



11 Nisan 5777 /April 7, 2017

Dear Shir Tikvah:

As we prepare for Passover, I'd like to share my opening invocation from this past Wednesday at the Minnesota House of Representatives.

This coming Monday night, as the sun kisses the horizon and the darkness of the heavens blanket the world, the Jewish people celebrate Pesach-Passover-our festival of liberation from bondage. It would make sense for me to stand before you with a piece of matzah-the unleavened bread we eat that symbolizes our people's hurried escape from Pharaoh's enslavement. It would make sense for me to distribute to each of you a piece of matzah-what we call the bread of affliction-that in one bite we taste both slavery and redemption.



Sorry. No matzah.

Instead, I stand before you holding our sacred sefer Torah, our holy Torah scroll.

In this scroll is written the history of our people-the majestic story of our creation as a human people, as a collective religious community, as a people devoted to Divine love and justice in the world.

We did not flee from slavery simply because slavery denied our humanity, because we were forced to work for Pharaoh's evil, because the labor was too hard and the desert too hot.

We fled slavery so that we might embrace this Torah-this sacred teaching-and hold it high, to lift our eyes to the heights of Mount Sinai to receive Divine Revelation not as a callous bumper sticker but as a theological mandate-that we would never forget the whip of the task master and the stench of slavery, that would we carry scars across our backs from the beating of Pharaoh's words, that we would be a people who felt injustice in our bones and demand-demand-for the rest of eternity that every human being be treated with dignity,

that we would create together a world of justice, that to be a Jew meant speaking boldly, lovingly, and courageously for human equality.

In this Torah is the story of our people's liberation from slavery and our religious commitment that states our moral mandate is to love our neighbor and to welcome the stranger and to care for the sick, the poor, the weak, the elderly. In this Torah is the sacred responsibility to remember our enslavement and call us not to bitterness but to compassion, to reject cynicism and to embrace the moral responsibility of hope.

As you engage in the work of our great state this morning standing on the sacred land of the Dakota people, I pray you do not cast your eyes down but that you lift your eyes. Lift your eyes so they shine with the light of Torah-with the light of compassion and the radiance of decency. Cast your gaze on the possibility of turning your swords into plowshares and your spears into pruning hooks. Raise your hands across the aisles of your indifference and like the ancient Jews, dream a new world into being-where compassion is the cornerstone of our politics and dignity the litmus test of our humanity. Raise your eyes towards your neighbors-even the ones you disagree with vehemently-and strive in freedom to love them as you love yourself.

Amen.

I wish all of you and your loved ones a happy, peaceful and healthy Passover.

Shabbat Shalom,
Michael