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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday May 13, 2022 ~ Parsha: Behar

Slow Down!

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

There is a lot in the news right now that should rightly concern us. Inflation. The baby formula crisis. The war in Ukraine. Tuesday's primaries. Abortion rights. Gas prices. And the most significant event of the past week, the racist and terrorist attack in Buffalo that claimed the lives of 10 precious souls, murdered simply for being black in America. How did a bored and troubled teenager become so enthralled by the racist and antisemitic messages he read so voraciously on irresponsible internet sites that either encourage or claim they have no power to control over the vile content that is distributed on those platforms.

Today, I want to reflect on another important issue which you may not be aware of, yet one over which you actually have some control. Unlike the big ticket items which I mentioned above, we can address this problem right now.

Earlier this week, the Department of Transportation announced that 42,915 Americans died from traffic accidents in 2021. You do the math. That's approximately 117 deaths per day, the highest number of fatalities since 2005.

Now if that statistic is not bad enough, consider the following. That number (42,915) is an 18% increase from 2019, the year before the pandemic. What might account for that increase in this already high number? Leading DOT officials speculate that this increase stems from behaviors associated with the pandemic. "An increase in dangerous driving, speeding, distracted driving, drug and alcohol impaired driving, not using seat belts during the pandemic, combined with roads designed for speed

instead of safety has wiped out a decade and a half of progress in reducing traffic crashes, injuries and deaths.”

Another observer, the Auto Association of America (AAA), attributed the increase to sophisticated vehicle technology that can inadvertently increase distracted driving. Other sources report that distracted driving was responsible for 7% of all fatal crashes in 2019, and more than 58% of teen crashes. Clearly, we have a problem, or perhaps more accurately, a series of problems on our highways that are literally killing people needlessly. How might we fix it?

I remember my first driving lesson 45 years ago. I was so excited to get my learners permit on my 16th birthday. I could not wait for my father of blessed memory to get home from work and take me driving. As we sat in the car that day, before we actually began to drive, my father taught me a valuable lesson. **A car is like a loaded weapon, and that I needed to remember that every time I got behind the wheel.** He was trying to teach me that driving was more than a great privilege and responsibility. It was (and remains) an inherently dangerous activity, and taking active steps to mitigate against those dangers was my responsibility. I never forgot that lesson, a lesson, that, in some similar fashion, each of you received at one point or another as well.

Studies have demonstrated that most drivers rate themselves a good driver. Yet we often witness other drivers texting while driving, failing to use hands free driving devices, eating and drinking, and engaging in the other dangerous and pathological behaviors that I mentioned earlier that lead to the terribly high numbers who die each year in car accidents. So many of these deaths could be avoided.

It is time for us to reconsider our behavior when we get behind the wheel. So let's keep it simple this Shabbat. No appeals to Torah, Talmud, or the teachings of our Rabbis. Let's slow down so that we might create safer conditions, be a better example to others, demonstrate respect for our own lives as well as others who share the roads with us, and do our part to reverse the appalling number of losses our nation has suffered.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner