

BI-TWT Semi-Annual Congregational Meeting

June 4, 2017 – 10 Sivan 5777

D'var Torah – Rabbi Enid C. Lader

Our Torah portion for this week – *B'ha'a-lot'cha* – opens as God tells Moses to instruct Aaron on how to light the lamps of the menorah, saying: “When you **kindle** the lamps, let the seven lamps give light at the front of the lampstand.” [Num. 8:2]

B'ha'a-lot'cha – when you kindle – literally when you raise.

The commentator Rashi explains why this expression is used: Because the flame rises, Scripture writes of their kindling, an expression of “rising,” for one must kindle – or hold a fire to the wick, until the flame rises by itself.

One must kindle – or hold a fire to the wick, until the flame rises by itself.

For me and the work that I get to do, this is such a powerful statement. There are many, many lamps in our congregation and our community; and the expression of “holding a fire to the wick” can take on many different meanings.

“Holding a fire to the wick” can be sitting around a family’s dining room table, saying the *Shehecheyanu* with them and then proceeding to read through and discuss their child’s bar or bat mitzvah Torah portion... Or sitting with a family in their living room and listening to them share stories and memories of their loved one as we prepare for the funeral and eulogy... Or sitting at the bedside of a congregant in the hospital or rehab hospital, and listening to their concerns – and sharing hopes and prayers for a good recovery...

“Hold a fire to the wick” can be standing before our religious school students and parents each week, teaching them Torah and then listening as they light up the morning with their holy insights... Or standing before a group of ministers from the West Park community and telling them about the history of our congregation and then showing them our Torah, many of whom are seeing one up close and personal for the first time... Or standing before a Bible group meeting at the Lakewood Baptist Church, and speaking with them about the Jewish view of the Bible... Or standing along with a Catholic and a Moslem woman, speaking about Noble Women of Faith...

“Holding a fire to the wick” can be leading Shabbat services on a Friday evening and bringing up one of our bar or bat mitzvah students to help lead, as they prepare to lead their own service... Or leading a family service with one of our elementary school students, shy in front of people, but ready to sing and sign the Shema and offer her own insights to Torah questions... Or leading Torah study on Shabbat mornings and bringing in additional commentaries to show the scope of Jewish thought and the pluralistic nature of our tradition...

Lighting all these lamps... all these wicks... all these flames... helping them to rise on their own.

It is an honor and a privilege for me to serve as your rabbi. Like the lights on the lampstand, I do not stand alone, and am very appreciative of:

- Debbie Chessin in her role as our congregation’s educator,
- to our Board for their leadership of our congregation,
- to our Ritual Committee for providing leadership of services and Torah study so that we are the only Reform Congregation in Cleveland that offers weekly Shabbat observance throughout the year,
- to Pat Outlaw, as she keeps the workings of our congregation moving forward,
- and to our congregation – for holding your sacred fire to my lamp.

As we now move on with our congregational meeting, Rabbi Yirmiyah teaches that being occupied with community needs is equivalent to being occupied with matters of Torah. Thus we pray:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּצָרְכֵי צְבוּר

*Barukh atah adonai eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav
v'tzivanu la'asok betzorkhei tzibur.*

How full of blessing you are, ETERNAL ONE, our God, majesty of the Universe,
who has consecrated us with Your commands,
and commanded us to occupy ourselves with the needs of the community.