



From Rabbi Weber:

When 16 people died this year from meningitis caused by unsanitary conditions at a drug manufacturer, federal agents swooped in to conduct an investigation and to identify the source of the contamination.

In 2009, a private plane collided with a helicopter over the Hudson River. Nine people died. Immediately afterward, the federal government revised flight regulations over all of New York City in response.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission announced the recall of a quarter-million baby cribs this year, after one child died after being trapped in a Pea Pod Travel Crib.

The National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration issues mandatory recalls on cars when problems appear which *could* cause an accident, even if no accidents have occurred and no one has been hurt.

But when 31,000 Americans are shot to death every year, no one does anything. Nothing. Not a law, not a rule, not anything.

Business Week magazine just reported that, within three years, gun deaths will outpace motor vehicle deaths in this country. Why? Because motor vehicle deaths have been going down, due to legislation which has made vehicles safer, while guns continue to be virtually unregulated. With every gun tragedy that happens – and they *are* happening more frequently – we cry, shake our heads, and say, "Well, the Second Amendment says we can't do anything about it. And even if we wanted to, no politician will take on the NRA." So we drop it, we forget, and we go on with our lives... until the next time.

Something has to change, doesn't it? I'm tired of the "guns don't kill people, people kill people" argument. Cars don't kill people, either, but we've made cars safer so fewer and fewer people die when *using* cars. The same goes for planes, for medicines, for the food we eat. I don't think many people believe we can make any of these things *perfectly safe*, but we know that an incremental improvement saves lives – maybe even our own lives. It's time to force gun manufacturers, gun sellers and gun owners to do this, too.

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (the RAC), our political office in Washington, has identified three areas which deserve our immediate – and *continuing* – action. They are:

- Renewing and improving the Assault Weapons Ban, which expired in 2004.
- Strengthening the regulations concerning background checks for people purchasing firearms.
- Outlawing the sale of high-capacity magazines for weapons.

All of these can be done, legally, within the confines of the Second Amendment. All of them have also been strongly opposed by the NRA, which opposes *any* legislation which limits the rights of Americans to unlimited purchases of unlimited guns with unlimited ammunition and unlimited capacity. No doubt, the NRA is a powerful force in our government because many of their members are single-issue voters who use their vote and their wallet to defeat any politician who makes *any* step toward gun control. But in the days since the Sandy Hook school massacre we have seen cracks in the "Wall of NO" which makes up the NRA. Conservative legislators, including some who have an "A" rating from the NRA, are starting to speak up; NRA members themselves are speaking up, too, saying it's time for their organization to open its eyes and face reality. They are calling on the NRA to work in cooperation with those who want gun control, to find an acceptable compromise before they find themselves voiceless in the debate. I don't know whether these voices of reason will carry the day, but I'm not going to wait to find out.

I am not afraid of guns. In high school I was an NRA-rated Expert Marksman, on my school's rifle team. In Israel I carried a (loaded) rifle as a member of *Mishmar Ezrahi*, the Civil Guard which patrolled Jerusalem's streets at night. But just as I have to license and register my car, I want to see the day when guns are licensed and registered, too.

In Rabbi Stern's article which follows, you will read about our efforts to make our school safer. But as Jews, we are commanded to look past our own safety. *Pikuach nefesh*, the protection of human life, is the highest of all the *mitzvot*; we are commanded to do whatever it takes to save life.

We will do our best at TRT. Now it's time to see what our country's best is, too.

If you agree, please go to www.rac.org to learn how you can help. "If not now, when?"

From Rabbi Stern:



The ripple effect from the tragedy at the Sandy Hook Elementary School began as soon as we heard the news – and all of us here at TRT immediately put into motion interim ways to protect our students when they are here to study, to pray and to gather with their Jewish friends.

I gathered all my teachers on Sunday morning, and talked to them about how we might address the fears and general anxiety of the children, as well as of the parents. Knowing that some parents had not spoken to their kids about the shootings, and needing to honor their decision not to discuss what had happened in a safe, idyllic town in Connecticut,

We needed to be very clear on three points, should anyone in class bring up the subject:

1. We are safe here at TRT
2. We are sad about what had happened
3. We are hopeful, because for the one deranged individual who acted on a violent desire, there were so many "helpers" who saved the day for the survivors.

Our K – 2nd graders never mentioned the event, so neither did their teachers, though they provided loving and compassionate attention to their students. And while this was clearly on the minds and hearts of older students, the discussion in the classrooms centered on how we can support and care for each other during difficult times, because that is what our tradition teaches us we must do.

This was a perfect life lesson that happened to be our value – our *middah* – of the month, *Derech Eretz*. Loosely translated as "the right way" or "the moral way", it actually means **doing the right thing**. It means walking the walk, not just talking the talk. I spoke to our 6th graders about ways they too could act to make the world safer, kinder and more compassionate.

So how will we protect what is precious here? First, all our doors will be locked one-half hour prior to the students entering the building. The doors will remain locked when children are present, and visitors/parents must be buzzed in. Second, we will have someone at the door checking people as they come in. **We will need parent volunteers to sit at the table in the front foyer, while school is in session. If you are willing to help, please call or email me.**

Third, we have already instituted new safety regulations and activated an all-call system on our phones, so that any lock-down steps can be immediately communicated to our teachers in class. Fourth, we are currently working on upgrading our current safety equipment and will apprise you of any and all changes as they happen.

We will work together to make each of you feel like TRT is indeed a sanctuary – the place where you are safe.

--"Hands On Judaism," a three-session mini-course is open to the whole community without charge.

Classes will meet on Sundays from 12:30-2pm
Sunday, January 20: "Hands On Shabbat"
Sunday, January 27: "Hands On Prayer"
Sunday, February 3: "Hands On Passover"
Anyone interested in learning how to DO Jewishly is welcome to attend, but advance registration is required. Call the temple office, at 732-308-0055, to register or if you have any questions.