

נִרְהוּ נְשִׁמַת אָדָם The breath of each person is God's candle [Proverbs 20:27]

Erev Shavuot 5780

Dear Shir Tikvah,

When George Floyd, z"l, was murdered by police on 38th and Chicago this Monday afternoon, our broken hearts cracked open once more. We extend our tender condolences to George Floyd's family and we condemn the murder of our neighbor, George Floyd. As community leaders, we call for the officers involved in the murder to be charged. This racist violence lands on the bodies of Black Jewish members of Shir Tikvah and on our Black neighbors and so, as a community, we rise to action.

We write to you on the eve of Shavuot, the festival in which we celebrate receiving the gift of Torah at Mount Sinai. According to Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Horowitz, at the moment of Revelation of Torah, of the opening phrase "Anochi Adonai Eloheikhem, I am Adonai your God," the Israelites heard just the aleph of Anochi, the silent first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In other words: the Israelites heard God take a breath. Just a breath. As we grieve the breath that was stolen from George Floyd, we pay special attention to that breathful aleph. This year, we find the Torah we need in the silence, in breath. Tonight and going forward, may we turn to each other and help each other find our breath again, reminding each other to slow, to ground, to connect, to breathe. May we fight for each other's precious breath. May we dedicate our breath this Shavuot to George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Michael Brown, Jr., Sandra Bland, Eric Garner and the many other Black victims of white supremacy, murdered by police.

We must take concrete action to make sure that the violence generated by white supremacy and aimed specifically at Black people is dismantled. To that end, we commit to the following actions, as crafted by our Racial Justice Task Force:

- Partnering with Black-led organizations, including [Black Visions Collective \(BLVC\)](#), [Reclaim the Block](#) and [MPD150](#), to call for charges against the police officers responsible for the murder of George Floyd and to address structural violence, specifically against Black and Brown people;
- Creating a network of care for Black members and family members of Black members of Shir Tikvah, involving phone calls made to all Black members of the congregation to check on their well-being in this difficult time;
- Supporting our members to take concrete, strategic action for racial justice, following the lead of our community partners.
- Calling for each of us refrain from commenting in public about the methods of protesters' response. Please act from a place of solidarity and respect, working to build and deepen relationships, that we may move through this difficult moment together. Please respect Black leaders and specifically Jewish Black people who have made this request.

We must not look away from the white supremacy that forms our criminal justice system and police departments. As our community reels from the murder, we reach to you in love and in mourning. In non-pandemic times, we would gather together in times of crisis in Shir Tikvah's sanctuary. We must find each other though we are physically distant for each other's safety. We are not isolated in this crisis. The Shir Tikvah Virtual Sanctuary is open for our voices on Shabbat and throughout the week—we look forward to singing, praying, learning and acting together.

As we draw near to Sinai this Shavuot eve, may we bring our whole, broken hearts. May we open ourselves to hearing the word of Torah that is meant for us this year. The rabbis teach that all of us stood at Sinai—all the generations, the whole complex multitude. This year more than ever, as we shake, as we grieve, as we rage, as we act, may we open ourselves to new possibilities of transformation.

May George Floyd's memory be a blessing.

L'shalom,

Rabbis Michael Adam Latz, Arielle Lekach-Rosenberg, & Debra Rappaport

Shir Tikvah Congregation

