

RABBIS AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE



RESOURCES FOR THE
2016 NATIONAL GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION
SABBATH WEEKEND, DECEMBER 14 - 18



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Rabbis Against Gun Violence
Resource Packet

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Sabbath Weekend - December 14-18

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I BACKGROUND

On December 14, 2012, after fatally shooting his mother at their Newtown Connecticut home, a 20-year-old dangerously mentally ill man shot and killed twenty children aged between 6 and 7 years old, as well as six adult staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The incident was the third-deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

On Wednesday, December 14th, 2106, the 4th Annual National Vigil for All Gun Violence Victims will be held in Washington, D.C. at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, launching local vigils and commemorations across the nation from December 14-18th. Congregations from coast to coast will participate – offering prayers, songs, and education. Faith communities will remember those who have lost their lives to gunfire, pray for those whose lives have been forever changed because of gun related injuries or the loss of a loved one, and educate one another on proven strategies to reduce gun violence.

Spearheaded by Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence (a coalition of more than 50 national denominations and faith-based organizations), the Newtown Foundation, States United to Prevent Gun Violence, Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, and Organizing for Action, this 2016 weekend builds on the success of last year's 3rd annual National Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath Weekend during which 500 local events were held in 39 states and the District of Columbia.

II HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE

Please join Rabbis Against Gun Violence - together with places of worship and other faith communities and organizations across the nation - by pledging to participate in the 2016 National Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath Weekend on December 14 – 18, 2016.

Your congregation, community, school or family can participate by incorporating songs, readings, poems, prayers, sermons and/or discussions in your service, at a community gathering or vigil, or around your family Shabbat table. This Resource Packet has ready-to-use materials, suggestions, and links to other sources that make it easy for you to find what you might want or need to make this happen. You can also reach out to us directly for support, suggestions and guidance by emailing rabbisagv@gmail.com

If you plan to participate in any way, please email us at rabbisagv@gmail.com and let us know. Why? Because that way we can (1) help support you and keep you up to date with resources and information as they become available; (2) add your name (with your permission) to the Faiths United website listing the many congregations/communities participating across the country; (3) be aware of what our members and supporters are doing.

Thank you for your commitment to remember and act on behalf of those killed, injured, or devastated by the loss of loved ones to the rampant gun violence plaguing our country.

Eileen Soffer
Executive Director
Rabbis Against Gun Violence
rabbisagv@gmail.com



III

SONG SUGGESTIONS

- Anu Chayavim: an original 2016 gun violence prevention song written by Chana Rothman
Shareable video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxMmhGb8nqo>
Sheet music: <http://truah.org/images/AnuChayavimSheetMusic.pdf>
- Olam Chesed Yibaneh – written by R. Menachem Creditor
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHp-jcPlKIY&feature=youtu.be>
- Gesher Tzar M'Od
- Im Ein Ani Li Mi Li
- Lo Alecha
- Lo Yisa Goy
- Oseh Shalom
- Shalom Rav
- And The Youth Shall See Visions - Debbie Friedman
- Not By Might - Debbie Friedman
- Blowing In The Wind - Bob Dylan
- If I Had A Hammer - Lee Hays and Pete Seeger
- Turn, Turn, Turn - Pete Seeger
- No Easy Walk To Freedom - Peter Yarrow
- We Shall Overcome
- Down By The River Side (Study War No More)
- Amazing Grace



IV

LIST OF READINGS / PRAYERS / POETRY

- **God, Let Me Cry on Your Shoulder** by Rabbi Rachel Barenblat
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God, Let Me Cry on Your Shoulder

After the Newtown shootings

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

(This poem first appeared in Open My Lips, Ben Yehuda Press, 2016. Appears in Not By Might, page 205)

God, let me cry on Your shoulder.
Rock me like a colicky baby.
Promise me You won't forget

Strengthen the hands and hearts
of Your servants tasked with caring
for those wounded in body and spirit.

each of Your perfect reflections
killed today. Promise me
You won't let me forget, either.

Help us to find meaning
In the tiny lights we kindle tonight.
Help us to trust

I'm hollow, stricken like a bell.
Make of my emptiness a channel
for Your boundless compassion.

that our reserves of hope
and healing are enough
to carry us through.

Soothe the children who witnessed
things no child should see,
the teachers who tried to protect them

We are in Your hands: put us to work.
Ignite in us the unquenchable yearning
to reshape our world

but couldn't, the parents
who are torn apart with grief,
who will never kiss their beloveds again.

so that violence against children
never happens again, anywhere.
We are Your grieving heart.



Against Gun Violence

(© 2016 Alden Solovy and www.tobendlight.com All rights reserved. *Appears in Not By Might, page 201*)

God of the slain,
God of the murdered and the victim,
The voice of lamentation echoes across the land.
Wailing beside graves opened too soon,
Weeping beside stains of blood
From the dead and the injured
Pouring forth from bullet wounds:
The child shot,
The suicide,
The domestic assault,
The gang violence,
The mass murder,
The long night of death made easy by guns
And automatic weapons.
The long night of sorrow made easy
By reckless access to machines of slaughter.

Source of justice,
Rock of strength and truth,
You call upon us to stand
In the name of common sense and reason:
To witness on behalf of the innocent and the cut
down –
The widowed, orphaned and bereaved –

To answer the scourge of senseless loss,
To advocate for gun control,
To remove military weapons from a civilian
population,
To return sanity to our laws, our policies, our lives.

Bless those who dedicate themselves to gun
control.
Grant them the fortitude and perseverance.
May the work of their hands never falter
Nor despair deter them from their holy calling.

Bless those who are mourning the dead.
Grant them solace and comfort.
Bless those who are healing from the trauma of
gun violence.
Grant them lives of health and prosperity,
Joy and peace.

Blessed are You, God of All Being,
Who summons us to choose life,
First choose life,
Above all,
Choose life.

Weary

Rabbi Sara O'Donnell Adler. (*Not By Might, page 213*)

Weary
of doling out comfort
scattering sympathy
like dandelion seed.
It's too much
to look into the empty
pool of a mother's eyes
not knowing what to name
that blank stare
knowing she will never again
return to herself.

So we look away.

Widows, orphans,
they get their own words
but what of the mothers, the fathers
of children gunned down?
What word to describe
that screaming
and silent
devastation?



The Revolution of Love

Francine M. Gordon (*Not By Might, page 162*)

Is there a reason to own a gun when We are meant to live in peace?

Or is humanity destined to inhabit this earth with violence never to cease?

How do We change the flow of current events to reflect a world of love?

Clearly more than prayers or songs of praise
to the One that lives Above
are needed at this moment in time
when the power of words and the power of rhyme
must move Mankind to a different way
with our feet and our hands and our voice we must say

TAKE ACTION TODAY TO GET RID OF THIS EVIL
TOGETHER WE WILL CREATE A PEACEFUL UPHEAVAL

and ensure that anyone who holds a gun does so with love,
protecting Us, guarding Us, blessed by the One Up Above
who is looking down right now with a Broken Heart.
Come, together, our Revolution of Love Must Start.

Your Brother's Blood Cries Out To Me from the Earth!

The Courage to Press Forward

Rabbi Shawn Israel Zevit (*Not By Might, page 224*)

Praying for the souls of the dead,
the support for the survivors and their families
and the courage to press forward
with gun control in this country.
Radical love is the antidote for radical hate.
The heart of our work is recognizing
that our humanity unites all of us.
We must use every ounce of our being
to counter this culture
of dehumanization that infects our communities.
We lift up prayers for victims, families and friends.
We sit in protest or rise and walk in activist spirit.



More than the Lives of our Children

Rabbi Philip Weintraub (*Not By Might, page 226*)

Ribono Shel Olam/Master of the Universe
Let us imagine a world
without the scourge of gun violence.
Let us imagine a world
without another toddler killing herself or her friends.
Let us imagine a world
where weapons of war are not in our vehicles or on our backs.

What would it take?
How many deaths are enough?
We know that idol worship is forbidden, yet guns have become our idols.
They have ears but cannot hear, eyes but cannot see.
Yet we value them more than the lives of our children, our lovers, our friends.

Enough is enough.
No more hashtags. No more campaigns.
No more gun violence.

Not tomorrow.
Today.

Prayer for Peace

Adapted from Prayer for Peace in Paris
Rabbi Lev Meirowitz Nelson

May the One who blessed our ancestors
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah—
The Merciful One who blessed the Hebrew midwives as they stood up against an evil decree
and watched over baby Moses as he floated on the river—
Bless and protect all those hurt and affected by gun violence.
May God send calm and courage to all who are living in fear,
healing and well-being to all who are injured,
comfort to their families and communities,
and good counsel to those acting for the public safety.
May all those whose lives have been cut short be bound up in the Bond of Life;
May peace fill the earth as water fills the sea,
And may this be a season of Shalom around the world.

Oseh shalom bim'romav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu, ve'al kol Yisrael ve'al kol yoshvei tevel, ve'imru Amen.



God Full of Mercy

Rabbi Ben Goldstein (*Peace in Our Cities*, page 127)

Today I find myself thinking of the words of the great Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai z"l:

*God-Full-of-Mercy, the prayer for the dead. If God was not full of mercy,
Mercy would have been in the world, not just in Him.*

Too often we are awakened to news of violence and death. Too often we are left with bloodshed and murder. We wonder when it will end. We wonder what a man could be thinking to intentionally inflict so much hurt on people he doesn't even know. We wonder how a God who created the beauty of nature could allow evil and destruction to mar his beautiful canvas. The red streams created by nonsensical acts leave us wondering about God's benevolence or lack thereof.

What is there left for us to do when the news makes us want to cry and cover our ears to pain and suffering? What recourse do we have to battle the pessimism and bleakness that we feel when we see these stories? How do we keep the darkness at bay?

... We all find ways of reaching out to catch that light that will shine through the darkness that surrounds us. I don't know what helps other people face the depravity of life and Man. For me, all I can do is pray. I pray to a God whose attributes I do not know. I pray to a universe whose meaning is beyond me. I pray that all life has meaning. I pray that my life can serve a purpose. I pray that the lives of those who have been taken from us will live on. I pray that God exists and can hear my prayers.

God Full of Mercy:

Have mercy on those whose lives ended before their time. Comfort those whose sobs ring in our ears. Let them know that they are not alone.

God, guide us through this difficult time as we fumble our way through the darkness.

Help your children whose hope has been diminished. Show us that goodness and beauty can triumph. Bless us to bring light into this world. Bless us to do the work that needs to be done.

May we be blessed to do God's work and may God be blessed through the work of our hands.



Rise Up, Choose Life

Rabbi Menachem Creditor

God, we know we must act,
and we know that, in order to act,
we must feel the urgency — Your Urgency.
We must channel Your pain
at the deaths of Your children
and remind our lawmakers to choose life.
We've been too quiet,
mistaking status updates and reactionary prayers
for true repentance for the worship of a weapon.
Our nation has endured
the epidemic of Gun Violence
for far too long.
We pray to You for renewal
as we spread our protective wings over one another again,
running to justice,
refusing weariness,
and choosing life.
May we sing louder than weapons and merit to see You in each other's eyes,
sanctifying Your Name
by standing together
by rising up again,
this time rebuilding Your World
by saving each other.
In the pursuit of Tzedek (Justice)
and Rachamim (Loving Compassion)
God is in this Place
And we must know it!
Newtown, Charleston, Aurora, Orlando, San Bernardino, Columbine, Fort Hood, Virginia Tech.
Too many to name.
So many lives, no -
So many worlds -
cut short.
My friends,
let us
Rise up with
our feet,
our hands, and
our words.



Inspiration From Our Sages and Texts

Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world.
And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world.
(Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5; Yerushalmi Talmud 4:9, Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 37a)

Pray as if everything depended on God; act as if everything depended on you. (Gates of Prayer)

The opposite of good is not evil; it is indifference (Elie Wiesel)

Lo alecha bamlacha ligmor, v'lo atah ben chorin l'hivatel mimena. You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to abstain from it. (Rabbi Tarfon, Pirkei Avot 2:21)

Some are guilty, but all are responsible. (Abraham Joshua Heschel)

Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor (Lev 19:16)

V

SAMPLE SERMON

A Message for those Entering the 21st Century

Rachel Weinberg, from Rabbi Joseph P. Weinberg z"l
(Not By Might, page 59)

The following is an excerpt of a sermon given by my father, Rabbi Joseph P. Weinberg z"l, on Rosh Hashanah, 1999. He knew it would likely be the last sermon he delivered. After battling brain cancer for nearly two years, the tumor was back.

And so, in the fall of 1999, Rabbi Joseph Weinberg composed the message he felt was most important to share with those who were about to enter a new century. Through his thirty-six years in the rabbinate, he had never shied away from speaking about tough topics – abortion, euthanasia, gay rights, war and peace – you name the topic.

He knew there was no lack of important issues to address as individuals – as a community. And yet, for his final sermon, he addressed one issue where he thought immediate action was needed. And so he spoke on that Rosh Hashanah night to his grandchildren:



You are all asleep in your beds, all snug and warm with so many stuffed animals that I can hardly find your faces. There is no better picture than this.

But I have seen other images this day; frightened little children just your age, holding hands, being led away from the horror at the North Valley Jewish Community Center in Los Angeles – another in a long line of shootings – Littleton, Jonesboro, Atlanta, Skokie.

How often have we seen teenagers racing for their lives out of a terror-filled school, children sobbing uncontrollably at a playmate's funeral, or parents walking their children to the bus stop afraid to even let go of their precious child's hand? Offices, schools, rural areas, urban centers – no place is safe anymore.

There are a few things we can tell the inhabitants of the next century that is more important than this: the gun madness must end...

This is a huge undertaking, my dear grandchildren and inhabitants of the 21st century, for I'm asking you to tackle a gigantic problem, and in some circles, still a very unpopular cause.

I speak of the gun issue now because clearly the safety of our children is at risk. Easily one can cry out on this subject, on any subject, "I'm only one person. What can I do?"

I am sure you will be asked more than once in your lifetime to step forward and take a stand. Remember always that Judaism tells us that every person is a partner with God, and every person can make a difference.

The poet, Aaron Zeitlin wrote:

"Praise me," says God, "I will know that you love me. Curse me, I will know that you love me. Praise me or curse me, I will know that you love me. But if you sit fenced off in your apathy, entrenched in – I don't care," says God... "if you see suffering and don't cry out... if you don't praise and don't revile, then I created you in vain," says God.

Failure is not the problem – only one's unwillingness to try.



VI

ADDITIONAL SOURCES FOR READINGS / PRAYERS / POETRY / SERMONS

Two Books from Rabbis Against Gun Violence with Collected Writings on Gun Violence Prevention

Not By Might: Channeling The Power Of Faith To End Gun Violence

A 2016 collection of writings edited by Menachem Creditor

Foreword by Shannon Watts. Introduction by Eileen Soffer

This volume of writings was published on the heels of the deadliest mass shooting in modern American history at Pulse, a nightclub in Orlando, Florida. It contains several of the selections reprinted above along with a great many more, including longer reflections and sermons from Jewish leaders across the country. The more than 60 contributors to the collection include Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Robyn Fryer Bodzin, Aryeh Cohen, Hannah Dresner, Denise L. Eger, Noah Farkas, Lauren Holtzblatt, Michael Adam Latz, Jesse M. Olitzky, and Jeffrey Salkin. This collection is available from Amazon and Create Space:

Amazon: <http://tinyurl.com/gn5kuch>

Create Space: <https://www.createpace.com/6353721>

Peace In Our Cities

A collection of writings edited by Menachem Creditor

Preface by Rabbi Jill Jacobs. Introduction by Pastor Michael McBride

Afterward by Teny Oded Gross. New Afterward by Dr. Erica Brown

This volume of writings was published shortly after the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown CT. It contains reflections, poetry, and sermons from Jewish leaders across the country. The more than thirty contributors to this collection include Rabbis Sharon Brous, Gary S. Creditor, Amy Eilberg, Ron Fish, Steven Greenberg, Lauren Grabelle Herrmann, Sheldon Lewis, Jack Moline, Jack Riemer, and Julie Schonfeld.

This collection is available from Amazon: <http://tinyurl.com/gwbuy3u>

Faiths United To Prevent Gun Violence Website

Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence is a coalition of more than 50 national denominations and faith-based organizations. On their website, they have resources provided by national, state, and local faith organizations to help plan a prayer, moment of reflection, call to action and more.

<http://www.decembersabbath.org/Judaism/>



VII

SOME GUN VIOLENCE FACTS

* Roughly 91 people are killed each day by guns. Of those, approximately 7 are children and teens. Approximately 33,000 people are killed each year by guns.

* Data from the National Crime Victimization Survey indicates that between 2010 and 2014, there were an estimated 43,000 hate crimes committed in the United States that involved guns.

* People on the terror watch lists legally purchased guns over 2,000 times over 11 years—because the FBI had no authority to block those sales.

* Young black men, particularly those in impoverished, dense urban areas, are especially at risk of gun violence. Constituting just 6% of the US population, black men account for more than 50% of all gun homicides each year. Firearm homicide is the leading cause of death for black males ages 15–34.

* Every 16 hours between 2006 and 2014, an American woman was fatally shot by a current or former romantic partner, totaling 544 deaths annually.

* In 2015, on average, a toddler in America shot someone once a week. Between 2007 and 2011, an average of 62 children age 14 and under died each year in reported unintentional shootings. But strong evidence shows that the actual count is a shocking 61% higher.

* Americans are 25 times more likely to be murdered with a gun than people in other developed countries.

* Over the past 5 years, more Americans have been murdered with guns than with all other weapons combined.

* Suicides account for about 2/3 of all gun death in the U.S. Roughly 14 veterans kill themselves each day with a firearm. If you can prolong the time between the often-impulsive decision to commit suicide and access to a gun, you can greatly decrease the chance of the attempt. And, of those people who attempt suicide and survive, only about 10 percent end up dying from suicide. So, preventing the attempted suicides – in this case by limiting access to guns by keeping them unloaded, locked, or out of the house – can save lives.

Sources:

<http://smartgunlaws.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Healing-Communities-in-Crisis-2.pdf>

<http://www.thetrace.org/2016/02/woman-shot-killed-frequency-domestic-violence/>

<http://www.thetrace.org/2015/12/gun-violence-stats-2015/>

http://everytownresearch.org/reports/innocents_lost/

<http://www.thetrace.org/2016/03/guns-suicide-risk-factor-harvard-study/>

<http://www.thetrace.org/2015/11/gun-suicides-mental-illness-statistics/>

Niraj Chokshi, “When Hate Crimes and Guns Mix: What Five Years of Federal Data Show,” <http://wapo.st/1sCj2za>.

“Senators Introduce Bill to Stop terrorists from Buying Firearms, Explosives,” February 24, 2015, available at

<http://1.usa.gov/1zIBli>



VIII

ADDITIONAL SOURCES ON GUN VIOLENCE

The Trace <https://www.thetrace.org/>

“The Trace is an independent, nonprofit and nonpartisan news organization dedicated to expanding public understanding of gun violence in the United States. There is an urgent need for the knowledge that public interest journalism can provide, because in this case one problem – America’s epidemic rates of shooting deaths and injuries, which leave 33,000 people killed annually and another 79,000 wounded – is compounded by another: a shortage of information about the issue. It is The Trace’s mission to close that deficit through daily reporting, investigations, analysis, and commentary on the policy, politics, culture, and business of guns in America.”

Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence <http://smartgunlaws.org/>

“Founded in the wake of the July 1, 1993, assault weapon massacre at 101 California Street in San Francisco that left eight dead and six wounded, the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence is now the premier resource for legal expertise and information regarding state and federal firearms laws. Made up of the foremost gun law attorneys in the nation, the Law Center tracks and analyzes firearm legislation in all 50 states, files amicus briefs in critical Second Amendment cases across the country, and works with lawmakers and advocates to craft and promote legislation that will reduce gun violence and save lives... The Law Center operates as part of the Americans for Responsible Solutions Foundation.”

The Violence Policy Center (VPC) <http://www.vpc.org/>

“The Violence Policy Center (VPC) works to stop gun death and injury through research, education, advocacy, and collaboration. Founded in 1988... the VPC informs the public about the impact of gun violence on their daily lives, exposes the profit-driven marketing and lobbying activities of the firearms industry and gun lobby, offers unique technical expertise to policymakers, organizations, and advocates on the federal, state, and local levels, and works for policy changes that save lives.

The Center for American Progress <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/view/>

(may need to cut and paste url into browser) “The Center for American Progress is an independent nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans, through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.

Everytown For Gun Safety <http://everytown.org/learn/>

Everytown For Gun Safety is a movement of Americans working together to end gun violence and build safer communities.

The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence <http://www.bradycampaign.org/gun-violence>

“It’s been more than 30 years since the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan when Jim Brady was shot. Since that day, Jim and Sarah Brady, along with the Brady Campaign, have been on a decades-long quest to prevent gun violence... Brady has announced the bold goal to cut the number of U.S. gun deaths in half by 2025.”



IX

NAMES OF THOSE KILLED AT SANDY HOOK

School personnel

Rachel D'Avino, 29, teacher's aide

Dawn Hochsprung, 47, principal

Anne Marie Murphy, 52, teacher's aide

Lauren Rousseau, 30, teacher

Mary Sherlach, 56, school psychologist

Victoria Leigh Soto, 27, teacher

Students

Charlotte Bacon, 6

James Mattioli, 6

Daniel Barden, 7

Grace McDonnell, 7

Olivia Engel, 6

Emilie Parker, 6

Josephine Gay, 7

Jack Pinto, 6

Dylan Hockley, 6

Noah Pozner, 6

Madeleine Hsu, 6

Caroline Previdi, 6

Catherine Hubbard, 6

Jessica Rekos, 6

Chase Kowalski, 7

Avielle Richman, 6

Jesse Lewis, 6

Benjamin Wheeler, 6

Ana Márquez-Greene, 6

Allison Wyatt, 6