



Shabbat Vayechi 5777 / January 13, 2017

Dear Shir Tikvah:

I'm thinking a lot about saying goodbye as I read the words of our Torah this week-Vayechi-He lives! As we read the final chapters of Jacob's life, he gathers his family together and he blesses them. His blessings are a mixed bag-some are true blessings; others more descriptive of his challenged relationships. It is a potent moment as Jacob breathes his last and dies.

Saying goodbye fills the space of our car and home daily: My kids and I love the Broadway musical Hamilton. Love. We listen to it every chance we get. During one particularly potent moment, President George Washington sings, "We're gonna teach them how to say goodbye." He's decided on his own not to seek a third term in office. He continues:

"If I say goodbye, the nation learns to move on

It outlives me when I'm gone

Like the scripture says:

"Everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree

And no one shall make them afraid."

They'll be safe in the nation we've made

I wanna sit under my own vine and fig tree

A moment alone in the shade

At home in this nation we've made

One last time"

And I'm thinking a lot about saying goodbye as I listened to President Obama's farewell address this past Tuesday night. He closed his remarks with a spiritual charge to each one of us:

"I am asking you to hold fast to that faith written into our founding documents; that idea whispered by slaves and abolitionists; that spirit sung by immigrants and homesteaders and those who marched for justice; that creed reaffirmed by those who planted flags from foreign battlefields to the surface of the moon; a creed at the core of every American whose story is not yet written: Yes We Can."

We say goodbye many times in our lives. Judaism invites us to say those goodbyes with as much intention as we can muster and as directly as possible. Why? Its not because the ancient sages had a grand vision of contemporary "closure." Rather, because we know that when we say goodbye we give ourselves and those we care about the gift to name what is important to us, what matters to us deeply, and to express ourselves directly. Intentional goodbyes don't make difficult experiences and painful moments disappear, but they do provide us the ritual moment to acknowledge how much the relationship meant, to honor the other person and ourselves before we move one.

For the goodbyes that need our attention and intention, let's give them the dignity they deserve. And in the process, create the holy space inside our hearts and our lives for the renewed, holy opportunities they create.

Shabbat Shalom,
Michael