

RABBI LUTZ COMMENTARY FROM THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING - MAY 22, 2011

Today we close the chapter on another year in our congregational journey and look forward to the year ahead, in a wonderful coincidence, we find the Israelites similarly positioned in our annual cycle of Torah reading. Yesterday we read the final chapters of the book of Leviticus, which closes the book as well on the Israelites stay at Mt. Sinai. This coming week 's parashah begins a new chapter in the story of the Israelites as the Book of Numbers opens with the Israelites moving way from Sinai and towards the Promised Land.

This journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land, is not just the mythical journey of our ancestors, but, of course, our own perpetual journey as well. We seem to be continually moving from Sinai to the Promised Land. Of course, there are those rare Sinai moments -- times of revelation when it all seems to come together, when we seem to have it all figured out, those rare moments of true clarity when we truly feel enlightened. And there are also those wonderful moments of accomplishment that sprinkle our journey as well, when we feel as if we have reached the promised land, special life moments that often come after much work and struggle and wandering, moments when we feel as if we have crossed the river and entered a new land filled with potential and promise. Such moment, equally, rare and treasured, fill us with pride and warmth and exhilaration.

But we can't stay long in either place. Most of our lives are spent somewhere in between the heights of the mountain and the milk and honey of the promised land, involved in the journey, wandering the wilderness. It 's not a bad place to be, by the way, because the journey is where we learn about ourselves, the journey is the place of growth and connection. And, most importantly, the journey is where we encounter each other because we do not journey alone. We have all kinds of traveling partners, our family, our friends, our community each making their own journey as well and all of us finding the blessings of support and comfort and love in each others presence as we move forward together -- as we move forward towards an envisioned promised land.

If we were to open a Torah, there between the end of Leviticus and the beginning of Numbers we would find a large blank space. This is the space of our journey. And it is into this space, into the wilderness, as it were, that we insert a blessing. *chazak chazak v'nitchazeyk* be strong, be strong and we shall be strengthened.

As I recite these words, before me appears an image of the Israelites, pulling up camp, turning their back on Sinai and facing the wilderness before them. "How are we going to do this?" one must have anxiously wondered. "How do we make this journey?" asked another. And perhaps a wise one among them addressed their con-

cerns with a simple word, "Together," *chazak chazak v'nitchazeyk*. You be strong and you be strong and together, we shall all be strengthened.

That, my friends, is the power of community That is the power of this sacred place. In joining our hands and hearts in walking together, in combining our strength we are all stronger, better equipped, better able to make the journey together.

So let me conclude by first thanking all of you who have given your strength to this journey that we might all be strengthened:

When you came into the activity center this morning you saw a poster displaying all of our committees. I hope that you had the opportunity to sign your name on our committee board. I want to invite any one who, over the course of this past year, volunteered for a committee to please stand so that we can acknowledge you for supporting our journey as a community.

It has been a tough year financially for many of us, individually, and certainly for us as a community. And so, I want to acknowledge everyone who answered my appeal. I am so appreciative for those who did whatever they were able to do whether it was \$50 dollars, \$500, \$5000 or more. We have made great strides towards our goal. We're no there yet, but we are on our way.

I know your contribution came from your heart to help keep our community strong. I would like to extend to you as well my heartfelt appreciation.

We come quickly to the close of our 45th year of journeying together. Like all other years there were moments of heartache and struggle but there were revelatory Sinai moments as well and even some sweet promises fulfilled. Let me conclude by noting the sense of thanksgiving I feel as I look back and the hope and promise that fills me as I look forward all embodied in those words that have come to mark moments of transition moments like this one, when we come once more round the circle, to its ending and its beginning as we continue our journey together.

"Chazak chazak v'nitchazeyk" be strong, be strong and we shall be strengthened.

Question: How has the TAS community strengthened you? You can email you answer to me at lutz@tasnorthridge.org

Rabbi Barry Lutz

