

Dear Chevraya,

We all know the jokes about two Jews and three opinions, often told with a touch of self-deprecation and shaded with a negative patina. While holding passionate opinions is not unique to Jews, the dynamics of traditional Jewish learning foster lively debate. What is often forgotten, however, beyond the study tables of the *beis medrash*/study hall, is that such debate and interpersonal challenge are not meant to be competitive or destructive, rather they are to be for the “sake of Heaven,” for the pursuit of truth and understanding. Each person in a study partnership is expected to understand how the other thinks and to know the nature of the other’s arguments. Debate in the service of understanding fosters unity. A beautiful expression in Modern Hebrew, *keshet de’ot*/rainbow of opinions, conveys the richness that inheres in a multiplicity of opinions.

Unity, in the great world and in all the worlds of our lives, remains so elusive because we humans so often fear differences, seeing them as a cause for separation and conflict, rather than as a source of connection and wholeness. Unity, unlike uniformity, is built on differences. In coming to understand, to respect, and to learn from the opinions of others we are enriched.

This Shabbos of *Parashat Naso* offers a gate through which we arrive symbolically at Mount Sinai, celebrating the receiving of Torah through the all night learning that begins *Shavuos*. Both *Naso* and *Shavuos* offer a beautiful and challenging framework through which to wrestle with and strive toward greater unity in all the spheres of our lives as Jews and as people. On this Shabbos, we read in the Torah a very detailed enumeration of the gifts brought by the princes of each of the twelve tribes to the dedication of the *Mishkan*, the desert sanctuary. It makes for rather dull reading: *one silver dish one hundred and thirty in weight, one silver sprinkling basin seventy shekels by the weight standard of the Sanctuary, both filled with fine wheat flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one spoon weighing ten shekels of gold, filled with incense....* There is a great gift in continuing to read the long list describing the gifts brought by the princes. To the smallest detail, every prince brought exactly the same gift! United by outward similarity, each prince attached unique personal meaning to the gifts. The greatest gift of all was that no one wanted to outdo anyone else.

In that spirit of being joined to each other through common concern for each other’s feelings and wellbeing, we arrive at Sinai. The Slonimer Rebbe teaches that revelation and opening up to receive Torah can only happen when there is unity among us; *the unity of Israel is the tachlis/essence of Torah and also the tachlis/essence of the preparation for the receiving of the Torah*. As the princes all gave the same gift, each attaching their own unique meaning to it, so God’s singular voice went out at Sinai and was heard by each one according to her or his own unique way of being and perceiving.

In all of our own different ways of being and perceiving, may the diversity of our opinions shine with rainbow beauty and bring us dancing in unity to Sinai.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor