

This past week, I had my first retreat with the incredible organization Rabbis Without Borders. If you haven't heard of it, no, we are not going to far flung corners of the earth to bring them Torah. Instead, I found myself this week in a group with some of the most brilliant, creative, and forward thinking rabbis in the country.

The theme of the retreat was pluralism. We learned a lot of great Torah, heard from a few innovators who are building bridges throughout the world, but the most difficult part of the retreat was when we were told to get in a group, pick an issue that was central to who we were as human beings, and argue against it. The idea was that everyone has a side, and it is easy to write off people who we think are wrong or mistaken. But, everyone lives their lives speaking from the essential truth of their existence, and if you are unwilling or unable to see that truth, you cannot truly build a relationship with them.

In Parashat B'ha'alotecha, in two different chapters, we are given glimpses into the different sides of what means to be a part of the community.

Sometimes, there are new and exciting events to celebrate:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and say to him, "When you mount the lamps, let the seven lamps give light at the front of the lampstand." (Numbers 8:1-2)

Other times, people come together and have to help one another through times of trouble, times of pain and loss, times of grief:

ד וְהָאֶסְפֵּיף אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבוֹ, 4 And the mixed multitude that was
הַתְּאֵוִי תֹאָוָה; וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ, גַּם among them fell a lusting; and the

בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיֹּאמְרוּ, מִי יֵאָכְלֵנוּ
בָּשָׂר.
*children of Israel also wept on their
part, and said: 'Would that we were
given flesh to eat!*

ה זָכַרְנוּ, אֶת-הַדָּגָה, אֲשֶׁר-נֹאכַל
בְּמִצְרַיִם, חֲנָם; אֶת הַקִּשְׁאִים,
וְאֶת הָאֲבִטְחִים, וְאֶת-הַחֲצִיר
וְאֶת-הַבָּצְלִים, וְאֶת-הַשּׁוּמִים.
*5 We remember the fish, which we
were wont to eat in Egypt for nought;
the cucumbers, and the melons, and
the leeks, and the onions, and the
garlic;*

ו וְעַתָּה נִפְשָׁנוּ יִבְשָׁה, אֵין כָּל--
בְּלִתִּי, אֶל-הַמָּן עֵינֵינוּ.
*6 but now our soul is dried away; there
is nothing at all; we have nought save
this manna to look to.'--*

The thing is, there is always light with the dark, pain in the beauty. Like graduating from high school to go on to the college of your choice, there is still heartache in leaving behind that which you know and love. For B'nai Yisrael, they are on a journey toward a new and incredible land, a land which will be their own, a home for all the people. But still, they know that to get there will be a long and difficult trial, and that their future in this new land is not guaranteed. Still, they persist in raising up new light, a symbol of a unified hope in a brighter future.

Because the text says not if, but when you raise up the new flame, you will need to take care in lighting the fire. Looking ahead is uncertain, unclear, while there are always good parts of the past that we cling to. Whether it is a place we have lived before, people we once knew, or memories of joyous times together, the past has a certain golden hue that we carry with us in our hearts.

S'forno reminds us that the

וזוה מעשה המנורה מקשה, the very composition of the menorah as a single chunk

of gold, with all its lights facing the lamp on the central shaft, symbolises this united endeavour to serve G'd, i.e. to look towards the spiritual light as symbolised by that in the center of the menorah, its "trunk." המנורה מקשה, to underline the unity, the whole people jointly striving to attain the same spiritual objective.

This is the goal, that by working with one another, we can not only make our way toward a united goal. More importantly, we can ONLY be united when we have the compassion to put our own ideas and opinions on hold for a moment in order to really look at the other people around us. They are our brothers and sisters, the friends and companions with whom will travel along the road ahead.

Tomorrow will be our final Shabbat in our current sanctuary, a place that has given decades of memories, simachot, and joy to so many of us. Understand the pain and discomfort for those who have been to this place, even as we hope to realize a great dream for the whole of this community. All change comes with loss, and all loss comes with pain. Give all the people around you the care to honor those feelings because they are very real and deeply felt.

I invite you to embrace the feelings at this moment, but also embrace the people around you. Sitting next to you are people committed to the future of this incredible community. In truth, we all have the same goal; to make this community the best it can be, to help it be a safe and flourishing place for all of our families and for anyone who chooses to come along with us. Tonight, we are asking each of you for your help. Help us care for everyone, no matter where they come from or what opinions they hold. Help us build the

excitement for our future. Help us hold close the hopes and dreams of the people who make this congregation incredible.

Help me raise a new light for us all. Shabbat Shalom.