

I've spent a lot of time with my Jewish peers these past few days. Through time spent listening and reflecting, I've come to realize that many of us grew up under a similar shadow. Although we were all raised in different denominations, reform, reconstructionist, conservative, or orthodox synagogues, perhaps not even in a synagogue at all, we share the knowledge and pain of loss.

We grew up hearing stories from our grandparents and parents of the persecution they faced as Jews. Some of us students have directly experienced acts of anti-Semitism; others have not. Although we might define the Holocaust within a fixed timeline, the legacy of such violence undoubtedly lives on. Although we often conceptualize anti-Semitism as isolated in a time and place far away from where we are now, we grew up repeatedly hearing the words "never forget." The number 6 million was ingrained in our minds from such an early age. We learned about hatred through the immense loss of our people. Despite a long ancient history of marginalization and persecution, we hold onto the number 6 million, as the most tangible reminder of violent anti-Semitism in the lives of our living relatives. People like us, our Hebrew teachers would say, people like you and me, our family members would say, were systematically targeted and murdered simply for being Jewish. Our communities taught us that what might seem like benign, trivial anti-Semitic comments could build up and lead to yet another tragedy.

After the events of this past weekend, many of us couldn't help but remember all that we have learned in our Jewish communities back home. We were raised with the spirit of "never forget, and never again." We were raised to protect not only the Jewish people, but people of all backgrounds. To welcome them into our communities with open arms, to understand where they are coming from, and to celebrate difference... because during the Holocaust, there weren't enough people to do that for us.

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During the Pittsburgh shooting, synagogues across the world were reading part of the Torah portion *Parashat Vayera*. In *Vayera*, the Torah introduces us to Abraham and Sarah. Three strangers appear outside of their home, and Abraham and Sarah invite them in. They feed them, clothe them, provide a bed for them, and even wash their feet – doing everything in their power to make them feel comfortable and welcomed. The strangers tell Sarah she will bear a child. At the ripe age of 90, Sarah laughs in disbelief. But soon she discovered these strangers were telling the truth... Sarah bore Isaac. And these strangers were no strangers at all... they were angels.

The Torah teaches us to be welcoming and open, to treat no one as a stranger. The Jewish people have sustained these values for thousands of years. On Saturday morning, synagogues across the world kept their doors open for Jews and non-Jews alike, just as our Bible teaches us. Trump claimed, "If there was an armed guard inside the temple, they would have been able to stop him." If we had locked our doors, we would be safe. Not only does this wrongly place onus on the individuals harmed, it

encourages the creation of borders and boundaries. But as we know, such divisiveness directly contradicts the tenets of the Jewish faith.

The Tree of Life Synagogue was partially targeted due to their affiliation with HIAS– the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. The organization quote “welcomes the stranger, and protects the refugee.” This feels especially poignant in light of President Trump’s plan for an executive order that would deny children of non-citizens the Fourteenth Amendment right to birthright citizenship. Along with many other proposed and enacted policies of the Trump administration, this makes it incredibly important that Jews and non-Jews alike take notice of this weekend’s Torah portion and its emphasis on the importance of welcoming all people, and not viewing anyone as other or stranger.

My grandma, whom I call Oma, Paulette Feigenbaum Rose, spent ages 2 to 6 traveling across more than 5 borders, sitting in prisons, clinging to a fake passport, climbing the Pyrenees mountain, to escape Nazi persecution, only to be denied entry into the United States. She lived in Canada, attended a monastery for her education and safety, until her family was allowed into the US. I tell you this to show why most Jewish people strongly believe in open doors, open borders, open minds, and open hearts. We do not tolerate anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism Islamophobia, xenophobia, white nationalism and all other forms of discrimination and hate. President Trump attempts to create divisiveness through rhetoric and policy. We attempt Tikkun Olam, to repair the world. Let Pittsburgh be a lesson and a reminder, as the Jewish faith loves to provide, against the hate rampant in our country right now. Today we grieve, tomorrow we fight, because there is so much work to be done.

May their memory be a blessing.