



Shabbat Emor  
12 Iyar 5778 /April 27, 2018

Dear Shir Tikvah:

One of my favorite Jewish texts comes from the Midrash, Avot d'Rabbi Natan. It reads:

Once Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was walking with his disciple, Rabbi Joshua, near Jerusalem, following the destruction of the Temple. Rabbi Joshua wept as he gazed upon the ashes of the holy place. "The place that atoned for the people Israel [through the ritual of sacrifice]-lies in ruins!" he cried.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai held his student as tears fell from his face and offered these words of comfort. "Even though our tears may fall and the Temple has been destroyed, there is an equally effective way for gaining atonement."

Rabbi Joshua wiped away his tears. "What is it, my rabbi?" he asked.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai smiled gently. "We can still gain atonement through deeds of chesed-loving kindness-as it is written, 'Loving kindness I desire, not sacrifice [Hosea 6:6].'"

From a place of pain, a powerful spiritual pivot. From aching places of despair, a call not to vengeance nor war, but loving kindness, compassion, tenderness.

As we enter Shabbat, let us look to Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's example: In a world of violence and mean-spiritedness, of nasty Tweets and unkindness remarks, let us fill the world with acts of kindness, love, decency, and compassion.

Imagine if the 550 households of Shir Tikvah each engaged in one act of chesed this Shabbat-one act of kindness and compassion? How would you feel to offer a kind act? How would you feel receiving an act of compassion and kindness?

On this Shabbat, let's choose loving kindness.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Michael