

January 21, 2021

*Bo* – Message from Rabbi Peltz

“Somehow we've weathered and witnessed / a nation that isn't broken / but simply unfinished.” This was one of the many powerful lines spoken by Amanda Gorman in her beautiful poem “The Hill We Climb” that she shared at the Inauguration of President Biden and Vice President Harris yesterday. This verse reminds us of the “more perfect union” that our Founders committed us, as “We the People,” to work toward in every generation. Like Moses’ journey to the promised land, this is a project that is never really finished. Yet we are not free to desist from it. In our challenging and divisive times, this project can seem exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. And it might be, if we are not able to come together. This of course was the great theme of the Inauguration: unity. As President Biden said, “On this January day, my whole soul is in this: Bringing America together, uniting our people, uniting our nation. And I ask every American to join me in this cause.” There is much to say about our leaders coming together to meaningfully address the many challenges we face as a nation. But what struck me here is President Biden’s call for each of us to join together for the cause of unity. What would it mean for each of us to take this seriously? Our community is not immune to the political divisions that we see in our nation. In our TBS Family, and in our own families, we have people on both sides of the aisle and our relationships have suffered. When did it happen that our political affiliation became the defining piece of our identity? We may be bound together as Jews, as friends, or by blood, and yet in too many instances our political party has taken precedence over all else. Certainly there are real political disagreements with real consequences for real people in our nation. But too often these disagreements become *mahlakot she'lo l'shem shamayim*, destructive arguments, as opposed to *mahlakot l'shem shamayim*, constructive arguments, for our relationships and for our nation. For the sake of ourselves, and for the sake of our children and grandchildren, we must break this cycle. We must do our part to work towards unity. We will never agree on all of the issues. But we ought to be in total agreement in the American project of building that more perfect union, that isn't broken, but simply unfinished.

Our first step in beginning this work can be found in one commentary on our Torah portion this week, *Bo*. Rabbi Nancy Wechsler wonders how Moshe is able to even approach Pharaoh, the man who has caused so much death and misery for his people. She says that he was able to do it by practicing *hakarat hatov* – focusing on the good. Moshe chose to believe that somewhere, even in Pharaoh, there was some good. This teaching was inspired by Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav who taught that when we are in a dark place, we should seek out just one spark of good, and that spark will lead us to find another and then another. If Moshe can believe that there is good in Pharaoh, then certainly we know that there is good in those with whom we disagree. Finding that good, that common point of connection, is the first step in working towards that unity. It is can be the first spark. Amanda Gorman describes how we can achieve this:

And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us  
but what stands before us  
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,  
we must first put our differences aside  
We lay down our arms  
so we can reach out our arms

to one another

*Kein yehi ratzon* – May we each do our part to make it so.