

Hi everyone and welcome to your Co-Presidents' first installment under the new STAR.

We'd like to start by thanking CBE's incredible communications team for recreating and re-imagining CBE's monthly newsletter. They have all put a lot of time into bringing this newsletter to you and we know you're going to love it.

Of course, we'd also like to say a special thank you to Bob Becker who carried the STAR torch for over 25 years. Thanks, Bob, for your many years of dedication.

It's fitting that the Torah portion we just read, *Bamidbar*, takes us to the wilderness. Our ancestors have left Egypt and are taking a very long journey through the desert. On the way, the Israelites are counted and categorized and given roles and responsibilities.

We learn from this portion the importance of organizing a community. In order for our ancestors to survive the journey through the wilderness, they needed to create structure. They needed to define roles and create accountability. Just as we have been speaking this year about the value of All Jews are Responsible for One Another, we see in this portion the need to understand each person's contribution to the collective.

It is a great reminder that everyone at CBE needs to be counted, and to be valued. All of our members count. As in *Bamidbar*, each one of us should proudly lift ourselves up and be counted for the unique contribution that we can make to CBE. In this crucial time of transition, we need each of you to contribute what you can to ensure that our community thrives and survives. While our financial needs are often front-and-center, we ask you now to also focus on those things that will keep our community strong : Support any of the many events or programs that fill the Star-Lite every week, answer Chesed's call for a meal or a ride for someone in need, sign up as a greeter and oneg host at the next Shabbat service. And please come forward and share with the Reflections Committee your vision of our community. In other words, as we have said and will continue to do so, please continue to show up for one another - *Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh baZeh*.

The other striking part of *Bamidbar* is the very long journey through the desert. This portion strikes us as appropriate for our current global moment, as we travel through the desert of a seemingly-endless pandemic. It also feels appropriate for our community's specific moment of wandering through our final month with Rabbi Mike as the spiritual leader of our congregation.

The time the Israelites take hiking through the wilderness is so long that most of the leaders do not reach the destination of the Promised Land. Rabbi Mike has walked through a lot of

wilderness with our community and left us stronger through his leadership. He helped us navigate the wilderness of the COVID-19 pandemic, creating connection and Jewish engagement even when we could not be together in person. Rabbi Mike led our boards of directors through many processes of change and growth. Rabbi Mike struggled with us as we reimaged our *amudim* (pillars): communal Jewish values, membership engagement, volunteer leadership, governance, financial sustainability.

Rabbi Mike has taught us to reconceptualize the way we live our Jewish values, to find meaning and inspiration in the words of Torah. He inspired us to confront the inequities of the world and to stand up for immigrants, workers, and others who have often been marginalized. He made us uncomfortable in many ways– in fact, even the idea that the Presidents could (and should!) write a D'var Torah is a direct result of the way Rabbi Mike has led us during his tenure at CBE.

As for the wilderness, this parasha conveys to us that the desert itself is the point, has its own intrinsic significance. Perhaps God could have chosen a less arduous path for our ancestors. But there is much to be gained from the journey. And we have learned so much from our time with Rabbi Mike. While he is leaving us to continue our communal journey with new leadership, he has changed us in ways for which we are forever grateful.

We dedicate this D'var Torah to Rabbi Mike – who showed us that learning Torah is a blessing and a responsibility; that living its teachings is the goal to which we can aspire. We thank him deeply for leading us through part of our journey in the wilderness. We will keep his teachings within us and use them in our path forward.

Jaymi and Chuck

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