



A Letter from Minneapolis

January 2026/Shevat 5786 | Rabbi Aaron Weinger

My sweet nephew Katani,

By the time you read this letter, you might be wondering about that name. For almost nine months we've been calling you Katani, which means my little one. It's a placeholder. You're still kicking around your eema's belly and we're still waiting for the WhatsApp message announcing your birth from Jerusalem.

But don't worry. Your abba (my brother) and eema (my sister-in-law) are cooking up something special. Just as they did to name your amazing big sister. Three years ago in April, when she was born, they had the courage to name her Hallel (praise) Nitzan (bud). I hear that name as an act of resistance; we never forget that something new will bloom.

Your eema and abba are expecting you any day. And so is your uncle, from Minneapolis, who is buying more onesies than you'll ever need. I wrote a letter to your sister shortly after she was born. But I couldn't wait longer to write yours. My city of Minneapolis is a place most Israelis think is either a suburb of Chicago or someplace east of Los Angeles. And Minneapolis is breaking right now. Minnesota and Israel, two places in my heart, are on fire.

Katani, we are waiting for you to arrive. For your love. For your life being yours to shine where light is deadened by fear, by people who don't *hear*. By those who *forget* the cry of every human being made in the Divine image.

The world needs your courage, however YOU will become YOU.

Katani, as I write this letter, we're getting ready to read parshat *Vaera* this Shabbat, chapter 6 toward the beginning of *Shemot*. In *Vaera* we read this incredible encounter between God and Moshe who is fearful. So God tells Moshe,

וַאֲנִי אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֶל־יִצְחָק וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי וְשְׁמִי יְהוָה לֹא נִודַעְתִּי לָהֶם:

I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name יהוה.

וְגַם הִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם לָתֵת לָהֶם אֶת־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֶת אֶרֶץ מִגְרֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר־גָּרוּ בָּהּ:

I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners.

וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־נַאֲקַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם מְעַבְדִּים אֹתָם וְאָזְכֹר אֶת־בְּרִיתִי:

I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.

In case you couldn't tell, Katani, God is speaking to a Moshe who has very low self-esteem. A Moshe who stumbles on his own speech. A Moshe we now revere as our greatest teacher, but who can't for a second believe that the Israelites – enslaved in Egypt – will ever pay attention to him.

Believe me, nephew, each one of us is a version of that Moshe at one point or another.

But instead of Divine grandstanding or fire-breathing fury, God gets close to Moshe in his vulnerability. Another way to put it:

“Hey, Moshe. Yeah I *appeared* before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yeah, I *established* my covenant with them. But I didn't really let them see all of me. In your feeling broken, Moshe, I'm with you as the compassionate name of God, Adonai. I'm sharing my whole presence with you and inviting you in.”

Yes, God *appeared*. Yes, God *established* with the big shots Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But that's not enough. *God had to hear, and God had to remember.*

God shares God's full self with Moshe by *hearing* and *remembering* right here, right now.

The medieval Italian commentator Sforno picks up on the power of remembering when he writes about 500 years ago:

“And I have remembered my covenant.” “And in this way, the Israelites showed themselves fit for Me to remember My covenant, as with (Ps. 106:44-45), ‘Upon seeing that they were in distress, and on God's hearing their cry, God recalled God covenant.’”

Sforno suggests that God draws closer precisely when the Israelites experience suffering. That's when God makes a choice to *remember*. That's how God responds to the Israelites' distress. That's what makes the covenant worth keeping alive. God is attuned to human suffering. God bonds with Moshe—not only by appearing and establishing in the past but also by hearing and remembering humanity in its unfolding.

So must we, Katani, for you in Israel and for us in Minnesota. One day you will read about it in the history books. You will read about those who obeyed without question and those who resisted with peaceful protest. Those who chose silence and those who drew on the past to dream, to build communities that uphold care and respect, and to act in the face of challenge.

That history has played out on Rechov Kaplan in Tel Aviv and at 34th and Portland in South Minneapolis, on Christopher Street in the West Village, and on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial by a man named Dr. King who had a dream. And history is still unfolding. History is unfolding where the fangs of fear still try to rip human dignity from hospitals and homes and houses of worship and stifle the compassionate Adonai of our Exodus story. But I promise you, Katani, that will not happen.

The Adonai of compassion is still speaking with love. And so must we here in Minnesota speak with love to our Somali and Latino immigrant neighbors under attack, who fear leaving home, sending their kids to school, and going to the grocery store. We must speak with love to the observers who bear witness to raids, like one that unfolded on Thursday in a family-owned Mexican restaurant in Willmar where first the ICE agents enjoyed lunch before rounding up three employees. And we must speak with love to one another, to every person sitting in the sanctuary of Adath Jeshurun terrified, unsure, and aching for many different reasons. It is the same love that was spoken to our family, through the refugee resettlement organization known as HIAS. They arrived on the shores of this great country despite the heinous nativism that painted all Jewish people as vermin. Katani, I traveled to New York with members of today's bat mitzvah family and your great grandmother Annette, on the LDI Great Gratitude Tour, to celebrate HIAS's life-saving work. You will read about those who spoke up when it would have been easier to be a silent Moshe or a forgetful God. But Moshe and God refuse those labels. And I hope you will too.

Katani, you will read about the dozens of colleagues in the Minnesota Rabbinical Association and Cantors Association, who yesterday issued a statement that is being distributed to our wider Jewish community after a devastating event—and many events since—unfolded in Minneapolis. I'm sharing some of it here, including a few passages I helped write with my colleagues and signed.

“As rabbis and cantors across Minnesota, we write out of collective concern for what is happening in our beloved state. No matter how you understand the need for immigration reform and border security, the actions of federal agents in our home are having a devastating impact on the people of our communities. This is a moment that requires us to stand united with our fellow Minnesotans.

We grieve the tragic death of Renée Nicole Good, fatally shot by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent on January 7th in front of her wife and horrified neighbors. We mourn for Renee's death and the heartbreak her family and loved ones are experiencing.

Alongside our grief is horror: horror that our fellow Minnesotans are terrified to leave their homes and even to answer their doors. They are not going to the jobs they rely on to afford their basic needs, or to attend worship services. Parents are scared to send their children to school. Schools, daycare centers and businesses are afraid to open, as ICE makes arrests on their doorsteps. Community members who are eager to help are fearful, in the wake of Renée Good's killing, that

they, too, may be targeted, harassed, or even killed. Our tradition repeatedly teaches us to love the stranger, remembering that we too have known the experience of being immigrants in a new land.

And alongside that horror is resolve: resolve to take action - as individuals and as a collective - to bear witness and make a difference. Right now we witness agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) wreaking havoc across our state. These actions have no home here. This is not what we know to be good and right as Minnesotans across the political spectrum who protect each other, the stranger in our midst, and our shared human dignity.

We know this moment is overwhelming and can make us feel helpless in the face of a monumental challenge. Even as we need to ensure our own physical and mental wellbeing, we can't let our fears stop us from taking the first step of action. We take strength from the prophet Jeremiah,

But you, have no fear, My servant Jacob—declares God—For I am with you. (Jeremiah 46:28) We hope that in the days ahead, chesed, kindness, will define the way we interact with each other. We know that all people are created in the image of God, regardless of immigration status. As we move ahead, we pray for comfort from the grief we are experiencing, courage to witness pain even when it is uncomfortable, and the resolve to take action toward building the world we want to see.”

Katani, each one of us follows the proud chain of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. But even God recognizes that living in the past is not enough. Living a Judaism that only makes us feel good, in which we skip the hard parts, is incomplete. Such a Judaism leaves our people enslaved in Egypt. It leaves Moshe hobbled by his own fears to confront Pharaoh and save our people. It leaves God stunted to become the compassionate Adonai who carries us upon the wings of eagles. It is not enough to appear and establish a covenant. It is only when God and humanity arrive in the present, when God and humanity *hear* the moaning and *remember* the covenant—that's when the covenant endures.

Katani, my nephew, when you read this letter you will have a name that you are growing into and a laugh and cry that we hear and remember. You will have outgrown all the onesies your uncle bought you. But that covenant-- you will always grow with. It doesn't just belong to the ancestors in your life, as special as they are. It also belongs to you. And its loving compassion is meant to extend far and wide.

Like God sharing it with Moshe, the covenant arrives with love, no matter the degree of heartbreak in any given moment of your life. May you, with your Divine spark, *hear* the moaning of those who are crying out. And may you, with your Divine spark, *remember* the possibility of a response and a world of peace.

Love you, Uncle Aaron