



Jewish Community and Multifaith Allies: Tree of Life Vigil
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Just as the sanctity of shabbat was shattered yesterday when a gunman burst through the doors of Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and murdered eleven Jews who had come to pray, so too has our sense of safety, as Jews in America, been shattered by this—the most violent anti-Semitic attack in our nation's history.

What do we do with this grief? This newfound sense of vulnerability? What do we do with the realization that yes—even here, where Jews have achieved unprecedented political, social and financial prominence—even here, we are other. We are targets of hatred and violence.

After four little girls were murdered in 16th street Baptist church in Birmingham, Dr. King said:

We must be concerned not merely about who murdered them, but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderer.

Dr. King was right then. And that message is as powerful, urgent and true today.

The trigger was pulled by one gunman, but what is the system, the way of life, the philosophy that produced the terrorist who rampaged through a Pittsburgh synagogue yesterday morning? We know anti-Semitism is on the rise in this country—the ADL indicates that the last two years have seen a spike in incidents from harassment to bomb threats and vandalism.

This shooter was driven by a very particular brand of anti-Semitism that was honed over centuries in Europe, and has now successfully migrated to the US. This is a right-wing nationalistic anti-Semitism, in which the Jew is the ultimate outsider, conspiring to undermine structures and systems of white power by funding and supporting movements for social change. The shooter believed this canard wholeheartedly, criticizing HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, a nonprofit organization that supports refugees, which he claimed was importing to America "invaders that kill our people." "I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered," he wrote, just before charging into the synagogue. "Screw your optics, I'm going in."

This new/ old anti-Semitism didn't emerge ex nihilo.

Over the past three years, America has turned from a place with a constant but quiet undercurrent of anti-Semitism to a place in which anti-Semitism is public, unabashed, and condoned from the highest offices. Accusations of "Soros the Globalist" cheating American workers, replete with hook nosed cartoons, have permeated the consciousness of a generation of angry, disaffected American white men who were looking for a scapegoat, and have been handed one.

Pittsburgh did not happen in a vacuum—it was the inevitable outcome of racialized hatred and anti-Semitism being fed, fueled and funded by those with a political agenda that literally puts our lives on the line.

Today we stand not only as a Jewish community, but alongside our multifaith allies and partners, because we know that Tree of Life now joins the sad and sorry list of sacred spaces that have borne witness to massacre in America, alongside the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in Oak Creek, Emanuel AME in Charleston, First Baptist in Sutherland Springs and others.

And we know that the spike in anti-Semitism in America today is part of a broader cultural trend of hatred and demonization many minority communities are facing, whether they be Jews, Muslims, Latinos, Blacks, Sikhs, LGBTQ folks, immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers.

Our multifaith partners stand with us. And we stand with them.

Arm in arm, side by side, reclaiming—through our tears and our conviction—an America that treats every one of us with love, respect, and dignity.

Our hearts are broken. Our sense of safety has been shattered.

And even as we struggle to hold the enormity of this tragedy, even as we grieve, we must be clear-headed and unequivocal in naming and condemning the disease of hatred that has permeated the culture of this nation, and the fanatical obsession with guns that has transformed it from hateful to deadly.

We send love and strength to the Jewish community of Pittsburgh—our family. *Zikhronam livrakha*—may the memories of those who perished reverberate in this world as a blessing for many years to come, and may the outpouring of support from around the world somehow bring comfort and consolation to those whose hearts have been shattered.