How to say it?

I t used to be that we writers and edi-
tors at Jewish newspapers knew what we could say. We did not use profanity. We did not use contractions, we did not use slang, we did not use nicknames. We wrote everything out in very long form. We wrote in the third person. (If we could have, we would have written in the 3rd person.) We were pompous, perhaps even ponderous, but we also were polite. Very very polite.

Things have changed. We use contrac-
tions. We use slang. We use short sen-
tences. We write in the first person sin-
gular (even though here I’m writing in the first person plural — but whoops). We try not to be pompous. We try not to be ponderous. We might not always succeed, but we try.

Despite all that, we do hope that we’re still polite.

But how are we supposed to report on the world around us?

Yes, this part is about our president.

How do we report on what he said? What do our readers want? We could use asterisks to replace some of the letters in the four-letter word he used, or we could call it the place that a barnyard epithet could fall into (or, in the alternative version, the place where the barnyard epithet lives).

We’re a weekly, so we know that all our readers and all their reading-age children will have read the unvarnished, un-gussied-up version of what he said, so in some senses our decision mat-
ters less. It’s the daily media, the up-to-the-
second online news sources, that really have to worry about that decision. And it’s the on-air reporters and podcasters who have to figure out exactly what to say.

So really we could skip it.

But there is something that we really do have to say. That is that our ancestors — our parents or grandparents — came from those s-hole places. They were the Dreamers of their day, and those were our parents or grandparents or great-grandparents — who were too young to remember much about the old country, too young to have any choice in where they were taken. Those children grew up to be citizens of the United States. They were the Dreamers of their day, and we should not forget that. They were the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to be free that the Statue of Liberty welcomes with her lamp. Had they been sent back, many of us would not be here. That is a simple and incontrovertible truth.

We also think of the irony that it was not one of those s-hole countries that created and carried out the Shoah. No, it was a clean, efficient, well-educated, thoroughly modern state. Germans were welcome here.

It is the immigrants from poor countries, who come here fueled with desperation and hope, who are determined to make their way here, to learn and to earn, and have good lives, or at least give good lives to their children — immigrants like our ancestors — who have succeeded here, and who have given birth to us. It is something we owe them to remember.

Here at the Jewish Standard we try not to be pompous. We try not to be ponderous, but whoops!). We try not to be pompous. We try not to be ponderous, but whoops!).

By far the most outrageous comment Der-
showitz made, however, was that “Qatar is a
ranked the richest country on the planet by Forbes, with no one threatening its existence, is struggling for survival like Israel, a country that has been threatened with genocide by terrorists and neighboring states for nearly 70 years. I am in shock.

In an effort to appear tough on the Qatars, he says he asked them about all the allegations made against them and declares them inno-
cent of all charges. I doubt Dershowitz is as
naive when defending clients who also declare their innocence.

He makes Qatar sound like some pathetic victim of crimes committed by bullies. He complains that the Saudis are leading the campaign to boycott “their tiny neighboring state” and asserts this is immoral and ille-
gal. One may always question the morality of blockades, but they are not illegal; they are a recognized tactic in economic and shooting
Editorial

Ban assault weapons

I cannot know what the parents of the 15 students or two teachers killed at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School are feeling now. But the parents of the 20 children and six staff members killed at Sandy Hook in 2012 do.

And so do the parents of students killed at other, smaller-scale school shootings, and of victims at malls and movie theaters and nightclubs.

But I do know what it feels like to be the parent of a dead child and dear readers, I desperately hope that none of you ever has to know what I know. Ever.

Let me tell you just a little of what it feels like, although of course words fail. It is black misery. It is being at the bottom of an airless, lightless, slimple lined hole, where you feel that you never will be able to breathe again, never will be able to see again, and you can’t imagine ever caring about any of those things again.

It is a feeling of utter hopelessness, of complete despair, of the certain knowledge that nothing you’ve ever believed was true, that even the most solid ground you’ve ever walked on was an illusion, and that hell, the black slime pit, was just beneath it all along, waiting for you.

And then that feeling sometimes turns into red-hot, blue-hot, melting rage.

It is a rage so hot, blue-hot, melting rage.

We are taught that the right to keep and bear arms is a well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed. But the rage that we feel, the bloody slaugh ter of innocents. And really, what can we do? It’s in the Constitution!

But demand that the 18th century Americans has the right to keep and bear arms in order to assure the health of a well regulated militia seems to not have much to do with the right of a deranged 19 year-old to burst into his old school — from which he’d been expelled because he was frightening, and because the school had no good way to deal with him, because we haven’t devoted many resources to figuring out how to handle lots, damaged, dangerous people like this one — and kill anyone he saw.

The Bill of Rights was ratified in 1791, into a world without assault weapons. It is to say that the Founding Fathers never imagined what their words would be twisted to allow.

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We as Jews are familiar with the idea of halacha as coming from Torah laws, but as having been changed and adapted, often almost beyond easy recognition, to fit the circumstances in which the Jews who lived by them found themselves. To use just an obvious example, the path from not coo king a kid in its mother’s milk to the elaborate rules governing kashrut is circuitous, although the goal — to fulfill God’s law by eating in a way that accepts that everything we eat comes from somewhere, and that we take the life we need to allow ours to continue come at a real cost, and must be done with respect and intent — is clear.

The Constitution and Bill of Rights, similarly, underlie all our laws, at least in theory, but without the idea that there is some guiding divine will behind them.

To have allowed the Second Amendment to warp into being as the right to keep and bear assault weapons seems to contradict the Declaration of Independence’s demand that each of us Americans is entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Tell that to the bereaved parents, whose ability to pursue happiness ended when their children’s right to life was ended.

This is not what our Founding Fathers intended.

Second Amendment, Second Amendment, Second Amendment, we are told, as if the Second Amendment to the Constitution, which reads, in its entirety, “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed,” leads inexorably to the bloody slaugh ter of innocents.

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When do we stop dragging out the Constitution as an excuse for allowing weapons designed for the battlefield to be purchased for the euphemistically called recreational use? Does anyone truly believe its Framers would have written the Second Amendment as they did if they could have envisioned the above statistics? Does anyone believe they would have done so if they could have conceived of rapid-fire weapons, or of high-capacity ammunition magazines, or of “bump stocks,” which effectively turn semi-automatic rifles into fully automatic ones?

When do we stop allowing our politicians to put the will of the National Rifle Association ahead of the welfare of America’s citizens of every age?

As for us Jews, when do we start acknowledging that Jewish law, which puts life above almost everything else, requires us to be in the forefront of any movement to keep military-style weapons and accessories out of civilian hands, and to prevent anyone who is mentally ill, or is an abuser of any kind — spousal, child, or otherwise — or who has a history of violence of all other kinds, from owning any kind of gun that has the ability to kill?

I know what some readers are saying about now: “There he goes again spewing his leftist bleeding heart liberal hogwash because he wants to take our guns away. Everyone knows guns don’t kill people.”

(Continue to page 43.)

Shammay Engelmayer is rabbi of Temple Israel Community Center / Congregation Hechal Yisrael in Cliffside Park and Temple Beth El of North Bergen.
I've been thinking about the Kindertransport a lot lately. In 2013 I interviewed Sig Silber of Paterson, who then was a successful, well-rooted, and happy patent attorney with an engineering degree from MIT, a thriving family, and a flourishing legal practice in Clifton. He also was a man whose mother had put him, his older brother, and their baby sister on the Kindertransport. He never saw his mother again; he and his siblings battled the trauma of that separation for all of their lives. Mr. Silber's struggles seem to have been successful, but he was quite clear about the toll they took on him, about how that separation from his mother, and the other separations over the course of the next decade that took him from home to home as the needs of the people caring for him and the bureaucracies that lost and then found him changed him, made it harder and harder for him to attach to new people. He stayed in Paterson long after he could have left, and everyone like him socioeconomically had left, he told me, because that's where he ended up in this country, and “I wanted to put down roots.” He was one of the very lucky ones. His sister, who had been seven months old when her mother had to give her up, never flourished, and died young. That's not surprising. The kind of trauma that comes from the separation from a parent can actively reroute a young person’s brain, scientists warn us. I've often imagined what it must have felt like for parents who had to put their children on the Kindertransport, but then make myself stop. It's not possible to imagine that level of unimagined pain. But the parents who are bringing their children up to the United States' southern border don't have to imagine it either, because they are living it. I know that we need immigration policies. We can't let everyone in. But I also know that, by far most, of the people who come to our southern border are looking to escape the violence and fear and degrading poverty of their lives. They are not at all unlike our ancestors; all were drawn by the vision of the Lady in the harbor, with her torch shining on them. They were driven by our talk of life and hope and prosperity and vast open spaces. Of amber waves of grain. There are other questions about immigration, even if they pale in comparison to what we're doing with parents and children. We need immigrants. As much as we (not being all of us, needless to say) talk about how immigrants take Americans' jobs, unemployment is low now, and the jobs immigrants take are the ones Americans don't want. They're day laborers. They're the guys on bikes with big bags of food, most visible when it's roasting hot or pouring rain and their lucky customers don't want to go out, so they do. They're the people who kill cows and then butcher them. (Remember Aaron Rubashkin, the Agriprocessors owner whose sentence President Trump commuted? His slaughterhouse, in Iowa — not exactly right over the border — employed many undocumented foreign workers. That's because almost no Americans want to work in such places — and the ones who do, the ones who want to kill, are the ones we really have to look out for.) At this point, there is neither courage nor novelty in speaking out against the remarkably cruel and profoundly un-Jewish policy that has American immigrant officials taking children away from their parents. But until that practice is ended, every single one of us who has a voice must raise it.

Rabbi Shmuley Boteach is the author of 32 books, including his new book, “Lust for Love,” co-authored with Pamela Anderson. Follow him on Twitter @RabbiShmuley.