

This week's Torah reading is Acharei Mot-Kedoshim, in English, After Death-Be Holy. While the meaning of "After Death" is clear, Holiness is a word that is much more difficult to define. My understanding of holiness comes from the word is contrasted with as part of Havdalah, the prayer we recite every Friday night, "HaMavdil beyn kodesh leChol," who differentiates between the holy and the ordinary/every day. Holiness in Judaism is about being different or extraordinary, not what we are used to in the every day. Therefore, one could call this combination of readings, After Death-Be Different.

While I've been aware of this understanding of holiness for a long time, this idea particularly hits home for me this week following Derek Chauvin's guilty verdict for the murder of George Floyd. As so many hoped that this moment would embody the value that after Floyd's death, things would be different, two reminders arose of how much work there still is left to do. The first was the reposting of the now deleted police report following George Floyd's murder.

While you can read the full text here-

<https://twitter.com/jaketapper/status/1384622849562873856/photo/1>, this report reminds us that were it not for the videos taken by then 17-year-old Darnella Frazier and others, how close this could have come to yet another miscarriage of justice. It instills in us the importance of those who are willing to see, report, and record acts of violence and injustice and how critical those individuals can be towards bringing about a just conclusion.

The other event was the tragic killing of 16-year-old Ma'Khia Bryant in Columbus, Ohio after *she herself* called the police to her home to help her. For every step we seem to take forward, we all too often see ourselves taking two steps back.

This past summer, after George Floyd's murder, we had the privilege to have Dr. Briellen Griffin teach us about race and racism. A native Minnesotan, she shared the following on her Facebook page:

*If you are not Black, and particularly if you are Minnesotan and particularly if you are white, I want you to take some time with yourself. I want you to interrogate yourself. I want you to meditate.*

*Minnesota isn't one of the worst states in the country for Black people because of Black people. I'll say it again: Minnesota isn't one of the worst states in the country for Black people because of Black people.*

*What can YOU do to make it better for Black people? What can you do to make it a place where all lives actually do matter? Because they don't. And this verdict doesn't change that. This is what happens when the system (kind of) works. This is what happens when a crime is committed and people hold someone accountable.*

*But we should have never been in this situation.*

*Would you have had the courage to record George's death?*

*Would you have had the courage to speak up and out?*

*Or would you have driven by and said, "ope! looks like something's going on there."*

*Do you know why Minnesota Nice is so brutal? It's not because it's aggressive or loud or overtly violent. It's because it is a culture of mind-your-business and silence. It's being "nice but not kind" as a friend of mine said the other day.*

*Just think on it. Justice is not even close to being served.*

If I take anything away from the experiences of this past week, it's Acharei Mot-Kedoshim, After (George Floyd and so many others') Deaths- (I need to) Be Different. I cannot change the world and I cannot end systemic racism, anti-Semitism, islamophobia, misogyny, or any of the many ills that face our world. What I can do, however, is look to change myself. I can look inward and reflect. I can talk to people and hear their pain and offer to carry their burden. I cannot change the world but I can commit to changing myself.