

WE WILL NOT BE SILENT. BLACK LIVES MATTER.

The image will forever break our hearts: A Minneapolis police officer's knee on George Floyd's neck with fellow officers standing by doing nothing – slowly, slowly extinguishing the breath of Mr. George Floyd.

Compare that horrific scene of the merciless ending of life to the beautiful image of God in Genesis, breathing life into Adam, the first person. God does so to teach all of humankind the mandate to protect, care for, and give life to others.

The murder of George Floyd was a desecration of this mandate. This act offends God, and so does every unjust system and structure that has allowed some people to feel more entitled to draw life-giving breath, even as they deny others that same right.

As a society, we can unfortunately absorb the blows of injustice for a long time. We might try to repair occasional wrongdoing, even accommodate standing inequities. But there comes a time when the corruption of our values through racism and abuse of power, can no longer be tolerated. When we must force the knee off the neck of people so they can breathe freely.

In the Bible, the prophet Amos indicts our people for gross injustice. He begins, "The Lord roars from Zion and screams in fury from Jerusalem..." With these words the prophet breathes out God's protest when our ancestors debased the Bible's exalted values of justice (*tzedek*), equality under the law (*mishpat*) and acts of kindness (*chesed*). Amos speaks, too, to us today.

Beth Abraham Synagogue of Greater Dayton adds our breath, our voice to that roar of righteous anger and to those screams for justice that have pulsed through our streets. The promise of this country is too great, and our failure to uphold our values too glaring to permit complacency. Now is the time to face America's distinct brand of systemic bigotry and racial oppression, with police violence only one of its common forms.

With our Black brothers and sisters, inside and outside of the Jewish community, vulnerable to attack, we too call out "Black Lives Matter" – and we will never be silent.

We proclaim "Sh'ma Yisrael" – Hear O Israel! We are committed not only to speak out, but we are committed to openly and intently listen to the lived experiences of our fellow citizens of color.

With George Floyd buried, we must all remember the Jobian cry: "Earth, do not cover my blood; continue to cry out for justice." That is our task. Mr. Floyd's blood cries out from the ground. It cannot be covered. Blood will continue to cry out until justice is done.

The ultimate Biblical symbol of freedom, redemption and renewal is the shofar, the ram's horn whose voice comes from the deep inner breath of the person blowing it.

In the spirit of the Divine mandate to give breath, we should recall the last gasps of George Floyd, "I can't breathe," and resolve, in his name, along with too many other victims, to give breath to one of the most basic messages of the shofar – to usher in an era of justice, peace, dignity and most important of all – life – for all of humankind.