

Jacob Blake's Life Matters

We have had a tough summer; none of us was planning on spending it mostly at home while experiencing a pandemic, but we have all tried to make the most of it....

Here, at [Emunah](#), we have had a summer filled with amazing Zoom services like our [musical Friday nights](#), like last night's musical BBQ and *Barekhu*, our [Summer Speakers Series](#) with wonderful talks by members of our *shul* – these are posted on our website and on our [YouTube channel](#). *Yasher koah* to Terri Swartz Russell for organizing it all.

And we will still hear from Mike Rosenberg on September 26!

We have also had amazing, safe, in-person, physically-distanced activities like Brotherhood softball, Monday Morning Ride With The Rabbi, and our wonderful youth staff organized youth activities in our courtyard, and



Rabbi Kling Perkins and I have been holding Wednesday evening *minyan* there in person and with simultaneous Zooming with thanks to Mark Druy for tech help and Kathy Macdonald for *gabbai*-ing!

We've been figuring out how to cope.

My boys and I learned how to mountain bike this summer which has gone pretty well, except when I thought I was still sixteen years old and tried to go fast over a jump.... When I finally mustered the strength to get up from the bushes that I landed in, I realized that I am really not sixteen anymore, and I probably should not do that....

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But, it has been a challenging time, the pandemic has continued to spread. People are still losing their livelihoods as we cannot figure out how to keep people working in smart ways as they are doing better in some other countries, and most tragically, people are still losing their lives in our country at levels that are simply unacceptable, since we cannot muster the will to wear masks. I cannot tell you how frustrated I am when I am outdoors on places like the bike path where there are signs explicitly stating that there are official ordinances that we **MUST** wear masks, and many do not wear them properly or at all.



And then there is the continued assault on African-Americans by the police.

This week we watched in horror as Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back as he walked back to his car where his three little children were sitting.

Now, I am not saying that he is perfect, or what he did was perfect, but do we think that he deserved to get shot seven times?

Although he is paralyzed and fighting for his life, the police handcuffed him to his hospital bed. Really? Is that necessary? That's adding insult to injury.

His parents got on TV the next day and deplored the violence carried out by a small number of extremists who may feel so lost and hopeless or maybe simply feel they have no other recourse.

Jacob Blake's father said that seeing his son get shot in the back right in front of his own little children made it seem like his life did not have value, that it did not matter, but his life does matter.



Lives matter.

Black lives matter.

It is a horrific video to watch.

How many do we have to see?

One a week?

Two a week?

And then we saw another one on Wednesday evening where a teen with an AK-47 went running down a street in Kenosha shooting protestors. He killed two people and the police did not arrest him. Instead we hear speeches about the importance of having free, unlimited access to these weapons of war. And then politicians and the media supporting him?!?

Let me put it this way: ours is a country where a black man with a cigarette in NY is deemed more dangerous or threatening than a white man with an AR-15 walking down a street in Kenosha, Wisconsin after having shot and killed two people. Then the police kill the black man and do nothing to the white man?!?

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Don't get me wrong – vandalism and arson and looting are wrong and anti-Semitism is deplorable. [A synagogue was vandalized as part of this](#)

[horrific violence](#). And I will stand up and shout out against that loudly and clearly.

But this country has a serious racist problem. It is embedded in its soil from its roots in slavery until this very moment.

You would think that after [the cold blooded 8 minute and 46 second public execution/murder of George Floyd](#), we would see fewer of these police shootings, but they have not abated.

They have not.

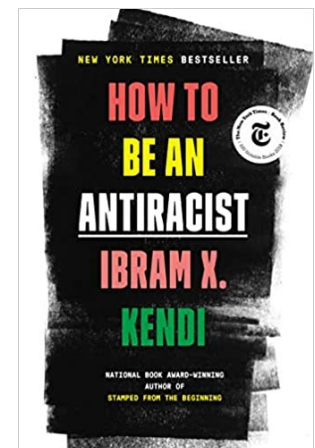
They have just continued.

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Let me say this. I am so proud of our community.

We have been working and reading and thinking and learning and reflecting all summer.

60 of us met on Zoom on Wednesday night to discuss Ibram Kendi's book and ideas about how to be an anti-racist. [In my group, we discussed policies of redlining that prevented blacks from obtaining mortgages in good neighborhoods](#); a legacy that caused economic hardships that have been passed down for decades and more.



As a *shul*, we are thinking about what actions we can take as individuals and as a community and while we are not monolithic, we are challenging ourselves.

And we should be proud of how we are truly working to think about these issues.

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So what does our Torah state about all this?

Well, first and foremost, it states, that we are all created *b'tzelem Elohim*, that every human being is created in the image of God and therefore, we are all fundamentally equal and holy. No one is better than anyone else.

As the rabbis explain, no one can say, I am better than you. Therefore, we treat everyone with great respect and never harm another person and NEVER, GOD FORBID, MURDER SOMEONE UNJUSTIFIABLY, because as the *Mishnah* teaches, to kill a human being unjustifiably is to kill an entire world!

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But while the basic idea is introduced in the first chapter of the Torah, it is everywhere in the Torah, because what is the point of this Torah?

What is the point of this entire tradition?

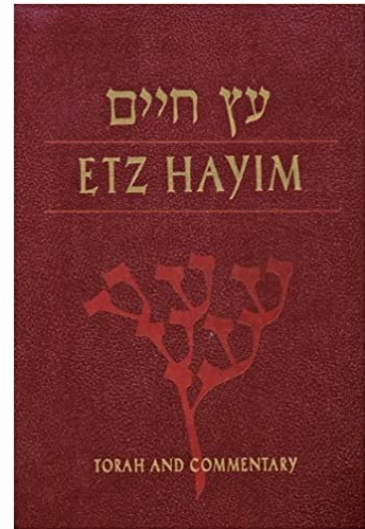
It is to make us better people.

More moral.

More spiritual.

Hopefully, better people.

So, these ideas are embedded in every *parashah*, and are included all over this *parashah*.



One of the many commandments reads: “If, along the road, you chance upon a bird’s nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young. Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.” (Dt. 22:6-7)

Weird, right?

If you really need the eggs for food? Why do you have to shoo away the mother?

Now, I will leave being a vegan for another day and I do aspire to be a little bit more vegan-ish each day, but in any case....

But what's up with this commandment?

Maimonides teaches in his masterpiece, the *Moreh Nevukhim*, the Guide to the Perplexed, that the reason we shoo away the mother bird from the nest is so that she will not see you taking her chicks. He likens this case to that of other laws where calves and cows are not to be slaughtered in the sight of each other or on the same day. (Lev. 22:28) Or, we can see it akin to the law of mixing milk and meat itself.



For the *Rambam*, as Maimonides is known in Hebrew, these laws are all about empathy. The Torah wants to cultivate kindness within us. The cruelty of these actions is not in taking the eggs or eating meat per se (although plenty can argue that those are cruel acts,) but in cultivating a sense of empathy and kindness within us.

If we can be kind to animals, then *kal v'homer*, how much more so, should we be empathetic to people – no matter what the color of their skin.

We have a lot of work to do.

Take your Torah.

Study it.

I am proud of our community.

But we have much more to do.

Jacob Blake's life matters.

Black lives matter.

It's time for us to act and live up to the ideals in our Torah.