



Parashat Shemini
21 Nisan 5778 / April 6, 2018

Dear Shir Tikvah:

At the beginning of Pesach, we celebrate the awakening of the revolutionary spirit. Through the week, we tell the story of the movement towards liberation. Now, as we reach the closing days of the holiday, we tell the story of the Israelites crossing the Sea of Reeds. This Shabbat, Jewish communities around the world will read aloud the words of Shirat haYam, the Song of the Sea, as the Israelites move from slavery into the wilderness, towards Sinai. There's a famous midrash that tells that as the Israelites crossed the sea, the angels sang victory songs. They raised their voices in joy and exaltation. God rebuked the angels, asking: how can you sing these victory songs when my children drown? The angels had painfully selective vision, but God saw the whole picture: while the Israelites crossed to liberation, Pharaoh's army drowned.

We have an obligation to see ourselves each year as though we ourselves have left Egypt. We must give ourselves the gift of experiencing the movement towards freedom, even as our historical moment challenges us on every level to stay accountable to the ways that we are implicated in oppression. Even as we open ourselves to the story of liberation, we cannot become intoxicated like the angels. We cannot lose ourselves in imagining ourselves free. We cannot sing a song of victory that fails to recognize the suffering of our neighbors, our friends, our family.

This week, as many of us sat down to seders to tell the story of mythic liberation, we confronted disturbing news of actions in Israel. As Prime Minister Netanyahu hardened his heart and reversed a decision to support asylum seekers in Israel and Israel met Palestinian demonstrations on the Gaza border with harsh military action, we were challenged to weave the story of our collective liberation together with the story of how we must continue to act up for justice.

The collision of liberation and loss cannot be avoided as we mourn more murders, at the hands of police and civilians this week. In particular, we hold the memory of Tyrone Rashad Williams, beloved by so many in the Twin Cities, who was murdered this week in North Minneapolis. May his memory be an inspiration and may his family and close community be comforted.

The song we sing this weekend must be woven through with our gratitude and joy and with threads of yearning and loss. There is room in our crossing to freedom for our full, broken hearts.

May we make the crossing this year with courage and resolve.

May we sing a freedom song so vast and thick we sing the whole world in.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Arielle Rosenberg