended with the near-death experience of Yitzhak, and in this week's Parsha, we read about the death and burial of Sarah. This is followed by the marriage of Yitzhak and Rivkah, and our Sages in the midrash teach us that Rivkah is a replacement, in a sense, for the important place that Yitzhak's mother Sora held in his life. So, in a manner of speaking, Sarah lives on after her death, which makes the title of the Parsha very apt – "**Chayei Sarah**", "The **Life** of Sarah. And I think that tells what this Shabbat is all about. We Jews are unfortunately accustomed to anti-Semitism leading to the murder of Jews, but we always bounce back, because we don't believe in death, we believe in life. I think that's why our challah baking event last night was a very fitting way to honor the memory of those who died. (We would like to thank Rachel Mark and Samy Belfer for arranging the wonderful event, and to everyone who participated.) The bracha we make on bread is Hamotzi, the blessing which takes precedent over all others. But what path does bread take to receive the most distinguished blessing? It starts as wheat grain, with the blessing of Ha'adama. Then you turn it into flour, which receives the lowest blessing, Shehakol. Only then can it become bread. The commentators explain that bread is like the Jewish people – it starts off at a certain level, gets crushed like flour, and then bounces back even higher than it was at the beginning. I think this is an important lesson we could take from this Shabbat: We are a resilient people, we must stay strong, and God willing this horrible tragedy should be a catalyst for life-affirming events in the future of the Jewish people. Shabbat shalom.