



Shabbat Naso/8 Sivan 5777
June 2, 2017

Dear Shir Tikvah:

I met my friend Marvin at Starbucks. Over the years, when you frequent the same place, you see a lot of familiar faces day in and day out. Sitting drinking my latte one day several years ago, Marvin struck up a conversation. We've been talking ever since.

Marvin is 62 years old, African American, and runs a small business that does construction projects and handy man services. Like so many of us, Marvin had moments in his past that were painful and challenging-and he made a commitment to turn that pain into something good. So Marvin spends a lot of his time in North Minneapolis and he hires a lot of formerly incarcerated men. Because he believes deeply in giving people a second chance. And he knows that with the opportunity to work and make a living, people are significantly less likely to reoffend and up in the prison system again. He runs discussion groups for African American men about racism. And he's bringing community members together this summer to talk about gun violence and how to best support the youth of Northside. He's passionate about the community, deeply committed to his family and friends, and is a man of gentle and powerful faith.

I've thought about my friend Marvin all week as I read our Torah portion, Naso. This is the text that contains one of the oldest blessings in Jewish tradition. "Y'varech'cha Adonai V'yish'mirecha," May the Eternal One bless you and protect you. Known as "Birkat Cohanim," or the Priestly Benediction in English, this is the bracha, the blessing, we say to our children on Shabbes eve and at holy moments when our eyes overflow with joy-welcoming our children to the covenant, when people stand underneath the chuppah, when our B'nei mitzvah chant from Torah.

These holy words call upon us not only to offer blessing but to be a blessing: to fall to the ground in humility with our arms raised to the sky; to offer the best of our heart and soul; to commit to a life serving values and ideals greater than ourselves; to show up, relentlessly, for people in our community.

To bless and to be blessed is to live a life of holy commitment, inspiration, and humble faith.

When I read these blessed verses of Torah, I think of my friend, Marvin. Be like Marvin. Be a blessing.

Shabbat Shalom,

Michael
Rabbi Michael Adam Latz