

Dear Chavraya,

In the beginning and in the end and all along the way, it is about relationship, of being with each other, of making the journey together. Whatever form your prayers take this weekend, praying with your voice or with your feet or with both, may their spirit be the same, determination and hope carried in song. I send deep blessings to all of you who are in Washington, and to those who will be walking in Boston, and to those who will be in shul, all of us joined in the same prayerful spirit. Whether on the streets or in shul, may we take Shabbos with us, each becoming Shabbos, each one emanating a vision of wholeness and peace, of all that is possible and shall someday be. May all who travel, travel safely and well, all your paths going only toward peace. This is the blessing of Moses' father in law, Yitro, to his son in law as Moses sets out on freedom's journey, first going deep into the belly of the beast, *lech l'shalom/go toward peace*.

This week's Torah portion, *Parashat Sh'mot* is filled with so much teaching that is meant for this week of its reading. At its very beginning, we are told, *A new king/melech chadash rose up over Egypt, who did not know Yosef/asher lo yadah et Yosef*. The rabbis debate whether it means the king was really new, or whether he issued new decrees, changing all that had been. Rashi suggests he acted "as though" he didn't know Yosef. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch sees foreboding in the Hebrew phrase of a new king rising up, *va'yakam*, "a new king rose up definitely does not imply a normal, legitimate dynastic change...." A rupture has taken place, and we are left to stare across the divide. In a teaching that is poignant in its effort to understand what happened, the Ha'Emek Davar, Rabbi Naphtoli Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, says that "new" refers to *new opinions/de'ot chadashot*, going on to say that the new Pharaoh *did not know how to acknowledge Yosef/she lo yadah l'hakir et Yosef/and all of the good that he had done for the country/asher harbeh l'heytiv im ha'medina*.

And as the slavery begins, the seeds of resistance are planted, nurtured by women. The long march to freedom as it begins in *Parashat Sh'mot* is a women's march, the men called to join. We see the courage of Moses' mother, Yocheved, who has the courage to have a child in the face of Pharaoh's edict to kill all the male children of Israel. We see the courage of Shifra and Puah, the midwives who dared to disobey, refusing to do Pharaoh's bidding to kill the little ones they brought into the world. We see the bravery of Pharaoh's own daughter, who comes to be known in our tradition as Batya, showing compassion for baby Moses hidden among the bulrushes by the water's edge. We see the courage of young Miriam, hiding to see what would happen to her little brother. Boldly stepping out, she asked Pharaoh's daughter if she should run and get a nursing woman for the baby, so uniting Moses with his own mother, that he might suckle from the breast of his people. We honor the quiet dignity and strength of Moses' wife, Tziporah, who cared for her children amidst the swirl of struggle, who on the return to Egypt stepped into the breach to save her husband before the journey had even begun.

As we seek courage now from the women, from our mothers and their daughters through time until today, and from all of those who have been abused and demeaned, from the vulnerable and forgotten, may song and spirit join us,

prayers of our lips and of our feet. As we come into Shabbos, I share with you below a prayer for America that I wrote eight years ago at another time of inauguration. It was written then with great hope, yet a hope touched by reality even amidst euphoria. I find that with a shift in *kavannah*, the intention with which it is offered, it speaks to me of today, as it does of yesterday, and so too, I hope, of tomorrow.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor

### Prayer for America

Compassionate One, fill our hearts with love and compassion for each other, that in truth we might be one nation indivisible. Bless our country, its government, its leaders, and its people. Bless the vision that is America and help us all to make it real. Help us to be for each other a mirror in which to see the best we are, and when we stray give to each one the courage to remind, speaking truth to power when need be.

Of qualities that built this land, help us to distinguish between their light and shadow sides, and to know the upright way, that good not be twisted into evil. Take the violence from us, so much part of what has been; and lead us on a new path to the Prophet's vision fulfilled, of swords turned into plowshares that we shall at last learn war no more. Let not our confidence become arrogance, nor might the measure of right; mature enough in our independence, may we celebrate with all nations the interdependence from which a greater good will come.

Thirsting for peace, help us to sing an anthem now, not of bombs bursting, but of amber waves of grain and purple mountain majesties; the beauty of this land we love, your blessing manifest, not of destiny, but of goodness spreading out from sea to shining sea; and not upon us alone Your blessing bestow, but upon every nation and people in the world of Your creation.

Help us to see that we the people are America the beautiful, in all the grandeur of our colors, and in the symphony of faiths and tongues by which we sing to You and call each others' names; in the pilgrims' pride of roots diverse, each one of us from other lands have come, not only of a Mayflower on the sea, but of steerage passage and in chains and through sweltering desert sands, wretched and poor yearning to breathe free; let us be the strength of heart and mind to sustain the hand of she who lifts her lamp beside the golden door.

In our caring for the earth, the sky and water, may we honor those who first dwelled upon this land, and in small measure so atone for all the wrong done to them.

With liberty and justice for all, that freedom not ring hollow, help us to insure  
that health and knowledge, bread and roses, be the birthright of every child born,  
each one free to be and become, dreams deferred no more.

Bring near the day, soon to rise, when in rainbow chorus we shall sing, we have  
overcome.