

Statement by the Beth Israel Center Board of Directors, in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020

Leviticus (19:16) tells us that we may not stand idly by while our neighbor's blood is shed.

Today, we know with bitter urgency that we have no less an obligation not to stand idly by while our neighbor's breath is stopped.

We know also that we cannot stand idly by, ignoring the many other forms of assault—physical, psychological, economic, environmental, legal, social—committed against our Black neighbors.

We cannot stand idly by

- while our school systems allow crowded, dilapidated, underfunded schools in communities of color across the country;
- while poor education and lack of opportunity too often become a pipeline to prison;
- while discrimination throws up barriers to employment and fair, equitable compensation;
- while suspicion, hostility, insult, aggressions and microaggressions, challenges and condescension, beset Black people of any age, day after day after day;
- while governmental neglect and environmental pollution plague disenfranchised neighborhoods;
- while COVID-19 devastates Black communities, causing more infections and more deaths among them than in any other population;
- while access to doctors, hospitals, grocery stores, rental homes or mortgage loans, voting rights, even to just a safe, peaceful day-to-day life—access to so many of the comforts and security most of us enjoy—remains out of sight for Black people, our neighbors.

Today, with cell phone recordings and internet postings, we have a much broader awareness of those times when “our neighbor's blood is shed.” George Floyd was our neighbor. Breonna Taylor was our neighbor. Ahmaud Arbery was our neighbor. Many more Black people now dead were our neighbors; if we did not know it then, we know it now. And we know that not only the dead but also the living deserve justice. Christian Cooper—peacefully appreciating birds in Central Park and asking a fellow citizen to obey the posted rules, only to have her brandish police intervention as a weapon against him—deserves our public voice saying No to the hostility, No to the white person's feeling of entitlement, No to the weaponization of police.

How will we, the Beth Israel Center congregation, heed the commandment of Leviticus?

We will stand in solidarity with Madison Black communities and with Black communities throughout the country rising up against police violence, against white supremacy, and against the social order which has oppressed Black people in America for 400 years. We will take our place in the long and challenging struggle to change the beliefs, policies and institutions that perpetuate inequities. We pledge partnership with local Black churches and Black-led organizations working for racial justice. And we affirm our belief that all human beings share in the Divine image and equally deserve respect and dignity.

Here are some specific steps Beth Israel is taking and will continue to take to support Black communities in Madison and across the country:

We will educate ourselves and each other, and we will call out racism when we encounter it;

We will use our voices, both individual and collective, to amplify calls to action and the demands of Black communities;

We will center the voices of Jews of Color in our congregation and in the broader community to ensure the inclusion of all Jewish perspectives as we wrestle with institutional racism and white supremacy in our society;

We will cultivate relationships of mutual aid with local Black churches and Black-led organizations;

We will share information about Black organizations fighting to defend Black communities and Black lives, and to achieve racial justice, and we will encourage those who can to assist these organizations;

We will work first to define and then to pursue a long-term racial justice project to engage BIC members.

And we embrace for today the truth which Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote to President John Kennedy in 1963: “The hour calls for moral grandeur and spiritual audacity.” **Beth Israel Center stands with our Black community because we know that Black Lives Matter.**