



It is a time of soul searching for all of us as we come to grips with the enormity of the injustice which black people and people of color have experienced throughout our history. It is also a time of hope – hope that we may finally come to grips with the racism and bigotry that many Americans have suffered and continued to suffer.

Racism has made it much more difficult for black and brown people to purchase homes, to live in safe and healthy communities, to walk and drive without fear of being stopped and arrested by the police, to receive a quality education or good paying jobs. Efforts to suppress the vote by erecting obstacles to voting, purging voter lists, etc. have not been limited to black and brown communities – but these communities are inordinately affected. The list goes on and on. And the result is that Black Americans take home less income, are far less likely to own their homes, and live shorter lives than white Americans.

Protests, largely peaceful, have taken place across the nation and in our communities. Millions of people are committed to finally addressing the curse that has plagued America since its earliest days. We believe that it is imperative that Kerem Shalom join in this work. As Jews, we have a particular duty to work for justice, which means working to change the institutions that have perpetuated racism and bigotry. To accomplish this, we must begin by examining ourselves and work to confront implicit bias which makes us unwitting participants in demeaning and limiting the possibilities for many of our citizens.

This will take years of effort and we are pledging Kerem Shalom to engage in this effort. We would like to share with you some of the initial steps we have taken to date:

1. We formed a Racial Justice Task Force. One of the initial efforts of the Racial Justice Task Force has been fighting voter suppression and many members of our Synagogue are engaged in writing postcards urging people to register and to vote. Voter suppression is not only targeted at blacks, but the efforts to limit polling places, purge voter lists, and discourage voting by mail have targeted black and brown communities. We encourage Kerem Shalom members to join in the work of this Task Force to whatever extent your interest and time permit. For more information or to join the task force, contact Deena Whitfield or Nancy Brown at socialjustice@keremshalom.org

2. With the unanimous approval of the Board, we are placing a Black Lives Matter banner in front of our Synagogue to demonstrate our support for the movement for racial justice. (<https://www.truah.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/truah-placard-blm-color.pdf>)

This does not mean that we will necessarily support every stand that the Black Lives Matter movement takes. However, we note that the Black Lives Matter organization does not advocate for BDS (boycott, divest and sanction Israel) (BDS). Indeed, the Black Lives Matter website includes the following statements of the organization:

“We work vigorously for freedom and justice for Black people and, by extension, all people.”

“We are unapologetically Black in our positioning. In affirming that Black Lives Matter, we need not qualify our position. To love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a prerequisite for wanting the same for others.

3. On Sunday, September 13th we had a workshop on Unconscious Bias. David Hoffman led an interactive workshop affording us the opportunity to understand and begin to come to grips with the personal and societal effects of the implicit racism which we all share.

4. We will continue to have learning opportunities such as our book clubs that have focused on issues of racial justice. We've explored the topic with such books as, How to be an Anti-Racist and The Fire Next Time.

5. On Sunday, November 1st at 4:00 PM the Racial Justice Task Force will host a Kerem Shalom Community Forum to engage our community in conversation focused on coming to grips with racism and what actions we might take to combat it.

This is a time where our obligations as Jews and the wave of history come together. We must make our voices heard and work to end racism and to create the just society that America was meant to be. We are both humbled and inspired to begin this important work at Kerem Shalom and hope that you will join us.

The Racial Justice Task Force