

**FROM THE RABBI'S DESK****Sermon Chayei Sarah -- "Pittsburgh" 11/3/18**

Good Shabbos, Shabbat shalom. First, I'd like to congratulate Claire Raab & Jordan Goldhammer on the birth of a baby girl, who was named Esther Ya'akova in shul this week. Mazal tov!

And I'd like to acknowledge that this week's kiddush is sponsored by Shana & Julia Rafsky, in memory of those who died in the Tree of Life Synagogue shootings. May their memory be a blessing.

The entire Jewish world is still reeling from this horrific event in Pittsburgh last Shabbat. For our community, this was an incident that hit especially hard, because it took place in a shul, it happened in our state, and many of our members come from that neighborhood and even attended the Tree of Life Synagogue. Many people in our community have reached out to me, because we're all struggling to cope with this tragedy and find a way to come to terms with it. I was very proud to see the large turnout at the challah baking on Thursday and want to thank Rachel Mark and Samy Belfer for arranging everything and making it so meaningful. The event certainly went a long way in helping our community cope with this tragedy.

We all know however that the inescapable truth is that we'll never be able to reach any kind of true resolution.

All we can hope for is to learn lessons from this tragic event, to pull something positive out of something that's completely negative. One of the things that it impressed on us, unfortunately, is the need to reevaluate our security precautions, because antisemitic acts are on the rise. I don't think we should overreact, but this incident should be a wakeup call to consider additional reasonable measures. With the help of Federation, Mekor is working with local police (and perhaps the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI) to determine how we can make the shul as safe as possible. Their strong recommendation is that we should strive to achieve the difficult balance between making our synagogue safe for all our members but preserving everyone's ability to attend shul in a normal way. We will continue our assessment over the days and weeks ahead and provide our shul community with more information.

Still, as crucial as the question of security is to our well-being, that focus alone will not suffice to help our community cope with the loss of innocent lives in Pittsburgh.

I believe that we need to also look to the Torah for guidance about how to grapple with their deaths, because that's what the Torah is for – to guide us in difficult situations when we are at a loss. I think it's quite eerie that last week, we were speaking about Akeidat Yitzhak and the issue of the randomness of that command to murder, just moments after the Pittsburgh

shootings took place, unbeknownst to us. And **this** week, our Parsha speaks about the death of Sarah as well as of Avraham. But the odd thing about the issue of death in this week's Parsha is that for some reason it's connected intensely with life and with marriage, which represents life. For example, although the Parsha deals with the death and burial of Sarah, its title is **Chayei Sarah**, *The Life of Sarah*.

And coincidentally, (or maybe not so much) Rivka is portrayed here as the "replacement" for Sarah in Yitzchak's life, because it specifically says he took Rivka into his mother's tent, and Rashi quotes the Midrash Rabbah that when that happened, all the miracles in that tent which were dormant after Sarah's death became active again. And ironically, Rivka's name for some reason spells out the word for burial in Hebrew, *kivurah*, the same letters as Rivkah. Even more strangely, the primary source for Jewish marriage, is the purchase of the Ma'arat Hamachpeila, the burial plot originally purchased by Avraham for Sarah in the episode at the beginning of the parsha. This burial plot is the first piece of land acquired by Avraham in the land of Israel, which means the basis of our connection to Israel incredibly is a burial plot. What does this pattern teach us? That a Jewish life, and the future which is represented by marriage, can only emerge from the **passing of the generations that came before**. That's the primary reason why the Torah says "V'Hadarta P'nei Zakein" you must respect your elders, and our Parsha has a theme of Zikna, old age. **Not** simply because they are old but because they created the foundation for our future, and without that recognition, we can have no future.

Many have remarked on the age range of those who were killed at Tree of Life – 54 to 97 years old, and some have said, "Well, at least no young people died." But in truth there is a lesson here: We should reflect on the meaningful fact that these older individuals were the ones chosen to sanctify God's name. This event should remind us that we must value the older generations and maintain our precious connection to them. We must appreciate that the future of the Jewish people will be built on the backs of those generations, including those who were martyred in Pittsburgh.

This realization is especially poignant for our shul, where most of our members are young. We cannot survive simply by virtue of our youthful community. We must connect to our past and treasure our elders. And in that spirit, we will say a few chapters of tehillim after Mussaf, in memory of those who perished, and in merit of those who were injured, for their complete recovery. And we will pray that these deaths, which were *al kiddush Hashem*, which sanctified God's name, should bring life to the Jewish people forever. Shabbat shalom.