

INVOCATION GOVERNOR'S INAUGURATION 2023

Breathe of all life,
Great Liberator of the oppressed,
Sacred Spirit of debate and resolution,
Divine Guide through the wilderness of the Human Condition,
We pray to you today and in days to come to guide Governor Scott as
he leads our beloved Vermont bravely forward.
Give him patience when faced with stubborn if principled impasse,
humility in the face of the power of his position,
skepticism when others come at him puffed up with certainty,
humor when faced with the inevitable absurdities that politics
engender,
and wisdom when faced with the real needs of the people of this state:
the need for good government, reasoned leadership, and a Governor
who puts the well-being of the people of Vermont above all.

The sages of Jewish tradition saw debate as sacred, but they also knew
the dangers of zealotry, and so they tell this story.

Two great rabbis and leaders of the Great Assembly, Rabbi Hillel and
Rabbi Shammai argued for three years about a particular point of law
and legislation. One side would say, "the law is on my side." And the
other side would say, "the law is on my side." After three years,
exasperated, God's voice from heaven blared forth saying, "Both of
your opinions, 'elu v'elu in Hebrew' both of your opinions are valid
words of the Living God. But since we must have an answer, the law is
according to this one, Hillel."

The rabbis ask if they were both valid opinions, why did the law follow Hillel. The answer? Because the party of Hillel was kind and gracious about the other side's opinion, and they taught their students both opinions, even teaching the other point of view first out of respect for debate.

God, teach us to see debate as a great sacred task to be taken seriously and given great care and openness.

Help us to value our democracy, appreciate that it is fragile, and to tend it with care and calm.

Teach us, our leaders, and our Governor to be kind and gracious to those who hold reasonable ideas with which they disagree, and to show respect to those who hold such ideas.

And may those who disagree with our Governor and his administration also be kind and gracious and show respect to those who hold reasonable ideas with which they disagree.

And as you help Governor Scott, help each of us to find the courage of humility and the openness to listen to ideas that challenge us.

In our prayers, observant Jews say many times every day "Shema Yisrael." "Hear O Israel." We say to declare our belief in the unity of the sacred, but also to remind ourselves just to listen, and to pay attention, because it can be truly difficult sometimes to stay open to the very thing we most need to hear.

May the One Who Commands us to Listen, guide this administration, and guide us to hear one another, listen to each other's experiences and points of view, and then work together to build a road through the wilderness toward the promised land of Freedom and Unity.

Amen