



My Dear Friends,

While one “governs in prose,” one inaugurates in poetry. Amanda Gorman’s powerful reading at the inauguration earlier this week is the latest in a long line of celebrated poets who ushered in a new President dating back to Robert Frost in 1961. At the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy, Frost read his poem “The Gift Outright,” which includes a passage that resonates deeply today:

*Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves*

This past year, we have been weakened as the fault lines in this country were not only exposed but ruptured. The way forward is to understand the organic connection we all have with one another. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose inspiring legacy we remembered this week, called this “the inescapable network of mutuality.” “Whatever affects one directly,” Dr. King said, “affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.”

In the Hebrew Bible, this interwoven “garment of destiny” is expressed powerfully by Moses in the portion of Exodus that is read by Jews throughout the world this Shabbat. After Moses demands the Egyptian Pharaoh free the Jewish people from slavery so they can freely worship God, Pharaoh, who first rebuffs Moses, is ready to partially relent. “Take the adult men,” he says. “They are the ones who serve God.” Moses, however, refuses, explaining that all the people must be freed: “The young and the old. Our sons and our daughters,” as a celebration to God is only when the entire people come together as one.

Moving forward, this sense of togetherness needs to be our guiding spirit. As a new administration assumes their new roles, we pray that God grants guidance, wisdom and success to President Joseph Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and their entire team. Their success is our success.

At the same time, we must remain fully aware that the true path towards healing in this country rests in our own hands. If we seek a new dawn, we must usher it in ourselves. This is the hope and promise of America, which was captured so poignantly in Amanda Gorman's closing words:

*We will rebuild, reconcile and recover
and every known nook of our nation and
every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
battered and beautiful
When day comes we step out of the shade,
afire and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it*

Wishing you all a Shabbat Shalom,
Dr. Ari Berman

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