

Dear Friends:

At the heart of the Passover Seder is an opportunity for study. The words taken from the book of Deuteronomy tell the story of the going out from Egypt from a first-hand perspective. With the iconic words: *Arami Oved Avi*, "My father was a wandering Aramean", the story of our people's journey to freedom begins.

The Haggadah introduces the quotation from Scripture with two words: *Tzeh U'lemd*--Go and learn! Why did the rabbis add the word "go"? It would have been simple enough to say, *Nilmad*--Let us learn! Here the rabbis offer us a powerful lesson about how to fully engage ideas through movement. When we are too fixed in our position, when we approach a subject with preconceived notions of what is true and false it is difficult to engage in a meaningful dialogue. Only when we are willing to move from our internal places of safety, approaching a text, and one another with true openness, is it possible to see an issue from all sides.

This past week a group of our young people learned the wisdom of the rabbinic phrase: *Tzeh U'lemd* first hand.

Beginning this past Sunday, 40 teenagers left Chicago on a road trip to the South. They were evenly divided - 20 teens from Anshe Emet Synagogue and 20 teens from Bright Star Church. Jews and African Americans set out on a trip of identity and discovery. Leaving their homes and communities, led by thoughtful and sensitive teachers; these young people had the opportunity to experience each other's history. Unhindered by their normal environment, their experience was profound. By all accounts it was a remarkable journey!

- *"I was surprised to learn that even though our communities are very different, there are still so many similarities to be found"* -- **Aviva Kaplan: Anshe Emet**
- *"I learned that we have a lot of similarities to each other, and it's so great that we are coming together. I think now that we are friends, we can start a wave, like a trend for us to get outside of our comfortability and talk to others"* -- **Genevieve Hicks: Bright Star Church**

I want to commend Rabbi D'ror Chankin-Gould on all that he did to both prepare and lead this trip in such an exemplary fashion.

I believe that the teenagers offer us a lesson as we prepare for our family Seders. We have become far too comfortable in our own political and philosophic circles. There is an unfortunate insularity that has become more and more pervasive, both in the secular as well as in the Jewish world. The result is that ideas are not shared easily and conversations on challenging topics are either avoided, or reduced to shouting matches. The Rabbis are speaking to our generation: *Tzeh U'lemd*--Go out and learn!

The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim*. According to tradition *Mitzrayim* is a combination of two Hebrew words: *Makom Tzar*, a narrow place. If we are unwilling to leave the safety of our own positions we imprison ourselves in a self-imposed *Mitzrayim*, that narrow place. From that vantage point it is unlikely our conversations with those with whom we do not agree will be fruitful. The goal of Jewish learning on Passover is not to win the argument, not to be right, but rather to have furthered and deepened our understanding of the struggle to leave Egypt. In this way, we give each other the freedom to express our thoughts, to grow, and engage an ancient story and continue the journey of identification and self-discovery that began in Egypt and continues to this very day.

Janet joins me in wishing you and your family a Chag Sameach, a joyous and meaningful Passover.

Michael Siegel

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Siegel', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Senior Rabbi
Anshe Emet Synagogue