

2022 Gun Violence Prevention Shabbat

#JewsDemandAction

Gun violence is taking an unacceptable toll on our society. This can be seen from many tragedies such as at Sandy Hook Elementary School, the Tree of Life Synagogue, Parkland, Florida, Las Vegas, Nevada, Boulder, Colorado, and Buffalo, New York. As Reform Jews, we cannot afford to stay silent. Together, we must demand that our legislators take action to stop these massacres.

Gun violence is a daily reality for people living in communities across America. Gun violence kills over 35,000 Americans every single year and the rate of gun violence in the United States is up to 25 times higher than other developed countries. Enough is enough.

Staggering Statistics

- **7:** Each day, seven children and teens under the age of 20 in America die from gun violence.
- **22:** A firearm used in the home is 22 times more likely to be used for an unintentional shooting, homicide, or suicide than it is for an incident of legally justifiable shooting (i.e. self-defense).
- **500 times:** The increased likelihood of a domestic violence victim being killed by their partner if a gun is present in the home.
- **693:** The number of mass shootings that took place in the United States in 2021. 28 involved 4 or more fatalities.
- **45,000:** Over 45,000 people were killed by guns in 2020, the highest number the CDC ever recorded since they began collecting such data in 1968.
- **\$229,000,000,000:** Gun violence costs the American economy at least \$229 billion every year, and half of these costs are borne by taxpayers.

For more information, visit www.nfty.org/gvp and www.rac.org/gvp.



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Service Additions

Consider using these prayers during your Shabbat service to draw awareness about the issue of gun violence.

Introductory Prayer-adapted from a URJ Shabbat after September 11

As we gather this Shabbat, each in our own communities, we are united by the grief and anguish we feel over the destruction of lives. We cry out as did Job:

Today again my complaint is bitter;
My strength is spent on account of my groaning.
Would that I knew how to reach God,
How to get to God's dwelling place. (*Job 23:2-3*)

We, like Job, are weary from grieving:
Grieving for a lost sense of safety in this world.
Grieving for homes and memories lost.
Grieving for souls extinguished before their time.
Grieving for communities that bear witness to the unbearable
and must somehow go on.
Hear our voice, Eternal God;
Have compassion upon us,
And accept our prayer with favor and mercy,
For You are a God who hears prayer and supplication.
We praise You, O God: You hearken to prayer.

Before the Mourner's Kaddish:

As we read the Mourner's Kaddish, let us remember to include in our prayers all of those who have been killed by senseless gun violence. Let us remember the parents who will not see their children grow up; let us remember the children who will never grow up; Let us remember the brothers and sisters for whom an empty seat reminds us of their absence, the friend who no longer calls; and let us remember those for whom there is no one left to say Kaddish. We are taught never to grieve alone for we are made stronger by the bonds of our community. It is our charge to share in the grief of those around us so that none of us must suffer with loss in solitude.



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Before the Mi Shebeirach:

As we pray for those members of our community who are in need of healing of the body or soul, let our thoughts also include those who suffer silently from mental illness.

Before the Shema:

When we watch the news after each senseless act of violence, we feel pain as though we ourselves were the victims. Every time someone is murdered, we ourselves are offended; God is offended, for we are all inextricably linked. We are one. As we recite the Shema, we raise our voice and collectively affirm this oneness.

A Prayer for Preventing Gun Violence

Courtesy of Temple Micah, Washington, DC

וְדַרְשׁוּ אֶת-שְׁלוֹמֵהּ עִיר, אֲשֶׁר הִגַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה, וְהִתְפִּיל לִי לִבְעֵדָה, אֶל-הַיְהוָה
And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried and pray for it;

כִּי בְשְׁלוֹמֵהּ יִהְיֶה לְכֶם שְׁלוֹמִים
for in her peace shall you have peace.
--Jeremiah 29:7

Guardian of life, liberty, and the promise of peace, may our nation always merit Your protection.

We recognize that gun freedoms in our nation have resulted in too many losing the freedom to full lives

We know that peace anywhere might be shattered in a moment, but we know, too, that many in this nation rarely experience the safety some of us take for granted

Help us to recall, as the prophet Jeremiah taught, that we must “seek the peace of the city,”

recognizing how our own peace is tied up in that of the city where we find ourselves.

The words of Isaiah remind us to share our bread, clothe the naked, unlock the fetters of wickedness

in this community and in our nation. [Isa 58:6-10]

In this prayer we focus on one common affliction of the soul

Among us are those for whom gun violence is a policy issue



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Grant our advocates light and wisdom, and help us all to support their efforts

Among us are those for whom gun violence is a real and present, if occasional, danger
Grant the fearful Your sheltering presence, and help us all to understand and address this burden

Among us are healers and others who deal directly with the aftermath of gun violence
Grant the responders strength in turmoil, and help us all to support their work

Among us are those who mourn victims of gun violence
Grant the mourners comfort, and help us all to better support them in their grief and cries for justice

Among us are those who have experienced gun violence

Grant the shattered healing, and help us all to recognize this trauma and its cost

Keep us ever aware of the wonder of humanity and of threats to the sanctity of human life
Teach us to recognize the affect of gun violence on so many of our nation's children
May we never be lazy in the work of peace or complacent in our relative safety

May we honor those who have died in defense of our ideals
And may we acknowledge threats, some of our own making, to those ideals

Grant our leaders wisdom and forbearance

May they govern with justice, compassion and clear knowledge of the cost of gun violence

Help us all to appreciate one another, and the variety of viewpoints in this community and beyond,

and teach us to respect the many ways we may serve You

Then, we've been taught, shall our light rise in darkness, and this gloom be as the noon-day. [Isa 58:10]

Shine Your light through the gloom. Heal us and our local , national, and global communities.

Lead us toward homes free of affliction and strife, bodies and spirits untrammled by gun violence.

Help us to be the change we hope to see. Soon and in our lifetimes. – Amen.



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Additional Prayers in Response to Tragedy

After a Trauma

Just and hold God,
receive our fear, our shame, our grief, our anger.
Help us to overcome them,
to use these energies in the service of healing

A Time of Anxiety

Eternal God, You abide though all things change. We are anxious and fearful, and we turn our hearts to You, looking to You and leaning on Your strength.

It is written (Psalm 84:5): Blessed is the one whose strength is in You.

Bless us now with faith and courage. Help us to feel that You are with us, steadying and sustaining us with the assurance that we are loved.

Be with us and bring us hope, that in the days to come, our aspirations may be fulfilled for our good and the good of those we love who depend on us.

Banish our fears with the sense that you are always present, to uphold and sustain us, as it is written (Isaiah 41:10) Heave no fear, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with the power of My righteousness.

Prayer for a Loss

O God, my need is great as I sink into the deep despair and pain of loss.
Help me face each hour so that I do not submit to the seemingly endless days and nights of darkness
and loneliness.

Remind me that life is a journey and death is a destination
so that I may heal and regain the essence and appreciation
of that which is good and beautiful in life.



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Grant me health of body and spirit.

Give my heart courage and make me whole again.

Set my soul free and let me remember the love in the past

so that I can give thanks to you for the memories of happy times we had together.

Praise to you, God, Healer of the sick at heart. Please hear my prayer and comfort me.

Maryann Fenster, from WRJ's Covenant of the Soul

Sermon Starters

Consider giving a sermon during *Wear Orange* Shabbat to help raise awareness about the issue of gun violence. The texts below are meant to help write a sermon about gun violence prevention and how it connects to Jewish tradition.

- Jewish tradition emphasizes the sanctity and primary value of human life. The Torah commands us, "Thou shalt not murder" (Exodus 20:13).
- The Talmud teaches us that, "He who takes one life it is as though he has destroyed the universe and he who saves one life it is as though he has saved the universe" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5). In an increasingly impersonal and alienating society, the dehumanizing of the human being and the carelessness with which life is taken stand in direct violation of these affirmations of our tradition.
- In Leviticus 19:16, we read, "Do not stand idly by while your neighbor's blood is shed." These words command us that in the face of gun violence, we must take action, and we cannot be indifferent.
- Jewish scripture encourages peaceful pursuit of our mutual welfare. Isaiah exhorts the people of the earth "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks" (Isaiah 2:4). We are commanded to turn weapons of destruction into tools for the great good of society. The following text from the Bereshit Rabbah (21:13) further idealizes the land free of weapons, "The Rabbis, commenting on the words: 'He placed at the East of the Garden of Eden the Cherubim and the flaming sword' say: 'At the East of the Garden of Eden at the very spot where stood the Cherubim with the flaming sword - there was Gehenna created.'



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- Jewish scholar and philosopher Maimonides taught Laws of Murder and Preserving Life: “One may not sell non-Jews weapons, and one may not sharpen their weapons and one may not sell them, knives, manacles, chains...and not bears, lions, or any object which can damage the public. But we do sell them shields which are only for defense.”
- Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, a third-century Jewish sage, once taught: Great is peace ... if the Holy One had not given peace to the world, sword and beast would devour up the whole world.
- “My teacher and colleague Rabbi Judith Abrams, who is a Talmudic scholar, shared this thought with us this week: ‘The Talmud teaches that Jerusalem was destroyed because the schoolchildren were interrupted in their studies.’ If we cannot commit to at least protecting the youngest and most vulnerable among us [from gun violence], what future do we have as a society, as a nation?’ ” - Rabbi Audrey R. Korotkin

Take Action

While we continue to mourn for our family, friends and community members who have been impacted by gun violence, it is our collective responsibility to also support our prayers with action. We face real threats to our lives and the lives of loved ones when we don't require background checks for all gun sales, such as sales made at gun shows and online. Currently, when you purchase a gun in the United States through a licensed gun seller, a background check is conducted. Since the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, also known as NICS, was started in 1998, it has prevented hundreds of thousands of people who are prohibited from owning guns, from purchasing one. Unfortunately, a background check is not required for every gun sale in the United States, so many people are still able to legally purchase guns (at gun shows and online) even if they wouldn't be able to in a store. Conducting a background check should be required for every gun sale, and the majority of Americans, including gun owners, are in favor of measures to expand mandatory background checks. There has never been a more important time to urge your Members of Congress to improve our background check system for gun sales.

To learn more about gun violence prevention legislation and contact your Members of Congress, visit www.rac.org/gvp.

