

Shalom Congregation Shaarei Kodesh,

On Shabbat, I delivered a kavanah, an intention, to the prayer for our country found in our siddur. It is a prayer that, when we were together in person, would happen week after week. A chaver/congregant, or a sacred guest, would come up to reader's table to deliver the prayer. When we say a prayer, week after week, we tend to ignore its full impact. There are some weeks when prayer speaks to us in different ways because of the experiences we encountered that week. This past Shabbat, I knew that the words of the Prayer for Our Country would be more impactful this week than in previous weeks. The Prayer for Our Country that we recite today was composed by Professor Louis Ginzberg in 1920. The prayer that used to be recited (and is still recited in Orthodox synagogues) is called the Prayer for the Government. The Lev Shalom Siddur offers a commentary on how these two prayers differ, and why this difference matters to us, Jews living in America: Early versions of this prayer referred to God as the one who gives dominion to kings and reflected the anxiety that Jews felt as a beleaguered minority. The prayer we say today, A Prayer for Our Country, is a prayer for its people, the source of authority in a democracy. Earlier prayers asked that the monarch be compassionate to the Jewish people, but this prayer hopes the leaders of the country will be fair and just to all, and that it works to bring peace and justice to the world.

“Creator of all flesh, bless all the inhabitants of our country with Your spirit. May citizens of all races and creeds forge a common bond in true harmony to banish all hatred and bigotry and to safeguard the ideals and free institutions which are the pride and glory of our country.”

Last week, we watched in horror as a gunman killed eight people in Atlanta, Georgia at Asian massage parlors. Their names:

Soon Chung Park 박순정, age 74

Hyun Jung Grant [김]현정, age 51

Sun Cha Kim 김선자, age 69

Yong Ae Yue 유영애, age 63

Delaina Ashley Yaun, age 33

Paul Andre Michels, age 54

Xiaojie Tan 譚小洁, age 49

Daoyou Feng 冯道友, age 44

The murderer claimed he did not target these victims because they were Asian-Americans, but a witness claims that he said, “I want to kill all the Asians.” Regardless of this incident, we have witnessed a year where Asian-Americans have been targeted and attacked by people who have blamed them for the spread of the Coronavirus. We have seen incidents where elderly Asian men and women were physically attacked on the streets, and many incidents of verbal abuse. As Jews, we know what it feels like to be a stranger and the ‘scapegoat’. We have been blamed for outbreaks of plagues and viruses and attacked; we have stood in their shoes. As we pray for our Country, let us pray that the words we say have an impact upon our hearts and the hearts of our fellow citizens. God created the world with words, and as partners in creation with God, we have the ability to create the type of society we would like to see. I urge you to watch a powerful D’var Torah by Rabbi Angela Buchdahl, the first Asian-American to be ordained as a rabbi, who leads Central Synagogue in New York City.

Anti-Asian Hate: We Too Were The Stranger by Rabbi Angela Buchdahl



In her D'var Torah, she speaks about how Passover is a time for us to empathize with the stranger among us. However, it is important to note that some Asian-Americans are Jews, part of our covenant, integral members of our congregations. It is not *they*, rather, it is *us*.

Let us stand by Jews of Asian descent, and all Asian-Americans in our great country. May the names of those souls lost be a blessing for us all, and may God comfort their families.

Rabbi David Baum

Here are some links to statements and resources to take action:

Joint Statement from ADL and Committee of 100 on the Rise of Anti-Asian Xenophobia and Hate- <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/joint-statement-from-adl-and-committee-of-100-on-the-rise-of-anti-asian>

Challenging Anti-Asian Bias and Acting as an Ally - Anti-Defamation League (a resource for educators and families) - <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/challenging-anti-asian-bias-and-acting-as-an-ally>

The Jewish Theological Seminary Denounces Anti-Asian Violence
<https://www.jtsa.edu/jts-denounces-anti-asian-violence>

Speak up against anti-Asian hate (Anti-Defamation League) - <https://www.adl.org/Anti-Asian-Hate>

Link to YouTube D'var Torah -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6cZhaB3wl_A&ab_channel=CentralSynagogue