

## **Gun Violence Shabbat Guide 2022**

### **Introduction**

The epidemic of gun violence facing the United States has gone on for far too long and has claimed too many innocent lives. Gun violence occurs on a daily basis, impacting the lives of children and adults every day. We see this time and again with mass shooting after mass shooting, as well as the gun deaths that occur each day, with names that will never make the headlines. As the Reform Jewish community, it is our responsibility to stand up and fight to end gun violence. Together we will enact change, and hold our legislators accountable until there are no more shootings.

Gun violence impacts so many individuals on a daily basis: each year thousands of Americans are killed because of gun violence, and thousands more are injured. It is time we say enough and put an end to this epidemic of gun violence.

### **Key Statistics**

The following statistics from [Everytown Center for Gun Safety](https://www.everytown.org/) demonstrate the magnitude of daily gun violence in the United States.

- People in the United States are 26 times more likely to be killed in a gun homicide than those in other high-income countries.
- On an average day, 110 Americans die from gun violence.
- Access to a gun triples the rate at which suicide occurs, with nearly 60% of suicides involving a gun.
- Domestic violence victims are five times more likely to be killed when the abuser has a gun.
- Each year, over 3,000,000 children are directly exposed to gun violence.
- In 2020, guns became the leading cause of death for Americans aged 0-19 years old.

For more information, visit [www.rac.org/gvp](https://www.rac.org/gvp) and [www.nfity.org/gvp](https://www.nfity.org/gvp).

### **Service Additions**

Consider using some of these prayers in your service to raise awareness and honor all victims of gun violence.

### ***Introductory Prayer***

*Adapted from [Opening Prayer for Colorado State House In The Aftermath of Tragedy](#)*  
By Rabbi Joe Black

Our God and God of all people,  
God of the rich and God of the poor.  
God of the teacher and God of the student.  
God of the families who wait in horror.  
God of the dispatcher who hears screams of terror from under bloodied desks.  
God of the first responder who bravely creeps through ravaged hallways.  
God of the doctor who treats the wounded.  
God of the rabbi, pastor, imam, or priest who seeks words of comfort but comes up empty.  
God of the young boy who sees his classmates die in front of him.  
God of the weeping, raging, inconsolable mother who screams at the sight of her child's lifeless body. God of the shattered communities torn apart by senseless violence.  
God of the legislators paralyzed by fear, partisanship, money, and undue influence.  
God of the Right.  
God of the Left.  
God hears our prayers.  
God who does not answer.  
On this day when we remember all the victims of gun violence.  
Our prayers have not stopped the bullets. Our prayers have changed nothing.  
Once again, a disturbed man with easy access to guns has squinted through the sights of a weapon, aimed, squeezed a trigger, and taken out his depraved anger, pain, and frustration on innocents: pure souls. Students and teachers. Brothers and sisters. Mothers and fathers- are cut down immediately by the power of hatred and technology.  
We are guilty, O God.  
We are guilty of inaction.  
We are guilty of complacency.  
We are guilty of allowing ourselves to be paralyzed by politics.  
The blood of our children cries out from the ground.  
The blood of police officers cut down in the line of duty flows through our streets.  
I do not appeal to You on this terrible morning to change us.  
We can only do that ourselves.  
Our enemies do not come only from far away places.  
The monsters we fear live among us.  
May those in this room who have the power to make change find the courage to seek a pathway to sanity and hope.  
May we hold ourselves and our leaders accountable.  
Only then will our prayers be worthy of an answer.  
AMEN

*Before the Shema*



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Time and time again, we watch news stories about senseless acts of gun violence. We feel pain for those directly impacted by gun violence, our nation, and for ourselves. We feel pain for those who have been attacked, and sorrow for the friends and families affected. As we recite the Shema together, we affirm that we are one people and feel the pain of all people together.

### ***A Prayer for Preventing Gun Violence***

יְדַרְשׁוּ אֶת־שָׁלוֹם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר הִגַּלִּיתִי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בַעֲדָהּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ כִּי בִשְׁלוֹמָהּ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שָׁלוֹם

*V'dirshu et sh'lom ha-ir, asher higleiti etchem shama, v'hitpal'lu va-adah, el Adonai. Ki vish'lomah, yihyeh lachem shalom.*

And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried, and pray for it; 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, and unlock the fetters of wickedness

in this community and in our nation. (Isaiah 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

***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



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***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 effect 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 the darkness, and this gloom be as the noon-day.

(Isaiah 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 untrammelled by gun violence. Help us to be the change we hope to see. Soon and in our lifetimes. – Amen.***

***Before the Mi Shebeirach***

In the Mi Shebeirach, we pray for a r'fuah shleimah (a complete recovery). This includes both r'fuat hanefesh ur'fuat haguf (a healing of the soul and the body). This prayer reminds us that Judaism considers mental and physical health equally important and provides an opportunity to consider the nuanced intersection between gun violence and mental health.

Mental illness is often stigmatized during conversations about gun violence, particularly in the aftermath of mass shootings. People with mental illness are not more likely to perpetuate violence against others or commit mass shootings; rather, they are more likely to be victims of violent crime, self-injury, and suicide. The majority of firearm deaths are suicides, and firearms are the most common method for suicide. We also recognize that gun violence (and fear of gun violence) can cause trauma and stress that may in turn contribute to mental illness.

As we pray for those in need of healing of body and soul, we acknowledge the complexity of gun violence and mental illness. We pray for those experiencing mental illness – that they may find empathy, compassion, and healing. We pray for an end to the stigmatization of mental illness. We pray that mental illness is never misused to shame those in need of healing or justify acts of violence and hatred against others.



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For more information about the intersection between gun violence and mental health, visit [Mental Health America](#) and the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#). For a list of Jewish and secular mental health hotlines and resources, visit [www.RAC.org/MentalHealthResources](http://www.RAC.org/MentalHealthResources).

### ***Before the Mourner's Kaddish***

As we read 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 siblings 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 loss in solitude.

### ***Additional Prayers to Include***

#### ***After a Trauma***

*Psalm 34:18-19*

שָׁמַע יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמַע וּמִכָּל-צָרוֹתָם הִצִּילָם  
קָרַב יְהוָה לְנַשְׁבְּרֵי-לֵב וְאֶת-דֹּפְאֵי-רוּחַ יוֹשִׁיעַ

The Eternal is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Eternal delivers from them all.

#### ***A Time of Anxiety***

*Psalm 31:9, 14-16*

וְלֹא הִסְגַּרְתָּנִי בְּיַד-אֹיֵב הָעֹמֶדֶת בְּמִרְחָב רִגְלִי  
כִּי שָׁמַעְתָּ י דִּבַּת רְבִים מְגֹרֵם מִסָּבִיב בְּהִנָּסְדָם יָחַד עָלַי לִקְחַת נַפְשִׁי וְיָמָּו  
וְנֹאֲגִי י עָלַיָהּ בְּטַחַתִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֶתֶּה  
בְּיָדְךָ עֲתִידִי הִצִּילָנִי מִיַּד-אֹיְבָי וּמִרָדְפָי

Be merciful to me, God, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. [...] But I trust in you, Adonai; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands.

#### ***A Prayer for Loss***

*We Remember Them - Sylvan Kamens & Rabbi Jack Riemer*

In the rising of the sun, and in its going down,  
we remember them.

From the moment I wake till I fall asleep,  
all that I do is remember them.

In the blowing of the wind and the chill of winter,  
we remember them.

On the frigid days of winter and the moments, I breathe the cold air,  
I warm myself with their embrace and remember them.

In the opening of buds and the rebirth of spring,  
we remember them.  
As the days grow longer and the outside becomes warmer,  
I am more awake and I remember them.

### ***Concluding Prayer***

*The Time Is Now By Cantor Sally Neff*

The call came again for thoughts and prayer.  
But, that is not the only way we can show we care.  
It was not the first time, why can't it be the last?  
It's time to make these stories a thing of the past.

I will stand, and I will cry out.  
I will dedicate myself, I will scream and shout.  
Thoughts and prayers are not enough  
It's past time for getting tough.  
I will stand. Stand with those kids  
The time is now.

The children cower in schools, yet the guns can play free.  
People fear to walk the streets, and the leaders only flee.  
We will now stand up for the children in their need,  
Or will we sit in silence and let them lay and bleed?  
No, I will  
Now you might ask about politics and laws.  
Children die while grown-ups challenge every clause.  
It's up to us to bring this nightmare to an end.  
You know what message we must send!

I will stand, and I will cry out.  
I will dedicate myself, I will scream and shout.  
Thoughts and prayers are not enough  
It's past time for getting tough.  
I will stand. Stand with those kids  
The time is now.

### **Sermon Starters:**

Consider giving a sermon during this Gun Violence Prevention Shabbat to bring awareness. The texts below are meant to help write a sermon connecting gun violence prevention to Jewish tradition.

- In Jewish tradition, we are taught the value that human life has, and the importance of us all to protect that. As we are commanded by the Torah, "Thou shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).



- It will never be enough, just to say that we are not the ones picking up the gun and taking innocent lives. We are taught, “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). We are all responsible for protecting the lives of others.
- Jewish tradition teaches us, “Do not stand idly by while your neighbor’s blood is shed” (Leviticus 19:16). When we have the power to make a difference, and still choose to do nothing, we are partly responsible for the epidemic of gun violence that is going on around us.
- Each life has value, regardless of how similar or different we are from one another: “And a wolf shall live with a lamb....They shall neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mount, for the land shall be full of the knowledge of the Eternal as water covers the sea” (Isaiah 11:6-9). We are all human, and we must protect the sanctity of all life.
- Jewish scripture encourages the peaceful pursuit of our mutual welfare. Isaiah exhorts the people of the earth to “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.’
- [Gun Violence and Judaism](#) source sheet, by Rabbi Joel Mosbacher

### **Take Action:**

Until we unite and commit to making meaningful change, families will mourn the loss of their loved ones day after day. As people of faith, we are tired of sending thoughts and prayers: they will never be enough. Gun violence will continue to be a threat to all of our lives, the lives of our loved ones, and those who we have not met yet until we are able to hold our legislators accountable and demand accountability, safety, and justice.

Urge your Senators to support the Assault Weapons Ban: [www.rac.org/banassaultweapons](http://www.rac.org/banassaultweapons).

Urge your Senators to support Ethan’s Law and mandate safe storage of guns in residences where minors reside: [www.rac.org/keepkidssafe](http://www.rac.org/keepkidssafe).

Tell your members of Congress to support a variety of gun violence prevention measures, including: universal background checks and closing deadly loopholes such as the intimate partner, Charleston, and private sale loopholes; increasing funding for gun violence research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institutes of Health; funding community-based gun violence prevention strategies to stop interpersonal gun violence; and more: [www.rac.org/stopgunviolence](http://www.rac.org/stopgunviolence).



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To learn more about gun violence prevention and ways for you and your congregation to get involved, please visit [www.rac.org/gvp](http://www.rac.org/gvp).

**For Further Study, Prayer, and Reflection**

Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence - [Resources for Engaging in the National Vigil and December Sabbath](#).

Newtown Action Alliance - [2022 Guide: Nationwide Vigils & Events to #EndGunViolence](#).

*All Jewish text citations are from Sefaria.*



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