

*On March 30, 2021, Rabbi Gordon was invited to deliver the invocation at the meeting of the Harris County Commissioners, led by Judge Lina Hidalgo. He was invited by Jack Cagle, Commissioner of Precinct 4, which includes Humble. Here is the blessing Rabbi Gordon presented:*

Allow me to offer respectful greetings to the Honorable Judge Hidalgo, and Commissioners Ellis, Garcia, Cagle and Ramsey and all others who have business to present today. It is an honor for to be invited to offer a blessing for this important meeting. Harris County includes one of the most diverse populations in the U.S., and I commend the Commissioners for choosing diverse ways to open your meetings. Of the many faith communities represented in Harris County, this season recognizes that three of the most numerous communities observe important springtime festivals that help define sacred values. The Christian community is preparing for Easter, a time of rebirth, renewal, resurrection and hope. In two weeks, the Muslim community will be starting the sacred fast of Ramadan, strengthening their community and spiritual connections with the Almighty. And my own community in the Jewish world is in the midst of Passover, the story of liberation of one people that carries universal lessons. Of the many lessons the Passover story teaches, I am going to share two significant ones that are meaningful for Harris County at this time.

One commandment in the Hebrew Scriptures is repeated more than any other. Thirty-six times, in one form or another, we are taught: “Treat the stranger as one of your own, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Almost every American has ancestors who were once new to this country and could be regarded as strangers. Thinking of people as strangers leads to ignorance, fear and prejudice. When we make the effort to get to know the other, to TRULY know the other...there are no strangers, and we become one community.

Another lesson from the biblical Exodus helps us learn about responding to challenges. The Jewish people were enslaved for generations. Of course this is a universal story, as we know all too well about other populations who have been unjustly enslaved. When our people were finally redeemed, our freedom journey started in a mysterious, sometimes dangerous desert wilderness. The struggles in the desert led to finding a Promised Land...but, of course, there were challenges there, too. Throughout the generations, one challenge leads to another, but each one brings new knowledge wisdom and inner strength. Harris County has endured Hurricanes, debilitating freeze, economic turmoil and many other challenges. Those who dedicate themselves to the well-being of the community know this as well as anyone. Overcoming a hurricane does not mean we won't have another one. But we learn from our challenges. And now, as we battle a health pandemic, we count on the wisdom of our leaders to help guide us to the ways health and safety.

Three thousand years ago, the Jewish people had a guide to help us through challenges in the wilderness. His name was Moses. When the challenges were great, Moses and his brother, Aaron delivered a blessing that has stood the test of time for many Jews and Christians. I offer you this blessing, that is found in the Book of Numbers, for the sacred work you do to care for the well-being of all of Harris County:

May God bless you and protect you.

May God's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

May God's presence be with you, and give you peace.

Judge, Commissioners and staff: May the work you do today, and every day bring a sense of comfort and unity to all those who live in and visit our home...Harris County, Texas.

And may we all say: AMEN!