"Libi bamizrach v'anochi b'sof ma'arav - My heart is in the east, and I am at the ends of the west." While these words were first written by the Spanish philosopher and poet, Yehudah HaLevi, expressing the familiar Diaspora sentiment of being physically in one place and spiritually in quite another, the line seems newly resonant for many of us this weekend as we feel our attention drawn to events taking place in our nation's capital. Some of us are celebrating today the inauguration of President Donald J. Trump, believing that he will be a solid ally of the State of Israel and bring an outsider's critical perspective to Washington, creating accountability, prosperity, and change. Others are more strongly aligned with the thousands of protesters descending upon DC this week with their calls for health equity, racial justice, women's rights, and the protection of immigrants. Whatever our feelings about the new administration and what it represents, it is hard to deny that this week marks a pivotal turning point for our country. *Libi bamizrach* - Our hearts are in the (North)east while we sit here in the (Mid)west.

As luck would have it, there is some amount of synchronicity this Shabbat between our Torah portion, *Parashat Shemot*, and the inaugural weekend just beginning. For our Torah portion, too, tells of the transition of national leadership as "a new king arose over Egypt who knew not Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). Rabbi Nahum Sarna, author of Exploring Exodus, points out the unusual juxtaposition between pharaoh, the most powerful man in all the land who nonetheless bears not a proper name, and the humble Hebrew midwives who serve under him, Shifra and Puah, who ultimately defy their ruler by saving the lives of Israelite baby boys. Sarna writes, "What is remarkable is that the names of these lowly women are recorded whereas, by contrast, the all-powerful reigning monarch is consistently veiled in anonymity. In this way the biblical narrator expresses his scale of values. All the power of the might of pharaoh, the outward magnificence of his realm, the dazzling splendor of his court, his colossal monuments - all are illusory, ephemeral, and in the ultimate reckoning, insignificant, and they must crumble into dust because they rest on foundations empty of moral content."[1] What makes an individual deserving of name and legacy, according to the Torah, is not the station he inhabits or the status she holds, the wealth he's accumulated or the title she's gained for herself. A person's merit, according to Jewish tradition, is determined by one's words and one's actions. In this way, a modest birthing coach can come to eclipse even the mightiest of rulers.

In many ways, presidential inaugurations celebrate victory - a candidate has won, he's gained access to this coveted position of leadership and power, he finally steps into the role that he's worked so hard to realize. And yet, celebration on day one of any president's first term cannot help but be premature when we recognize that the mark of a leader's ultimate success lies not in having achieved this particular position, no matter how prestigious, but in having used it either well or poorly to bring safety, prosperity, right, justice, and freedom to the American people. President Trump has formidable challenges before him, facing a nation more deeply divided than at any time in recent history, and he has the opportunity not just to "win" but to begin to "earn" his title by using his position to promote healing, tolerance, and partnership. It is my deepest hope that these values will come to find expression as he formally begins his tenure as President of the United States.

To those who are celebrating today, I say congratulations. It has not necessarily been easy to be a Trump supporter in suburban Chicago, and I hope that your convictions about the promise our new president holds for our nation's economic growth, disruption of politics as usual, and support of the State of Israel indeed come true. I hope that you will recognize the particular influence you now have, as those on the inside, to hold our new president accountable - making sure that not only his policies, but also his words, reflect our highest values when it comes to human dignity and difference. And I

hope that you will look across the aisle so that we can work together on some of our country's most intractable problems.

And to those who are so devastated...It is not easy to maintain hope given the climate of these last many months which have often felt like one crushing blow after another. Perhaps there is inspiration to be found in the figures of Shifra and Puah, the Bible's first models of activism, resistance, and civil disobedience. These brave women had no formal access to power and yet they were able to use the roles that they inhabited to fight, quite successfully, for their values despite considerable obstacles and danger. There are so many ways to exert influence in this world - through lobbying elected officials or becoming involved in local government, through volunteering time and money to causes that matter, through grass-roots organizing and public discourse. My door is always open to those who wish to brainstorm or to mourn. And I am here, too for those who feel promise in this moment and want to share.

Each Shabbat in the Prayer for our Country we recite, "We ask Your blessings for our country, for its government, for its leader and advisers, and for all who exercise just and rightful authority. Teach them insights of Your Torah, that they may administer all affairs of state fairly, that peace and security, happiness and prosperity, justice and freedom may forever abide in our midst...May citizens of all races and creeds forge a common bond in true harmony to banish all hatred and bigotry and to safeguard the ideals and free institutions which are the pride and glory of our country." [2] May President Trump indeed heed these very wise words.

Our hearts may be in the east, but I'm glad that we're at least here together in the west.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Annie Tucker

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[1] Sarna, Nahum M. Understanding Exodus. New York: Schocken Books, 1987. p. 25.
[2] Siddur Sim Shalom. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1989. p. 415.