

(Bonus) After Colleyville

Josh: Hello, everybody. This is Joshua Molina and this is not a usual weekly recording of Chutzpod, but the rabbi and I felt that we needed to jump on and discuss recent events.

Shira: Yeah, it's been a, it's been a tough weekend for the Jewish community, for people of faith.

Josh: And that's why we're going to take a few moments and talk about what happened on Shabbos at Temple Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas, where a gunman entered the synagogue and took the rabbi and 3 congregants hostage. One eventually is released, and then after almost 11 hours of this tense, awful, life-threatening, standoff – thank God – the remaining 3 people got out alive and unharmed, at least physically.

Shira: So we thought we would speak to each other about what comes up for us in moments like this, and thereby continue a conversation with you, the beginning community that's starting to come together around this podcast. The question that I wanted to ask you, Josh, is: how are you?

Josh: If I'm honest, my first reaction was fear for them. I didn't personalize it at first, and then anger. I have such anger over antisemitism and, you know, there's some science behind the idea that trauma is in– can be in a people's DNA and I have no doubt that there is trauma in Jewish DNA, and I have it, and I don't usually personalize. It usually is anger before fear, but then I think about what happened and I go to synagogue and I have a family that goes to synagogue. And so it's not hard to go from the anger to the fear. Maybe the anger covers up the fear most of the time? But I do have fear. Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, who seems to be an incredible man and someone I've never, had not heard of before yesterday, said, “A **Shul** is called a **Beit Knesset**, a house of assembly, and integral to Judaism is assembling.” Being together in **Kahal** this idea of, that we're a community and that we are stronger together and so even though sometimes we're in fear together, there is strength in numbers, and our numbers are small relative to the rest of the population, so we could use other people to stand up also on our behalf. It's not fair to judge from social media, but I was a little disappointed as I scoured Twitter on and off all day that there weren't more people opening their mouth, even just to say, “This is going on!” Like, “Hey, this is going on, see this!”

Shira: Well, okay so you just said like a hundred different things that are really important. So, which is of course one of the manifestations of this moment when you're triggered, right, and your trauma reaction is triggered, you have all the feelings, all of them. And I do think you're right, I think that some of the anger is actual anger and some of is our trauma reaction to the deep fear, because who wants to live in fear that this is the world we're living in? Whether it's Pittsburgh or whether it's Colleyville, this idea that someone can walk into a house of worship, a house of worship, while people are at prayer which, as we're going to talk about in this Friday's upcoming episode is one of the most vulnerable postures a person can be at, and attack them. It sort of cuts us to the quick, in a whole different way.

Josh: Apparently the assailant – whatever we want to call him – terrorist, person was banging on the door and the rabbi let him in and made tea for him because he thought he saw somebody who needed some help.

Shira: Isn't that an amazing part of the story?

Josh: Unreal.

Shira: What an act of **Chesed** from that rabbi and I know that there's going to be a lot of different conversations about that moment, but I just want to hold it right now in this second, as an act of love and loving kindness and a recognition that there are, even as there are some terrible people in the world, there are more good people than bad ones and this rabbi was trusting in the good, you know? I feel that, as human beings, we can be oriented toward trust or we could be oriented toward fear. This rabbi was oriented towards trust and I think the Jewish community for very good reasons, because the epigenetics, as you were saying before Josh, often is oriented toward fear and after weekends like this, even more so. Everything I know about anti-Semitism I want to offer my gratitude to Alana Eichner because she taught me what she learned from her teachers, is that there's like three basic manifestations, right? There is blame, there's terror, and there's isolation. Jews are blamed for things that are outside of our control. We were blamed in Colleyville for the arrest of a woman by the US government. We were blamed in Pittsburgh for immigration policy and so you see that happening over and over again, that Jews are somehow blamed for things that we have not done as a community. And then of course, there's terror, you don't need me to explain how this past weekend was terror, and then isolation as well. We see a lot of it just coming to the fore here and it just, it activates our sort of fear, our fear neurons. I do hope that when we start to come to more healing, we are able to move back to a place of trust and not just stay firmly, always in the seat of fear.

Josh: Beautifully said. You made me think, as you were speaking also, that there are other immediate reactions that also, we have to fight against. And one of the other things I saw on social media was a quick pivot to Islamophobia from a lot of people, and so I want to make sure we talk about everything with nuance and with care that hatred doesn't just propel into hatred. And this was a single person and that it's antisemitism we're fighting it's not another fade, it's not another people. It's that same specific hatred of another, just because they are the other, we also have to avoid.

Shira: Yeah, I think you're right. Islamophobia is, I mean it's a hateful reaction, but it's a fear-based reaction, also. And we just, we really, when we respond from a place of fear, I mean obviously a little bit of healthy fear is good. The rabbi spoke about how Jewish worries about terrorism led him and his congregants to be trained in ways that help them, so I'm not saying that we should live in a fearless way, but anything more than sort of a healthy, realistic amount of fear, can be really dangerous.

Josh: And Rabbi maybe this is a good point to mention, that we, with purpose and with intention, we didn't change our intro music. So if you're listening and you thought "That was rather upbeat for what they're now discussing," let's explain why we kept it.

Shira: I'm glad you brought that up, Josh. I want to begin by taking us back to this past weekend's Torah portion that was being read in the synagogue, when the attacker entered.

There is this moment when the Israelites are standing at the shore of the Red Sea, and in front of them is the Red Sea that has not yet parted, and behind them are the Egyptian warriors bearing down upon them, ready to kill them. You can only imagine how much terror the Israelites felt and you can only imagine that it might have been, comparable to what some of the congregants and the rabbi were feeling inside the shul itself. Rabbi Alan Lew has this beautiful teaching, **Zichrono Livrach**a – may his memory be for a blessing, about what the Israelites do and say in that moment, and it focuses in on five specific verbs. So if you're following along at home, the chapter and verse is Exodus, chapter 14, verses 13 and 14. There are these verbs that are used, the first one being **Al Tira'u** – do not be afraid. And Rabbi Lew teaches that it doesn't mean like, “don't be afraid,” of course we're afraid, but it's “don't let your fear paralyze you so that you cannot move.” He tee atz vu – stand strong, stand up. **Virau** – and see God, and see the fullness of the presence that is around you. is the Hebrew, which means to be silent. Which is meant to teach that in these most difficult moments, we, you, I, we're trying to put words to something terror that, there are no words to this terror. And sometimes silence is the only answer. And then the final verb is **V'isau** – now go forward. That's the option that we have as a Jewish people, and as people of faith, as Americans who are dealing with issues of gun violence beyond what we can tolerate that at a certain point, you cannot be paralyzed and you have to keep moving forward. And so we use the language of Hadag Nahash, the Hebrew is **Lakum**, which means get up. Because the idea is we want to remind people that we can mourn and we should mourn, and we should allow ourselves to be scared and angry. And then one day we're going to get up and we're going to move forward. And the song, the prayer that we're actually going to close out with in just a minute, by Rabbi Miriam Margles is called Kuma and it's based on the prayer that we say right before we enter this standing silence meditation of the Amida. We say “tzur yIsrael” Rock of Israel, in whom we trust Kuma, the Israelites, we are actually asking God to get up, recognizing that we can't do this alone, that we are in community. That if we get up, those people next to us need to get up and God needs to get up, and together we will walk toward the promised land. So thank you everyone for listening. We don't know you, but we're sending our love, because I don't think it can harm the world to just have a little bit more love.

Josh: And thank you to Tim Shovers our executive producer and to PRX and to Miriam Margles and to Hadag Nahash, and thank you all for listening and being part of our Kahal, our community.

Shira: And with a blessing Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam, matir asurim. We give thanks to the source of all life for freeing the captives.

Josh: Amen.