

The Blessing of Being In Between
October 29, 2016 ~ 26 Tishrei 5776
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It was a brilliant moment as the sun set and reds and oranges and purples vibrantly cast their glow across the sky. They never could have imagined encountering such beauty, Adam and Eve, but as the colors shifted into darker hues of purples and blues worry set in. Where had the sun gone? Would it come back? They could not even see God's creations in the moon's dim glow. In the garden, it was as if the sun shone all day and all night, but now, outside of the garden it was a dark time for Adam and for Eve.

The rabbis of the midrash called this time - *bein hashmashot* - for they were between - *bein* - two suns - two *shemesh*. *Bein Hashmashot*: neither here nor there, no longer and not yet. It was liminal, on the threshold between one day and the next. It was a moment disorienting, scary. They had never experienced a moment like this before and could not imagine a way out. Who, how, when they wondered would they get past this moment of *bein hashmashot*? Being in between, being in the middle, a place neither here nor there, but in a place they would someday learn was profoundly holy.¹

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It was a brilliant moment. Purples and blues and silvers, like the colors at the end of sunset, drawing eyes upward to an embroidered velvet ark cover. A brilliant tableau in front of which my rabbi, Sandford Kopnick, blessed me with the priestly benediction as I became Bat Mitzvah on the 27th of Tishrei 5756 - which is tomorrow - at Congregation Achduth Vesholom in Fort Wayne, Indiana. My rabbi arrived at our temple just months before and when selecting my Torah portion, he promised us that it would come in handy down the road to know the first days of creation, to know *this* parasha *Bereshit*.

When Adam and Eve worried about *bein hashmashot* - being in the middle of two suns - they had not yet encountered the phenomenon of *middle* school. Or growing up in the *middle* of the country. And certainly not being a *middle* child. They hadn't yet learned how being in between, in the liminal space, could be holy space. They hadn't yet eaten the apple that would give them the knowledge of such knowing. And neither had I. That day was actually a joyous and sacred day, in all of its teenage awkwardness as I faced the ark in a navy blue suit with red thread lined button holes and gold colored buttons that my Aunt Patti - the kind of aunt who is not actually my aunt - bribed me with a Hootie and the Blowfish CD to wear. I hated it. You can tell as

¹ Based on Genesis Rabbah 11:2 & 12:6; Pirkei de Rebbe Eliezer 20

much as in some of the pictures. But she said it would make my mom happy. And I liked my mom. And Hootie. So it seemed like a fair deal.

It hadn't been a time of fair deals, in my opinion. A few years prior, we had suffered the loss of loved ones that seemed so unfair. And in that very moment of becoming Bat Mitzvah, my Zayde Gubitz was at the end of his life and unable to celebrate with us. His English yartzeit is also tomorrow. But my rabbi held us up and did what he could to support and mould the transformation of Jennifer on the path to becoming Jen - who would read Bereshit every Simchat Torah at the temple from that day on.

Rabbi Kopnick also picked up and pushed on my family's interests and talents: my mom's gift for guitar, Jewish music and education; my dad's gift of public speaking, creativity, communal affairs and social justice work. These gifts were already developing in my brother, sister and me. So I picked up a guitar for the first time, began to help teach religious school, and grew as a leader and songleader of our temple youth group and reform Jewish summer camp, GUCI, in Zionsville, IN.

And so as we stood in front of that ark with hues of blues, and purples, and silvers that led the eyes upward to the *ner tamid*, the eternal light, my rabbi blessed me. In my years of being *bein hashmashot* - in between the suns, in the middle - he helped me move past that time of unfair deals and middle school awkwardness that seemed dark, devoid of light. Because he could see my light on the path to becoming me.

Most of us don't want to use middle school as a core story this far into life, (I have self awareness about that), but it's no surprise then that it was around that time when becoming me became intertwined with becoming a rabbi.

So by the middle year of rabbinical school, year 3 of 5 - I was *bein hashmashot* again. Neither here nor there, no longer an earthling and not yet a rabbi, exactly in the middle. It was by no means as bad as middle school. At this point, I could choose my own clothes, but I was unclear who I was to be as a rabbi. I knew my rabbinate couldn't look like my childhood rabbi's because I wasn't him. It couldn't look like other mentors or classmates' rabbinate because I wasn't them. So where was my voice? What would my rabbinate look like?

In walked Mehlman, (we're on a last name basis - Mehlman and Gubitz). It was Mehlman's homiletics class that helped me find my voice. He nurtured how much I cared about poetic meter and imagery, appreciated the atypical way I see things, accepted my half awake participation in his 8am Thursday classes (I'm not and will never be an 8am-er). And when it came time for my senior sermon, which is the only moment you get to speak formally at HUC in

New York, Mehlman stepped in. He went over my drash with me word by word over a tuna sandwich at a restaurant on Broadway. That sermon's delivery and reception was my proudest and most accomplished moment in rabbinical school. As Mehlman's student, *bein Hashmashot* - even when it was still dark at 8am, I could find light.

It is light as well that Cantor Hollis Schachner brings to my rabbinate and brings out in me. I never imagined a colleague who would share and play and laugh with me in such ways. Who would trade roles, let me sing and find my voice. Who would always have my back, can read my mind usually, who lets me parent her children when she's busy, and shares my special love of yoga pants that look like dress pants. And who finds Torah in the *bein hashmashot* - the in-between and often dark moments of people's lives. And helps them face it, learn from it, and when possible - shine in it.

Bein hashmashot - in between all of my sunsets, all of my middles - the liminal moments where I was finishing one stage of life and moving on to the next - there was disorientation, sometimes darkness, and certainly fear. Even as each moment shaped me for the next opportunity, even as the colors of sunrise and sunset would shine brilliantly across midwest, east coast, or Jerusalem skies - I would wonder to myself: Who, what, when, where, and how would my next sun rise?

And so here I am as the sun rises on the 5th year of my rabbinate, but my 1st year here with you at Temple Israel. And there is certainly some in-between-ness, some liminality still to navigate. But I carry the light of mentors, my family and friends with me, knowing that the light I already have and that was nurtured in me is illuminated further by Elaine, Roy, Matt, Suzie, Dan and our staff. I feel so enlightened and inspired by their lights. The beauty of a flame is that it shines brighter when it does not stand alone. Truly - even as I work to find my place and space here and among them, I feel brighter in that process of becoming. And I feel so enlightened and inspired about my **work** at Temple Israel. Some of which is already so bright: a torch passed to me is The Riverway Project's vibrance; and some of which is still somewhere between a spark and a flame ready for me to lead and partner with *you* in its ignition: Engage@TI and Small Groups with Meaning, Interfaith Engagement and Outreach - as we find meaningful ways to meet and connect our congregants to one another, to reach those who find themselves on the fringes of Jewish life, to reach those who are *bein hashmashot* - in the liminal in-the-middle moments, and to reach those through creative entrepreneurial ideas that we don't even know we have yet.

When Adam and Eve spent their first night out of the garden - *bein hashmashot* - they only knew that being in those middle, liminal moments where we are neither here nor there seemed

to be scary, frightening, and so dark. They did not know - and for many times in my life neither did I - that such liminal moments can be moments of potential, full of possibility, sparks flying.

When it was that dark time for Adam and for Eve, what, the rabbis ask, did God do to comfort them? Some say a pillar of fire was sent **to them** to illuminate the darkness, and to guard them from all evil. Others rabbis teach, however, that they found two stones, rubbed them together, and illuminated the dark themselves. And in their mouths - the rabbis place this blessing - which as part of our Havdalah ritual marks our weekly transition from one moment to the next:

Baruch atah Adonai, borei m'oreh ha'aish.

Blessed are you, Adonai who creates the vibrant light of fire.