

Hiking in the Rockies with my family was the highlight of my summer. Less than a half day's drive out of Denver and we were in wilderness. The years of nudging the kids along the trail with stories and treats had paid off and now they were leaving us in the dust.

As we headed up to Emerald Lake, and it was up the whole way, my body objected. First my right knee reminded me that it wasn't so sure about this idea, then my hips complained that I was no longer 17. But the amazing thing about these aches and pains, was that if I kept going, they resolved themselves, and I was able to go the lakes and beyond, through Alpine meadows and along rivers dotted with waterfalls. How much I would have missed, if I had let that initial pain deter me.

The rabbis have a saying- Lefum Tzaara agra, according to the effort so is the reward, or more literally according to the pain so is the profit. It is in Aramaic which may have been because it was so important that they wanted everyone to understand it, or conversely it might have been a common saying that the rabbis picked up and applied to Torah study. It reminds me of the sports adage, "no pain no gain", or the slogan of my college class in computer science- "garbage in, garbage out". It is found in Pirke Avot and attributed to a lesser known scholar

Ben Heh Heh. Why isn't he called rabbi? We don't know, some say he died before he received ordination. What kind of name is Heh Heh? It's as strange in Hebrew as it is in English. Maybe he was a convert, the commentaries say, with the first Heh standing for Abraham, and the second for Sarah. They each received an extra hey in their names from God, and they are considered the parents of all converts, so that Jews by choice will have yichus, ancestral honor. A more exciting version tells us that because Ben Heh Heh converted in the days of the Hadrianic persecutions, when it was illegal to convert to Judaism, he used Heh Heh as an alias, so he could remain undercover. Don't you love that image, secret agent rabbi?

Ben Heh Heh might have been adding his own interpretation to a statement found in the Talmud, Megilla 6b : " If you make the effort, you will find results." This is said in the context of Torah study. Before you say something is meaningless, the rabbis advise, consider whether you have invested in trying to discern its meaning.

That's good advice, but I want to riff on this teaching in a slightly different direction.

Pain is very important to the health of our bodies. Were we to be unable to experience pain, life would be very dangerous. Recently I read a story about a teenager in Georgia who did not experience pain because of a genetic abnormality. While her friends thought it was really cool, her parents spoke of the stress of their hypervigilance. Most of the children with this syndrome die young of burns or other injuries. They have infections that go unnoticed or broken bones that are untreated. By the time someone realizes there's a problem, they are too sick to save. Without the body's own warning system, pain, we can fail to respond in time.

Pain is necessary to our health, but we often fear it, and because we fear it we let a little pain deter us from things that we really want to do. It can be physical pain, or emotional distress that we feel we cannot endure.

Carol Dweck, a well respected academic, has written extensively about the growth mindset which allows an individual to get through challenges and to persevere. Otherwise when hitting an obstacle or setback, people often interpret the pain they experience as a sign to stop, as proof that they don't have the ability to succeed in that area. Dweck has a close relationship with the president of Harvey Mudd College, a science and engineering school, which over the last

decade has brought gender parity to its student body and faculty. Dweck found that in math or science, if women encounter some problem, they quickly reach the conclusion that they aren't good at these subjects. She encouraged the school to set up systems so that young women would maintain their self-confidence and would see the problem, as the men did, as outside of themselves, in the difficulty of the material.

This spring I experienced some pain in our work together as a congregation. The community had turned out in an amazing way in February at a Jewish rally in Mountain View against the initial "Muslim Ban," and the talk at that time about Muslims being identified through outward marking. Members of our congregation and the general Jewish community, a significant number of whom had never been politically active over my last 27 years here, related to the issues of immigrants and refugees in a deeply personal and Jewish way. That conversation continued within our congregation and in the interfaith alliance to which we belong, PACT, People Acting in Community Together. We met fellow volunteers active in local churches which were bearing the brunt of harsher enforcement, which by the style of enforcement seemed to violate past respect for the due process of American law. We saw commonalities between the hateful messages sent to the

Evergreen Mosque, the resurrection of old Anti-Semitic tropes, and the attacks on those seeking asylum in this country.

The board of our congregation, asked by our Shir Hadash Organizing Committee, voted to join the sanctuary movement. This had three components. First- to ally ourselves with other religious communities. Second - to invite our members to get rapid response training so as to serve as witnesses to help make sure that individual rights were not being trampled in ICE round-ups, and finally, to host an individual in our Sanctuary building who was at risk of being deported, though they had a legitimate case for asylum, that is, that they could make a legal case that the return to their country of origin was likely to constitute a threat to their life.

There followed a personally painful period when I, and I know many others, on all sides, felt misunderstood and not listened to. I know others also felt judged unfairly, as views were not fully heard. Some would have preferred that we proceed in other ways, some, who were personally very generous to people of other faiths and races, felt hurt as generalizations were made about them. We learned a lot about communication and how much is necessary to make sure key details are not lost.

On reflection, having lived through my first year here when the board voted to make the purchase of grocery store scrip mandatory and the congregation responded like a bull to a red flag, I should have been more wary creating a situation in which people felt like something was being foisted upon them.

So, we doubled back, brought in the local chair of the American Immigrant Attorneys Association to share more detailed information. We spoke with other congregations, Reform and not Reform, Jewish and not Jewish , and gathered best practices. Our national Reform movement adopted a strong resolution on civil rights and immigration and meanwhile things kept happening in the outside world.

I am so proud that we continued to move forward despite the pain. It was scary and uncomfortable to have people upset. We all like to be liked and we like the Temple to be a warm and comfortable place, but we persevered. Theoretically we agree that it is better to have differences of opinion than conformity but the cost of that independence of thought is that sometimes we will disagree, and we don't like that as well.

Moving forward there have already been some very positive outcomes. A large number of people have trained as rapid responders. New volunteers have come

forward who have never participated in Temple life before. You can do that too.

Individuals who were thinking of leaving the congregation because they no longer needed the Temple with their children grown, stayed on to support the congregation's social justice work.

Through the lawyers we have been working with, two other immigrant women, both of whom have already received asylum have come to our attention and though they don't need sanctuary we are able to help them in other ways. In these two cases these are women who have suffered severely in being trafficked, raped and mistreated, the grounds for their being granted asylum. They need help restarting their lives, they need medical care and a safe haven and we are able, through the generosity of our members, to step up and respond to their needs. These same attorneys have other clients, waiting to be awarded sanctuary by the courts, and being able to stay safely in our Temple and avoid deportation, will allow their cases to move forward.

Bringing someone seeking asylum into the Temple , will we be violating the law?

There are different readings of the legal term harboring, and if we are public about what we are doing , we stand on strong legal arguments that we are not.

There is also a higher law of due process which we will be respecting and a higher law upon which this country was established.

Why bring them to Temple rather than to someone's home? ICE has continued to respect Memorandum #11 which recognizes religious institutions as sensitive locations making it safer for the asylum seeker to stay here.

Are we, Congregation Shir Hadash, in danger? Though it is scary to do something this brave, I do not believe, based on 40 years of precedents in which no congregation or clergy member has been prosecuted, that we are in danger. We live in a community where the Mayor of San Jose, the Head of the County Board of Supervisors, the District Attorney, and our Congressional delegation are all with us. Even the Town of Los Gatos passed a resolution back on May 2nd declaring itself an inclusive community and stating its commitment "to a diverse, supportive inclusive community and to protecting the constitutional and human rights of its residents, workers and visitors."

I have visited Israel about 2 dozen times and almost every time I visit Yad VaShem, the Holocaust memorial. Each time what is most meaningful to me is the garden honoring the righteous Gentiles. How much courage they showed in those times of great danger! How tempting it must have been just to mind your

own business and not get involved with people who were different than you. I ask myself, if it were my gay or transgender son who was in danger in being sent back to a country where his life was at risk, if it were my daughter who had been trafficked or raped, wouldn't I want people of conscience to step forward and act on their behalf? As we will read tomorrow, V'havata lereyechah kamocho- love your fellow as yourself or as is repeated often in the Torah, "for you know the heart of the stranger".

Within our congregation there are different political viewpoints, but I think we are together in our respect for the basic principles of American democracy and in remembering the history of our Jewish families. My family came to the United States at a time when you didn't need paperwork to enter this country, but I know many of us have stories of family members leaving Czarist Russia illegally to evade the 25 year draft or merely to escape persecution?

We all do things that are hard. Maybe you also climb high mountains with old knees, or get on airplanes even though you are afraid to fly. Maybe you get up and walk into a classroom even though you are experiencing anxiety, or begin a conversation with someone who has yelled at you in the past. We should not be

insensitive to pain, we can learn from pain, but there are also times when we have to push through that first level of pain, to get to where the rewards are.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro spoke to us at the end of the summer, at a meaningful session which I was sorry to miss. He wrote a poem based on the saying from the Mishnah:

“Ben Hei Hei Said;

Effort is its own reward.

We are here to do.

And through doing to learn

And through learning to know

And through knowing to experience wonder

And through wonder to attain wisdom

And through wisdom to find simplicity

And through simplicity to give attention

And through attention to see what needs to be done.”

These are our times and we must rise to its challenges.