

Rabbi's Column

This is the English portion of the text I read at last Thursday night's Candlelight vigil for the Orlando dead:

The Preacher reminded us: There is nothing new under the sun.

People killing the other, because they are other, is not new. Mass murder is not new. Killing people in the space where they go to feel secure is not new. The oppression and death of members of the LGBTQ community is not new.

The Jewish responses I engage in tonight are not new either.

God moments in Judaism are achieved during study, during the act of self-understanding known as prayer, and when engaging in actions designed to make the world a better place.

My study text tonight comes from Genesis. When Cain killed Abel, the text tells us "the sound of your brother's bloods cry out to Me, says God." Why is the word "blood" written as "bloods"? Because it is not only the person themselves that dies at the time of death. It is the loss of their future impact. The people whom they will not be able to help. The children they will not help to raise. The communities that will miss all that they could have offered over the span of the rest of their lives. The chance interactions, brief conversations, facebook and twitter connections - all of it. Forty-nine of these universes are gone.

There are a couple of prayers in Judaism that are connected with death. The most commonly recited one is Kaddish. Jews recite Kaddish when someone dies, on the anniversary of their deaths, and during memorial services. While the requirement for reciting Kaddish is limited to close relatives, it can be recited for anyone, whether you know them or not.

Kaddish is not directed at the dead, or even about death. It is a statement about how we view God's nature and reputation, ending with a reminder that peace requires godliness within the world.

Kaddish is recited, then:

A personal paraphrase of the words I just recited is:

God's nature is unique and beyond words, and it is our fervent hope that in this world where we are an appropriate aspect, God's existence will be made noticeable in our lifetimes.

The reputation and nature of God's nature is worthy of our words, inadequate as they might be, since each blessing, song, compliment and consolation spoken to each other and about God enhances that reputation.

We will do the work we can to spread the gifts from Your storehouse of peace, yet You are the Peacemaker who must join with us to make the peace last. May it be Your will to do so very soon.

Those who agree, please say, "Amen."