



Shabbat Yitro 5777/February 17, 2017

Dear Shir Tikvah:

Having recently returned from Jerusalem from my winter retreat at the Hartman Institute, Israel is on my mind and in my heart. Indeed, Israel has been much in the news this past week:

- o The US President declared his acceptance of a one-state solution as opposed to a two state solution for Israel-Palestine, upending 50 years of international diplomacy and US leadership in one press conference.
- o The President's nominee for Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, appearing before a Senate committee, admitting that he had called liberal Jews "Kapos"-and not apologizing for it-all the while being a major donor to Settlement expansion in the West Bank, a primary obstacle to a peaceful resolution to the conflict.
- o A supposed "anti-BDS" (Boycott, Divestment, Sanction) Bill introduced into the Minnesota state legislature that claims to protect Israel from discrimination, but in fact, does nothing to help Israel or address anti-Semitism in Minnesota and is likely counterproductive.

It would easy to get discouraged-even despondent-over the state of affairs with Israel these days.

But as one who is an Ohev Yisrael-a lover of the land and people of Israel-and with a deep commitment to peace and justice for both the Israelis and Palestinians, there are signs of hope and potential:

- o Darin Hussein, a young Palestinian peace activist and Fellow at the Humphrey Institute, spoke to our I-Engage course on Sunday morning, offering a powerful vision of cooperation and co-existence. Darin will also be speaking on March 31 during Shabbat services-please join us. She's brilliant!
- o Last night, I participated in the Twin Cities Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom Jewish-Muslim Women's interfaith service of Unity at Breaking Bread Café, where Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women and their loved ones gathered in prayer and song.
- o On Wednesday night, I represented the Jewish community on an interfaith panel at a Mosque, where along with Mayor Hodges and other community leaders, we spoke of how we lift up our differences and learn with each other to build a community of mutual respect and cooperation. To be welcomed by our friends in the Somali Muslim community-to be embraced so warmly-is a precious gift.

As we read Torah this Shabbat and recall the moment of revelation at Sinai, I'm left with this powerful impression: There are moments when we have great spiritual insight that are full of great drama-they are potent and life changing as the seas roar and the mountains tremble and thunder fills the universe. God willing, we'll have a peace process for a two-state solution in Israel-Palestine soon!

But as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (z"l) taught us, "those moments are brief, sporadic, and rare." We must treasure them and cultivate those sacred moments that occur each day-often lacking the fire of Sinai, often on panel discussions and quiet conversations and interfaith dialogues-and nurture them with tenderness, that someday, they might blossom into a new garden of justice and peace.

Shabbat Shalom,

Michael