

A Text for Newtown (A Jeremiad for Our Times)

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BH

Ever since last Friday, I've been wracking my brain for an appropriate text to apply to what happened in Newtown. Here is one we might use:

Jerusalem was destroyed only because **schoolchildren there were interrupted [from studying Torah]**, as it is stated: “[And I am filled with the wrath of God, I cannot attend contain it,] pour it onto the infants in the street [and onto the gathering of youths together, for men and women alike will be captured, the elderly along with those of advanced years] (Jeremiah 6:11)”.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because **people had no shame** before each other, as it stated: “They acted shamefully; they have performed abominations, yet they neither were ashamed [nor did they know humiliation. Therefore, they will fall among the fallen, they will fail at the time that I punish them, said God (Jeremiah 6:15)”....

Jerusalem was destroyed only because they **disparaged scholars** in it...Anyone who disparages scholars cannot be healed from his wound.

Jerusalem was destroyed only because the people **did not rebuke one another**, as it is said, “Her ministers were like stags that found no pasture, and they walked without strength before their pursuer (Lamentations 1:6).” Just as this stag turns its head toward the other's tail when it grazes and each one feeds on its own, so too, the Jewish people in that generation lowered their faces to the ground and did not rebuke one another....

Any city in which there are no schoolchildren is destroyed. Ravina said: They leave it desolate. (B. Shabbat 119-120a)

The text gives us a clear message.

Unless we protect our schoolchildren, we are doomed.

Unless we develop a good healthy sense of shame, we are doomed.

Unless we forsake a know-nothing culture, we are doomed.

Unless we rebuke one another, we are doomed.

Unless we protect our schoolchildren, we are doomed to be utterly destroyed.

Our sages are calling to us, if we would but listen. It is time to put away fantasies that are packaged as news. It is time to confront both gun violence and mental health care for the irredeemably insane. It is time to feel properly ashamed of what we have come to as a country. It is a time to say to those who insist that military arms and large clips be freely available that they can't get everything they want. Our schoolchildren's right to attend school safely is more important than their hobby.

Let me know what you think.