

Rabbi Sharon Brous speaks at Women's March D.C.

by Rabbi Sharon Brous | PUBLISHED Jan 22, 2017 in the Jewish Journal.

The nation we love is in crisis, and it is not only a political crisis. It is a moral crisis. A SOUL crisis.

But we know how to navigate troubled terrain.

Thousands of years ago, the Hebrew people were brutally enslaved in Egypt. The story of their redemption from bondage has planted in our collective consciousness the deepest human truth: that though we suffer, the trajectory of history moves from slavery to freedom, darkness to light, narrowness to expansiveness.

We all remember Moses standing before Pharaoh proclaiming, "Let my people go." But the quiet heroes of that liberation movement were two women, Shifra and Puah, midwives ordered by Pharaoh to take the lives of the firstborn male Hebrew children.

What Pharaoh did not know was that Shifra and Puah feared *no man*, they feared only the Holy One. So they risked their lives to resist the Empire and defy the evil decree.

Many believe Shifra and Puah were Hebrew women, rising up against an existential threat to their people. But others claim they were Egyptian, which made their decision to protect the Hebrews even more heroic. They entered the fray for their sisters because they understood they were a part of what Dr. King would later call *an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny*.

Like Egypt, our country dwells today in narrow straits.

But *we are not powerless*. Those midwives armed us with a blueprint for spiritual resistance: the marriage of radical empathy and moral action.

Sometimes—maybe once in a generation—a spirit of resistance is awakened at the intersection of love, faith and holy outrage. In those moments, we are reminded what we're fighting for, what our armed forces are willing to die for, what this country was built for and what our flag flies for: liberty and justice, *for all*.

This is one of those sacred moments. Today, around the country, we, the people, stand together in protest, proclaiming our fidelity to love over hate, progress over regress, and inclusion over exclusion.

Today, spiritual resistance is Black, Latino and white folks fighting—together—the systemic racism that is the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, and working—together—to welcome immigrants and refugees to our country with dignity and compassion, for we, too, were strangers.

It is Jews and Muslims, Christians, Catholics, Sikhs—people of all faiths and none—standing together to reject a Muslim registry, to reject all forms of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and any other discrimination against a religious minority.

Spiritual resistance is white women and women of color, gay, trans and heterosexual women and MEN of all stripes rejecting the political machinations that would turn us against each other, instead affirming our fundamental interconnectedness.

Because you see, our soul crisis is rooted in a cynical politics that pits vulnerable populations against each other. But spiritual resistance reawakens us to our shared humanity. One nation, indivisible.

Our children will one day ask us: where were you when our country was thrust into a lion's den of demagoguery and division? We will say: I stood with love. I stood with hope. I stood with sisters and brothers of all religions and races and genders and sexualities to insist that we *will* emerge from the darkness and bask in the brilliance of an America that honors the infinite worth of all of God's children.

This is an America that believes that *all* people deserve to live free from demonization, disenfranchisement, and denigration, that white supremacy and misogyny have no place in our diverse nation, that *all* people deserve affordable health care and a living wage, that our economic anxiety need not turn us against one another, but can, instead, help us understand one another.

This is an America that is sustained—not threatened—by its diversity.

This is an America fueled by hope, the greatest act of defiance against a politics of pessimism and culture of despair.

Our nation was built on lofty ideals of justice and equality—ideals that our founders themselves failed to realize, but which nevertheless perpetually lift our gaze toward the promise of a better America.

The only way we'll realize those ideals and heal from our soul-sickness is TOGETHER. As the great civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer said: "You don't have to like everybody, but you have to love everybody." Lift up the hand of someone to your left and to your right. *We are* the vast and varied manifestations of hope and love and spiritual defiance that will hold our nation to its greatest aspirations. We are the agents of change.

Together, we will stand against the moral bankruptcy that threatens our democracy.

Together, we will reclaim truth and lift our voices for justice and mercy.

Together, we will become midwives of a new era in America.

Shabbat shalom—may this holy day bring peace to all of us, and peace to our beloved country.