

May 6, 2021

Rabbi Peltz - *Behar Bechukotai*

“IRL.” Do you know what these letters stand for? I admit that I am not always up on the text message abbreviations that so many of our kids use today. But this is an important one. “IRL” stands for “in real life.” As in, “it’s great to see you in real life!” That’s something I’ve been saying more and more lately as we have been able to meet in-person for Shabbat services, group programs and our school celebrations like our wonderful Vav Promotion last night and our 65th Gimmel Consecration this Shabbat. Of course we are still following appropriate guidelines, with masks, physical distancing and limited numbers. Still, it is so wonderful to be able to see people again “IRL.”

I know that many of us, even after getting vaccinated, still feel hesitant to come back together in-person. There are many reasons for this. For some it is health concerns. For others, after such a long and traumatic time, it can be hard to see ourselves in a public setting. And for others it is trading the convenience and comfort of being virtual for the greater effort it takes to leave the house and come to TBS. Since we understand and appreciate all of these concerns, TBS will continue to have a virtual option for our services and programs. We are also going to continue to provide more opportunities to be together in-person. This is a process that we are experiencing in nearly all aspects of our lives. While a return to normal is what we all have been hoping for, being back in-person can feel scary. Especially now, when we are in a sort of in-between time, with COVID cases decreasing but the virus still posing a risk for the unvaccinated. Still, as we are vaccinated and as we feel comfortable, we need to start changing our mindsets to once again reengage with each other.

There is a verse in our *parashah* this week that speaks to how we can do this. At the beginning of *B’ḥukkotai*, the second of the two portions we will read this week, the Torah says that one of the rewards for following the *mitzvot* (commandments) is a surplus of grain. You will have so much grain, the Torah says, “you will have to clear out the old to make room for the new.” (Lev. 26:10) The Israeli journalist Sivan Rahav-Meir, in her Torah commentary, says that some read this verse spiritually. She explains, “If you wish to renew yourself with new knowledge and achievements or if you wish to develop in new directions, make sure that there is room in the storehouse of your mind and clear out old thoughts and teachings.” She goes on to say that the way we make room in souls for new experiences is by teaching what we have already learned to others. Rahav-Meir’s interpretation helps us think about how we can change our behavior, and prepare ourselves for new experiences.

We need time and space to process our experiences, which many of you have been able to do in our Omer conversations. This helps us begin to gain an understanding as to how this time has impacted us, and it helps us to prepare to move forward. To “clear out the old to make room for the new.” This takes time, but it also takes small steps that challenge ourselves to return and reengage. Each of us will move forward at our own pace, but knowing that we are doing it together makes all of us feel better. As the old African proverb says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” Let us take these steps back to in-person community together. We look forward to seeing you back “IRL.”