

Hi friends. I'm Jim Bernstein. My family and I have been members of Temple Beth Israel for 26 years and I'm currently our synagogue's Vice President of Education. I have 3 children ages 23 to 32, each of whom attended religious and Hebrew school at TBI.

I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about my kids and what I've learned from them. And no, it's not about how to use Instagram or how to do the latest tik tok dance.

My children all chose paths of activism: Becca provides support for young people in marginalized communities and their disproportionate experience of grief, Natty interned with nonprofits working to reform the broken criminal justice system. Micah works in reproductive justice and has participated in organized movements against incarceration and police violence since 2013

Long before the killing of George Floyd, they have asked me to think about my privilege and white supremacy. I always deflected. I would say White supremacists are the KKK and refuse to understand the privilege I have, including the fact that we lived in a neighborhood of Evanston that still reflected decades of segregation practices, with maybe one Black family who lived anywhere near us.

But my privilege hit home in May when my kids, once again, joined the protests happening across the country. While Andrea and I supported their participation in the abstract, the fact was: we were worried about their safety. We asked them to turn on their "Find my Friends" app and call us whenever they made it home. This focus on their safety frustrated my kids. They pointed out that instead of focusing on the importance of the protests, I was too absorbed in my own children's safety. They also reminded me that the anxiety I felt in these few moments could not compare to what Black parents feel every single day. I was hypocritically thinking about my white children's safety while they were at protests about the lack of safety of Black people because of the police.

This hit home. Not being racist is truly not enough. I needed to go down a path to be actively anti-racist and again my kids stepped up. They suggested I watch 13th, a powerful documentary on Netflix on the history of racial inequality and police violence in the US. I learned so much that I was not taught in school about how state and federal legislation serves to increase inequality. This movie is a must watch for every family, I encourage everyone to choose it for their next movie night and have discussions afterward. They forwarded essays on defunding the police. I learned that I judged before understanding. Defunding does not mean to immediately do away with law enforcement. Rather, it is a process to reallocate resources from growing police budgets to underfunded community services that support mental health, addiction and homelessness. It is a process that takes money and responsibility away from police and focuses on providing services that address and repair harm instead of punishing people.

You might be asking now: How can we best demonstrate our allyship and work to achieve tikkun olam? At last week's Jewish Council of Urban Affairs 2020 Acts of Change Event, Angelique Power, a Jewish woman of color and the President of the Field Foundation, said that "Self and institutional reflection must come before systemic change." I'm asking all of us to reflect as individuals and a congregation. For White Jews, it starts with recognizing our privilege and adding how to be anti-racist to our quest for lifelong learning.

Shabbat Shalom.

Defund the Police.

Black Lives Matter.