



*Parshat Naso*  
**June 18, 2016—12 Sivan 5776**  
**The Fullness of Time:**  
**A Sermon After Orlando**  
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It is June, the beginning of summer, 80s and sunny, the glory of our calendar, and true to that festive spirit, this morning has been filled with David and Brad's b'nei mitzvah and so many other happy milestones. In one sense, our joy is palpable.

And yet, at the same time, as a nation we have also been sitting shiva for a week, sitting shiva for the victims of Orlando, seeing the stories of the 49 victims whose lives were snuffed out senselessly and violently one week ago. As I read their stories, so young and so innocent, as I looked at their faces, I felt like I did after 9/11 reading the obituaries in the Times.

This morning then presents us with emotional complexity. Joy. A baby naming. Two b'nei mitzvah. Anniversaries. Celebrations. *And* getting up from a national shiva for 49 tragedies.

I know it's June, but the language we need, the vocabulary we need, the insight we need to make sense of this complexity, is not June, but is September, October, is Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur. We need to go to the most sober prayer, the most scary prayer, the most honest prayer, the prayer that tells it like it is: *unetaneh tokef*.

*Mi vekitzo, u'mi loh v'kitzo*, who gets to have a long, full life, and who dies before their time?

This line especially called out because I experienced this week with a certain kind of split screen tv. While our nation was thinking about Orlando, here in our shul we had two local shivas.

One woman who passed away, Reba Katz, was 95 years old. *v'kitzo*. A long full life. She was totally lucid until the end. She was adept at the new technologies, skyping and facetimeing with her grandchildren and even her great grandchildren. *v'kitzo*. She was beautiful and took pride in her appearance, still cherishing her weekly Thursday morning hair appointment. *v'kitzo*. One man who passed away, Harold Garber, was 93. *v'kitzo*. His daughter recalled that he had enjoyed a long and beautiful marriage with her mother. And years after her mother passed away, indeed, when he was 93, he married a woman with whom he had fallen in love who was only 90. They were married for one month before she passed away. How much did he love life that he was still, in his last year, at the age of 93, able to love again? *v'kitzo*. The fullness of time.

But while the *v'kitzo* stories were playing out locally, as a nation we confronted 49 stories of people who died *loh v'kitzo*, before their time. Cory James Connell, was not even a regular party goer. He went to Pulse to accompany family and friends. He was just hanging out with family, going along where they wanted to go, when he was in the wrong place, wrong time. Age 21, *loh v'kitzo*. Darryl Roman Burt II, was celebrating his graduation weekend with his family, wrong place, wrong time, age 29, *loh v'kitzo*. Miguel Angel Honorato, the father of 3 young sons, decided on a lark to go dancing late on a Saturday night when he was shot and killed, age 30, *loh v'kitzo*. Luis Omar Ocasio-Capo, a barista at Starbucks, age 20, *loh v'kitzo*. Mercedes Marisol Flores, working at Target to support herself, while also going to college, age 26, *loh v'kitzo*. 49 lives. 49 deaths. *loh v'kitzo*.

Here's the thing about *v'kitzo* and *loh v'kitzo*, in the fullness of time, and not in the fullness of time. There is a paradox that cuts to the heart of the human condition.

What do any of us want? We want *v'kitzo*. We want a long, rich, full life.

If any of us here could sign up for the *v'kitzo* package, the fullness of time package, 95 and still skyping, 95 and still getting your hair done every week, 93 and still falling in love, who would not sign up for that right now?

And what is one thing that we cannot necessarily have? *v'kitzo*. The thing we want, a long, rich, full life, is the one thing we cannot control.

Sure there is some conduct that is more healthy and more conducive to longevity. But there are no guarantees.

Eating healthy is great. But we cannot broccoli our way to 95. Broccoli is a noun, not a verb.

Exercising regularly is fantastic. But we cannot run and peddle and yoga our way to 95. Jim Fixx, who wrote the Complete Book of Running, died of a heart attack at the age of 52, *loh v'kitzo*, while in the middle of a run.

Moral excellence is beautiful. But mensches do not get an inside track on longevity. There is no inside track on longevity.

If we cannot control our longevity, what *can* we control?

If we cannot control *the quantity of our years*, what we do have more control over *the quality of our days*.

Will we make it to 95? Who knows? Even tomorrow is not guaranteed.

But what will we do with today? Today? *That is* in our hands.

The prophet Micah teaches us that when we get up in the morning, we should ask ourselves: What does God want of us? The answer: Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

That is a hard enough job description anyway, but it is made harder by the fact that even if we do it all, all three, we do justice, love mercy, walk humbly, there still are no guarantees.

Which brings us back to Orlando that dreadful morning. A 20-year old named Patience Carter was on vacation with two friends, Tiara Parker, age 20, and Akyra Murray, age 18. The three young women were out dancing at the Pulse, having a lovely evening. At about 2:00 a.m., they figured the night was over. They called an Uber to get a ride home. Patience Carter was out of the club, on the street with Akyra Murray when they heard the gun shots start up. They fell to the floor. The gun shots were inside. They were outside. Death and danger were inside. But this 20 and 18 year old were outside, alive, safe. There was only one problem. They realized that their friend, Tiara Parker, was still inside. She had not made it out.

What to do? To run as fast and as far as possible in the opposite direction?

Or go back inside, back into harm's way, to try to find their missing friend.

Patience Carter and Akyra Murray rushed back in to find their friend. Once inside, now stuck in hell, with random shooting and random death, they ran for shelter to the bathroom, and locked themselves inside a stall. Other people did the same. The gunman entered the bathroom and started firing away. Patience Carter was shot in the leg, fell to the floor, and was pinned underneath another person for several hours. Tiara Parker, the friend whom they went to retrieve, survived. But Akyra Murray, at 18, was the youngest victim, felled while trying to do the good deed of being a loyal friend who looked out for the person she came with.

The Torah tells us *loh ta'amod al dam reicha*, do not stand idly by while the blood of our neighbor is shed. Patience Carter did not stand idly by. Akyra Murray did not stand idly by.

What about us? Do we stand idly by? Sadly, we do.

We stand idly by when we get inured to the violence, when an 18 year old rushes back in to save a friend, but we shrug it off as inevitable.

We stand idly by when we say, what can we do?

We stand idly by when what we do is not commensurate to what we feel.

Too many of us stood idly by by doing nothing after Virginia Tech; nothing after Aurora; nothing after Newtown; nothing after San Bernardino.

Enough.

No more standing idly by, no more shrugging off murder in our streets, in our college campuses, in our movie theatres, in our elementary schools, in our office parties, in our nightclubs. When we get up from shiva for a loved one, we walk around the block and reemerge to life reenergized to carry out our departed loved ones' best values. And now, that we get up from shiva as a nation, the blood of 49 innocent people calls out to us: do not shrug this off! Do not think this is inevitable! Care. Learn. Come to an educated conclusion. Vote. Elect leaders who make our world safer! Do not let us die in vain!

That's why shul matters. That's why this service matters. This service, in which we get to celebrate the fullness of life, is also where we get the strength to give the world what it demands of us. Out there, all too often, there is brokenness and pain. In here, love and joy. Out there, all too often, poisoned politics and strife. In here, people coming together. Out there, all too often, despair. In here, hope. May our time in this sacred place renew us for a hard world, giving us the anchoring, the centering, the spiritual strength we will need to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.

*Mi v'kitzo u'mi loh v'kitzo?* Who gets a long, rich, full life, and who dies before their time? *How many years* is up to God. *What we do with our days* is up to us. Shabbat shalom.