



Shir Tikvah
שיר תקווה

2 September 2016/Rosh Chodesh Elul 5776

Dear Shir Tikvah Community:

Rav Kook taught that our task as Jews is to, "renew the old and make it holy." After a beautiful summer of sabbatical time, I return to Shir Tikvah renewed and eager to share in the creation of holiness with you and with the Divine.

As I reflect upon our summer away, I am full of gratitude-kosi r'vaya-my cup runneth over: I am very thankful to the board of Trustees, led so compassionately by Luke Weisberg, for honoring my rabbinate and for so fully supporting my sabbatical time; to Rabbi Debra Rappaport, John Humleker, and our outstanding staff team for doing all their own work during my sabbatical while filling in some of the inevitable gaps from my absence; and to you, Shir Tikvah, our beautiful synagogue community.

So nu? What does a rabbi do on sabbatical?

Jewish France and Italy: Michael, the girls and I saved our airline miles for many years! We traveled this summer and explored synagogues in Paris, Rome, and Venice; and we discovered how Jews throughout the world pray and live. We saw beautiful works of art, ate delicious food, walked for miles and and miles and miles and spent much needed time together as a family.

Hartman: In July, I studied at the Shalom Hartman Institute as a member of their Rabbinic Leadership Initiative. For three and half weeks, along with 27 other rabbis from across Jewish denominations in the United States and in Canada, we immersed ourselves in Jewish text and thought, exploring issues of Jewish identity, peoplehood, and the boundaries and opportunities of contemporary Jewish life. This was the first of four summers in Jerusalem and I will continue to try to find words to describe how humbled and inspired I am to sit at the feet of such wise, exquisite teachers. (Shameless Plug #1: On Sunday mornings, I will be teaching Hartman's I-Engage course on Jewish Values and the Israel-Palestinian Conflict. For more information, I would love to study with you).

Engaging Leadership: One highlight of many: Hartman also runs a program for Muslim leaders to engage them in a dialogue about Zionism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and to build partnerships with rabbis. This summer, members of the Muslim and Rabbinic Leadership Initiatives toured the Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin (z"l) memorial in Tel Aviv. It was amongst the most heart opening, spiritual, healing moments of my life: to weep together with Muslim leaders and rabbis over the violence that murdered Rabin, the agony both our communities feel over the anemic peace process, the possibilities we felt in each others tears... I am reminded of the text from Genesis: Mah Nora HaMakom HaZeh~How Awesome is this Place!

Read: I read this books and articles this summer, some for pleasure, others to deepen my professional skills. I look forward to sharing with you some of what I learned and discovered along the way. (Shameless plug #2: Read "Just Mercy" by Bryan Stevenson and join Shir Tikvah, Jewish Community Action, and the National Council of Jewish Women for a discussion about redemption, race, & our criminal justice system on September 24. For more details.

Finally, being away-having distance from the daily pressures of professional life-I was able to reconnect with and nurture that spark in my kishkes that reminds me how blessed I am to be your rabbi; and how much I missed being with you. What a gift!

While I was on sabbatical, I took bit of a respite (though not entirely) from social media (at least Facebook). I did write a weekly Shabbat message; it was a way to hold myself in the gift of Shabbat. It is a tradition that I will keep going; this is the first weekly Shabbat message where I hope to share an inspiring morsel of Torah before we feast on the 25 hours of Shabbes rest and renewal. If you have questions, ideas, or suggestions, please share them.

Here's to deepening the Torah of our souls and the Torah of our people as we reach higher for compassion and holiness.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Michael Adam Latz