



THE RABBI'S COLUMN: TIKKUN OLAM

By Mark Sameth

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I'll spare you. You don't need a rabbi to preach to you about how sad the Connecticut massacre was; or about the preciousness of life; or about how we need to appreciate every moment; or about how we should hold our children a little tighter. We're all feeling all of the same things, and no one need articulate any of that for any of us.

What I do want to talk to you about is "tikkun olam," and how it obligates us to now act. The expression "tikkun olam" (repair of the world) comes from the Jewish mystical tradition and it takes what to some religionists would be a radical theological position, but one which liberals, progressives, humanists, and other rational, sensitive, non-doctrinaire, non-fundamentalist people all come to each in their own way: That this cannot be what God intended for the world. Not even close. Something is fundamentally broken here; something cries out desperately for repair.

We can do better than this. And we must, and we will. Sometimes, it seems, things have to get so bad that there is a shock to collective system, a blow to the collective psyche. Such was the news that twenty little children and six adults had been mowed down at their school in broad daylight. How is this possible?

It's possible because our country is awash in guns: handguns, rifles, automatic and semi-automatic weapons with magazine clips holding as many as 100 bullets each. Why that is, is of little interest to me. I'll leave the pondering of the underlying factors that went into creating such a culture of violence to others. But my Jewish tradition is very clear: Do not stand idly by the blood of your brother (or sister, or child, or someone else's child).

The time to act is now. The rabbi's group to which I belong – the CCAR – has been long on record in favor of sane gun control laws, and was very active in the last fight on this issue, which sadly we lost. Well, the fight is about to resume again. Indeed by the time you read this (I'm writing in mid-December) you may already have heard of actions being planned. Petition drives are ongoing, and I hear from a very good source that plans are already under way for a major march on Washington this coming spring. Please, please, please – do not just feel sad. Feel committed to repairing our world, and join with us as actions are announced.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In attempting to write this month's column, it's virtually impossible to think or write about anything else other than the recent catastrophic and unspeakable tragedy that occurred in Newtown, CT.

Twenty beautiful and innocent young children together with six adults senselessly and coldly murdered is difficult for any society or culture to comprehend. It also leaves us with more questions than answers.

While grieving and mourning as a nation, the fact remains, that as a society, we subconsciously have been selectively desensitized to a culture of violence that exists, is accepted, and often celebrated in our films, music and video games.

Moreover, why would a parent have a virtual arsenal of assault weapons and ammunition in her home? Was anything good ever going to come from this? Only tragedy, accidental or otherwise, was going to eventually occur from this set of circumstances.

None of the weapons involved are even remotely

considered to be weapons of sport (legal game hunting or recreational target shooting). Some organizations (the NRA among others) clinging reflexively to the Second Amendment is preposterous.

When the Second Amendment was adopted as part of the Bill of Rights in 1791, it protected the, "Right of the people to keep and bear arms." As a relatively new, expanding and still embryonic country, the Founding Fathers undoubtedly felt that much of our nation at that time had reason to need protection for their homes and families (with law enforcement agencies still underdeveloped or non-existent in some parts of the nation).

However, 221 years later, with a mature infrastructure, larger population and considerably more developed military and law enforcement agencies in place, there is no possible productive need or result that can occur from private citizens carrying assault weapons.

Additionally, what the Founding Fathers seemingly failed to

envision or consider with the adoption of the Second Amendment were the remarkable technological advances that would occur in weaponry over the many decades to come (single shot Muskets or pistols are a far cry from AK-47, Bushmaster AR-15, Glock, or Sig-Sauer assault weapons).

The Bushmaster AR-15 assault rifle (used in the Newtown tragedy) and used by the U.S. military in Iraq, is incredibly and unbelievably readily available for purchase nationally at Wal-Mart or on their website.

A national ban on assault weapons for non-military and non-police use is long overdue. Perhaps the tragic events of Newtown will be a watershed moment and tipping point, and the young, innocent victims of Newtown, as well as the victims of so many other episodes of gun violence will not have died in vain.

— Jerry Neuburger

Pleasantville Community Synagogue Mission Statement

Pleasantville Community Synagogue is a transdenominational, inclusive community, a spiritual home deeply rooted in Torah (study), Avodah (prayer), and Gemilut Chasadim (deeds of loving-kindness). We seek to facilitate lifelong spiritual growth by engaging each member wherever that member may be on life's journey, embracing all generations. We encourage Tikkun Middot (repair of the self) and Tikkun Olam (repair of the world) through Jewish education for all ages, social action, Ahavat Yisrael (love of Israel), and a commitment to the understanding and fulfillment of mitzvot. We are a highly participatory community which relies on the commitment of time and energy from all members and which aspires to become an integral part of each member's life and their family's lives.



HEBREW SCHOOL HAPPENINGS

Ronni Metzger, Principal

December began with festive and fun Chanukah celebrations. The Bet and Gimel students performed Chanukah songs led by Lisa Lipkin and accompanied by Vivian Freiheit at the Atria Senior Center in Briarcliff Manor. Cards were given out to the residents and we all joined in reciting the blessings as we lit the menorah. It was a wonderful experience for all involved. We then returned to PCS where dreidles were a recurring theme. We decorated wooden dreidles, we colored velvet dreidle magnets and even made edible dreidles! We ended the morning enjoying delicious latkes! The later session enjoyed making dreidles out of clay (really) and playing some competitive games of dreidle. The students also created beautiful art projects, which are hanging in the sanctuary, and everyone got involved in making latkes. The students peeled and grated the potatoes and onions, mixed in the eggs and salt and pepper, and several terrific parents manned the kitchen frying up hundreds of latkes. They were so good, that not a single one was left!! It was a great start to the month.

Sadly, the month ended with our country experiencing a devastating disaster, when a crazy man broke into a Connecticut elementary school armed with an assault weapon and two handguns and opened fire, massacring 20 children and 6 adults. The grief has been indescribable. We are all struggling to recover from those horrific events and trying to make sense of an incomprehensible tragedy; it is impossible to find the words to express our anguish.

Last month, after the hurricane, we all came together to help one another with a warm place to stay, a warm meal or simply a warm shower. However, after this senseless killing, we came together, but there was little we could offer one another. As a community, one thing we could do was pray. I, however, chose to follow the example of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, and "pray with my legs." Rabbi Heschel believed that to make the world a better place, we have to take action. He described walking in the Civil Rights March with Martin Luther King, Jr. as "praying with his legs." I too, decided to take action. I signed petitions for tighter gun control laws. I motivated my Zayin students to bring the words of our sacred texts to life and "not stand idly by" while others suffer, and write letters to President Obama, Governor Cuomo, our Senators or Representatives, demanding immediate actions to stop the violence, using the reference from Pirke Avot, "If not now, then when?" It was cathartic. Working with the students and getting involved made me feel less helpless and maybe a little hopeful that we helped to make our home a safer place. Even if it is just a tiny step, it is a step in the right direction, and a prayer that I am hoping will be heard.

I also want our families to know that the synagogue has taken some immediate precautions, including locking doors, adding a chime to the alarm system so we hear when someone opens the doors, ensuring that all the alarm zones are in working order. I have also contacted the Pleasantville Police Department to come to PCS to give us a safety assessment. I will provide updates as they are received.





Warmest thanks to Dale Blum and Cris Martinez for the wonderful photos!



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lhirschschultz@shalompcs.com

Gary Greenwald
ggreenwald@shalompcs.com

Jerry Neuburger
jneuburger@shalomPCS.com

Kiersten Zweibaum
kzweibaum@shalompcs.com

Amy Gutenplan
info@shalompcs.com

Rabbi Mark Sameth
rabbi@shalompcs.com

To contact PCS: Phone (914) 769-2672; Fax (914) 769-1795; Website: www.shalomPCS.com
Marcy Gray, Synagogue Administrator: (914) 769-2672; mgray@shalomPCS.com
Ronni Metzger, Religious School: (914) 773-0043; principal@shalompcs.com
Barbara Doctor, Member Accounts: (914) 747-3017; Accounts@shalomPCS.com

A THANK YOU FROM STATEN ISLAND

It is amazing to see the progress that the community has made and I am very happy to say that slowly but surely we are returning back to normal!

Our community has been working endlessly to repair and rebuild their homes, and businesses have begun to open their doors again! It was wonderful to see how the neighborhood worked together as one to help each other in any way possible.

We were able to return to our school building on November 20th. The students as well as the teachers were thrilled to be "home"! The only damage that remains to our building is the boiler needs to be replaced so we are using a temporary one for now.

There are neighborhoods in Staten Island who unfortunately aren't recovering as quickly. They are determined to rebuild and I know through their determination, heart and soul they will!

Through the generous donations from the people of your synagogue and other kind, loving people, we were able to help support our community. A room was set up in our school where people from the community could come to collect much needed supplies and whatever support they needed to rebuild. At first, the most needed supplies were cleaning supplies, gloves, and masks so we were able to distribute these items. Then families were given gift cards based on need. Many families were also given clothes and toys.

Staten Island was changed forever due to the effects of Hurricane Sandy. However, we were changed for the good. We have come together in a way no one would have expected. We have learned that you can still rely on the kindness of strangers.

God bless you for helping us during this most difficult time! I will never forget what you did, it meant so much to so many! It made it easier to know that there were people who cared and wanted to help! Thank you from the bottom of my heart!


- AnnMarie Guinto-Palmeri, Teacher, P.S. 52, Staten Island, NY



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a donation for my
school that was really
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for your
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for helping
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ASK THE RABBI: How to become Jewish, Jewish foods, life on other planets, and other things

On December 6 Rabbi Mark met with our 4th grade (Kita Gimmel) class. Here is a brief excerpt from that wide-ranging discussion:

Caleb Freiheit: How do you become Jewish?

Rabbi Mark: Well, it can be as simple as being born or adopted into a Jewish family. It may be that both of your parents are Jewish, or that one parent is Jewish, and your parents have decided to raise you as part of the Jewish community. But sometimes an adult - who didn't grow up Jewish - decides that he or she wants to become Jewish. In that case - because they didn't go to Hebrew school - they study with a rabbi, and then we have a ceremony welcoming them to the Jewish community!

Benjamin Hahn: Why are there foods that Jews don't eat?

Rabbi Mark: Do you guys know what Ben is talking about?

Charlotte Harrison: I know! We don't mix milk and meat.

Rabbi Mark: Right; some Jews do not eat milk and meat at the same meal. Why? Because a long time ago there was a famous dish made from cooking a young goat in the milk of its mother. And the Jews thought that was way cruel. The Torah doesn't allow it. And to remind us to be kind to animals the Rabbis made a rule about eating milk and meat separately. There are also foods the Torah says are OK and not OK to eat. Some Jews follow those rules today and others only follow them in their home, and others don't follow them. These are the rules of "kashrut" or "keeping kosher."

Charlotte Harrison: Which rabbi wrote the Torah?

Rabbi Mark: *(Smiling)* Well...the Torah was actually written before there were rabbis! Some people believe that God inspired Moses to write the whole Torah. Some people believe it was written by Ezra the Scribe. Some people believe that many people helped write it. But we've only had rabbis for a little over 2000 years, and the Torah is much older than that!

Jake Leis: Why do we have private prayers at the end of the Standing Prayer (Amidah)?

Rabbi Mark: Well, the prayer book, the siddur, was written by the rabbis a long time ago. I think they did a great job. But they were smart enough to know that there was no way they could know what Jake would be feeling today, what Jake would need to say to God today. So they made a rule that everyone should end their prayers with their own words. What is troubling me today? What am I grateful for today? What do I need to do to make the world a better place today? Those are the sorts of things we're supposed to think about and say to God in our hearts at the end of prayer.

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ASK THE RABBI, CONTINUED

Jake: And why do we say “amen”?

Rabbi Mark: Everyone who speaks English knows the word “amen” – but it comes from the Hebrew “emunah” (faith). Amen means “I believe it!” Most Jews will say amen only to someone else’s prayer to show that they believe it too. But some Jews, like many non-Jews, say amen after their own prayers.

Maia Mayers: How many words are in the Torah?

Rabbi Mark: Wait a minute, I actually know this one! Three hundred and four thousand and something. OK, count how long it takes me to go upstairs, get my book, and come back! (*22 seconds later*). This book is called a “concordance” and it has every word in the Torah and tells you how many times each word is used, and where the word appears. And here in the front of the book it says that there are a total of 304,805 words in the Torah. I was close! I learned this a few years ago when another student asked me during Ask The Rabbi!

Matthea Schor: Who made the Israeli flag?

Rabbi Mark: Well, in the old days every tribe had its own banner. Has anyone ever been in a parking lot with their mom or dad and they can’t find the car? (*All the hands go up, and lots of excited chatter.*) OK, well imagine you’re in the desert with 600,000 Jews! How are you going to find your tent? So as a start, each tribe had their own flag so you could know your section. But the modern Israeli flag? I’d have to look that one up. (*The answer is Lena Harris, who sewed what was then called the Zionist Flag in the New York City awning shop of her son Morris Harris, for the first Zionist Congress in 1897 Basel Switzerland. This became the official flag of the State of Israel on October 28, 1948, five months after the country was established.*)

Sydney Schulz: Why is script in English connected and Hebrew script is not?

Rabbi Mark: That’s a good point, Sydney! Well, what’s the reason for script?

Sydney: So that you can write faster.

Rabbi Mark: Right. And Hebrew script, like English script, is much faster to write. By the way, did you know that the English language was not even invented until about 500 years ago! Hebrew has been around for more than 4,000 years!

Noah Solomon: Why did God make other planets?

Rabbi Mark: How many of you think that there is life on other planets? (*Almost all of the hands go up.*) OK, well, we don’t know for a fact that there is. But just last week they discovered carbon on Mars, and carbon is one of the things you need for there to be life. I think it’s probable that there is life on other planets; I don’t think God created an entire Universe with life on one planet alone.

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ASK THE RABBI, CONTINUED

Noah: And how was Jewish religion made?

Rabbi Mark: Well, how many of you have heard of the country Iraq? (*Hands up all over the room.*) Well, that's where Judaism started. There was a group of people there – long before the country was even called Iraq – and the people were called the Habiru. Say it fast. Does it sound like a word you know? (*Hebrew! they shout.*) Right! And two of these Habirus were named Abraham and Sarah, who were the first in their time to believe that there was only one God in the Universe, that we're all connected to each other, all part of one reality. And they left and moved to Canaan, which later was called Israel, and that's how the Jewish religion began.

Ethan Spanierman: Why do we stand when we open the Ark?

Rabbi Mark: Out of respect. There's a rule that when the Torah is moving we are to stand out of respect. But we have a tradition of rising when the Ark doors are open, since we know the Torah is about to be moving. In the old days, when a teacher walked into the room all the students would rise out of respect. Maybe Mora Jennifer will want to begin that tradition again here at the PCS Hebrew School!

Ethan: And what do you have to do to become a rabbi?

Rabbi Mark: Well, after four years of college I spent five years studying in what is called a "rabbinical school" - one of those years they require all of us to spend studying in Jerusalem; an amazing experience!

Mora Jennifer: Do all of the rabbinical schools require that?

Rabbi Mark: I know that both the Reform and Conservative seminaries – HUC and JTS – do require it.

Joshua Zweibaum: What's your favorite Israeli food?

Rabbi Mark: Well, Israeli food is actually from all over the world, because Jews are from all over the world. So for Indian Jews their food has curry. For Chinese Jews, noodles are very popular (Marco Polo, the great Italian explorer, first ate noodles in China and brought it back to Italy where they called it spaghetti!) I love all of those foods. But I think my favorite Israeli food is a spice called "zatar" – you can eat it on hummus, or just on a piece of warm pita bread with oil. It's the best!

Maya Solnick: What is your Hebrew name?

Rabbi Mark: Thanks for asking! It's Mordechai Tzvi.

Ben Klingner: What's your favorite holiday?

Rabbi Mark: My favorite Jewish holiday is always the closest one! So this week my favorite holiday is Channukah. But around Sukkot I would tell you that that's my favorite holiday, because we put a sukkah up in our backyard – it's like a clubhouse! – and we eat our meals in the Sukkah, and have parties there, and if the weather is good we even sleep there at night, looking up through the roof to watch the full moon move across the sky. Still, my absolute favorite Jewish holiday would have to be Shabbat, even though it comes every week. That's my favorite. Guys, thank you all so much for your wonderful questions. If you have any more – and I hope you do – just write them on a note (the Yiddish word is "kvittel") and put them under the door to my study, and I'll write you back. Thanks again! Today was great!

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Stuart Kleinman, father of Jennifer Taboh	January 22
Leslie Ogrin, father of Mara Cohen	January 23
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To All PCS Members:

If you or another member suffer personal tragedy or loss or are otherwise in need of help, please immediately call Rabbi Mark at 769-2672, and Michael Gold at 238-9219.

NEWSLETTER ACCEPTS ADS!

The PCS Newsletter is published monthly, online, from September through June, and it is emailed to every member family as well as to prospective members and some Jewish organizations.

If you provide professional or business services in the area, the PCS newsletter might provide some extra, valuable visibility. To arrange for your ad to appear in the newsletter, here's what you need to know:

*** Deadlines:**

Ads should be submitted by the 15th of the month. They can be emailed to Judy Chinitz at judyhope@optonline.net or cristina@lightbodymusic.com.

*** Ad Specifications:**

Ads will be published in one size only: one-quarter page, which is approximately 3 1/2 x 4 3/4 inches. The artwork should be provided by the advertiser.

*** Advertising Rates:**

The cost per ad (for 10 issues - no bulletin published in July and August) is \$100 for 1/4 page. Note: Checks preferred. Can be mailed to Pleasantville Community Synagogue, PO Box 148, Pleasantville, NY 10570 with "newsletter ad" in the memo section. To pay by credit card, please call the synagogue office at 914-769-2672.



Pleasantville Community Synagogue

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Free to all but donations are welcome.



PCS COMMITTEE CHAIRS

All the Committees of The Pleasantville Community Synagogue are eager for your participation and suggestions. If you'd like to get more involved in the life of the PCS community, this is the way to begin! Below are the names of the committees, their chairs, and contact information.

Adult Education

David Felder
info@shalomPCS.com

B'nei Mitzvah

Ed Sperling
edsperling@gmail.com

Building Committee

Richard Levine
rlvine@shalomPCS.com

Jewish Education

Kiersten Zweibaum
info@shalomPCS.com

Communications

Cristina Altieri-Martinez
cmartinez@shalomPCS.com

Spiritual Life

Peter Schaffer
pschaffer@shalomPCS.com

Finance

Oren Cohen
ocohen@shalomPCS.com

Fundraising

Kenneth Furst
kfurst@shalomPCS.com

High Holidays

Jerry Neuburger
jneuburger@shalomPCS.com

Human Resources

Lisa Lipkin
llipkin@shalomPCS.com

Membership Engagement

Laurie Hirsch Schulz
lhirschschulz@shalomPCS.com

Membership Outreach

Leyla Nakisbendi
Leyla@shalomPCS.com

Israel Action Committee

Ofri Felder
ofelder@shalomPCS.com

Seth Rutman
srutman@shalomPCS.com

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Michael Gold
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ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

The PCS Newsletter is published monthly, online, from September through June. Articles and photos should be submitted by the 24th of the month. They can be e-mailed to Judith Chinitz, Editor, at judyhope@optonline.net or dropped off at the newsletter box in the Synagogue office.

Pleasantville Community Synagogue * 219 Bedford Road * Pleasantville, NY 10570
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FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR YOUR SUPPORT

General Fund

Finances any need of the synagogue considered necessary by the Board of Trustees. All unspecified gifts are credited to the General Fund.

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

Supports various individuals, organizations and/or programs at the discretion of the Rabbi.

Building Fund

To preserve the beauty and functionality of our physical plant, and to build reserves for future expansion.

Hebrew School Emergency Scholarship Fund

Provides scholarships to children who would like to attend our Hebrew School and may not currently have the financial resources to do so.

Kiddush Fund

Your donation provides lunch after services on Shabbat morning: salads, bagels and pastry.

Ed Sperling Fund

Pleasantville Community Synagogue is collecting funds for Ed Sperling to help pay for equipment necessary and vital for his continued recuperation and rehabilitation.

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PLEASE NOTE: To help our bookkeeper, please issue separate checks for dues or other special events. All donations should be made payable to Pleasantville Community Synagogue (please indicate which fund in the memo section of your check).

CHESHVAN - KISLEV 5773

January 2013 - PCS Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
30 No Hebrew School	31	1	2	3	4 Birthday Blessings 4:21pm-4:39pm - Candle lighting	5 9:00am Morning Meditation, ; Shabbat Service, Parashat Shemot 5:52pm-5:53pm - Havdalah (72 min)
6 Kita Zayin, 11 am Hebrew High School/Rabbi's Comparative Religion Class, 11:30 am	7	8	9	10 Ask the Rabbi, 6th grade, 4 pm	11 PCS House Band 4:28pm-4:46pm - Candle lighting	12 9:00am Morning Meditation, Family Education Shabbat Kita Hey Shabbaton Parashat Vaera Rosh Chodesh Sh'vat 5:59pm-6:00pm - Havdalah (72 min)
13 11:30am Intermarriage Forum at PCS Rosh Chodesh event Kita Zayin, 11 am Executive Committee meeting, 7:30 pm	14	15	16 Spiritual Life Committee meeting, 7:30 pm	17 Board meeting, 7:30 pm	18 4:36pm-4:54pm - Candle lighting	19 9:00am Morning Meditation, ; Shabbat Service, Parashat Bo 6:07pm-6:08pm - Havdalah (72 min)
20 Pre- and Post-Adoptive Parent Group at PCS - 6 pm, ametz@jccan y.org	21	22	23	24	25 PCS House Band 4:45pm-5:03pm - Candle lighting	26 9:00am Morning Meditation, ; Shabbat Service, Kita Hey Havdallah Tu B'Shvat Parashat Beshalach 6:16pm-6:17pm - Havdalah (72 min)
27 5:00pm Tu B'Shvat seder, Hebrew High School/Rabbi's Comparative Religion Class, 11:30 am	28	29	30	31	1 Kita Dalet Shabbaton PCS House Band 4:53pm-5:11pm - Candle lighting	2 9:00am Morning Meditation, ; Shabbat Service, Progressive Dinner Parashat Yitro 6:24pm-6:25pm - Havdalah (72 min)

Note: Times and dates of events may change after the newsletter has come out. To get the latest information on any possible changes, please check the calendar on our website: www.ShalomPCS.com. Future months are also on the website.

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SAVE THE DATES:

Friday, January 4: Birthday in January? Come for your Birthday Blessing, 7:15 pm

Saturday, January 12: 5th Grade Shabbaton and Family Education Shabbat, 10 am

Sunday, January 13: Intermarried? Our Intermarried Forum is 11:30 am to 1:00 pm

Saturday, February 2: Progressive Dinner (private homes; RSVP's required)

