

Beha'alotcha: Allyship Beyond Pride Month

Congregation Netivot Shalom

21 Sivan 5783 / 10 June 2023

I'm focusing on the Fourth Aliyah of today's parsha. I'm going to talk about silver trumpets.

Our parsha opens with the Israelites finally leaving after a year at Mt. Sinai. But first, Hashem (G-d) gives instructions for the journey. Since there's no map, they are to follow the cloud that appears daily over the Mishkan (the Tabernacle).

But this is a large camp. They can't all see that cloud. So Hashem commands Moses to *"make two trumpets of silver; of hammered work."*

I have some questions.

Could Hashem have elaborated? Silver, hammered, looks and sounds like a trumpet. Good start, but:

Why silver? They already have shofarot (trumpets made from animal horn). Well, a shofar is organic, naturally formed.

A silver trumpet means creating something new, a thing not inherently present in our world. It's human-made. It's intentionally made. Just like our actions and lives are. Not to argue, but is silver really the most reliable material? Pure silver won't last more than a generation or two.

Hashem tells Moses that this is *"an instruction for all time throughout the ages"* or translated elsewhere, *"Throughout your generations."* While the actual trumpet isn't inherited, the knowledge and traditions of the previous generations are. Each generation has to make its own trumpets.

Moses wasn't given detailed specifications but he did get guidelines for how they should be used in four scenarios:

1. Assemble- gather at the Tent of Meeting
2. Move- depart the camp and follow the cloud

Then comes a shift as the Israelites leave the wilderness. Now in their own land, they are commanded to:

3. Defend- fight back when an aggressor attacks them
4. Celebrate and Acknowledge- sound the trumpets at communal festivals and gatherings, over offerings and sacrifices.

What does that mean for us? Should we be blowing silver trumpets?

Yes.

We start with assemble.

Let's assemble as one nation and reject the narrative that there is no place for Queer people in Judaism. The Israelites acted as one nation although there were separate tribes and camps, different roles, responsibilities, and occupations. Just like everyone here comes from separate lived experiences.

As one nation we don't shut people out because of those differences. When we reject the exclusion of LGBTQ+ Jews, we assert that erasure is purposeful and reversible. Some claim we aren't in the history, that traditions are irrelevant or don't apply to us, and that those in the queer alphabet soup are a modern and secular phenomenon.

They claim this because we scare them. They are scared of our existence, scared that we challenge their rigidity, scared that their children will know us, know about us, and will reject bigotry. They say we're a threat, perverted and dangerous.

We have always been here. There is plenty of space for plenty of people at the Shabbat table, on the beit din, in the beit midrash, and on the bimah. There always has been.

"Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself"

There have never not been Queer Jews. Those who insist on that are misguided, in denial, and dangerous. We must challenge fundamentalism at every step.

We are assembled.

Remember why.

Let's move.

Move away from the insistence on using past paradigms as the only way to behave today. Remember-- new trumpets for each generation.

Jews from all streams and sects tacitly accept the premise that Jews in the past (like us in the present) aren't diviners. The Israelites needed instructions because daily life in Mitzrayim was not the same as life in the wilderness. Like all humans, they tried to make sense of it. Like them, we have to wrestle with our traditions, wrestle with what Jews have done for millennia as the world around us changes, just as it changed for them.

Do you know what sound the silver trumpets make when it's time to move? For assembling, for getting ready to journey, it's tekia. Sounds of happiness and joy. When

it's time to move, the Israelites hear teruah. The sound that compels them to depart, a sound that happens anytime, with no warning, no pattern, is a sound of sorrow. It is hard and difficult and scary but they accept that. And with the resolve to do what all of us can do at any time-- move into the future.

We've assembled and moved.
But the world is dangerous.

The Levites should blow the trumpets in times of war when an aggressor attacks in their own land. Why did they need trumpets? When someone attacks, shouldn't everyone just head to the city walls and take up arms against a sea of troubles?

It's pleasant to think that people (including yourself) will just do the right thing.

We're imperfect. It can be easy to ignore, to look away, to think of suffering as not your problem nor something you can do anything about. We need something to remind us that we only survive together. We/you/I/them are charged with defending as a sacred obligation, a covenantal responsibility: to stand up against oppressing and violent forces.

There's more for the Israelites and their descendants. The silver trumpets should be sounded on days of gladness. When we celebrate together and acknowledge our sacrifices.

Without a Temple, what are we supposed to sacrifice? What about our comfort? Certainty? We can approach ourselves and others with grace. And recruit knowing that:

It's okay to be uncomfortable. It's good to reflect on the past and acknowledge there were times when you didn't join with your fellow humans, that you believed in that narrative of exclusion, when you stayed silent. Times when you tried but it wasn't enough.

It's okay to be uncertain. I frequently am. We can't expect everyone to buy into a journey on their own. None of us enter this world with all the answers nor with a complete understanding of how it works. How it changes.

It's necessary to be compassionate. Try not to condemn those who are slow to embrace this reality. Who are unsure just like you and I were, are, and continue to be. Make it okay to show up and not know the right words or answers.

It is not easy.

Wasn't for the Israelites either.

Maimonides said that to sound an alarm in times of catastrophe is a mitzvah (it is a sacred obligation). This is a catastrophic time. This is very much life or death. Shouldn't we be blowing trumpets? Blowing them differently than how we have so far?

Allywork is positive. It's meaningful and impactful. But I urge all of us to avoid othering and delegating and being comfortable. It's just not enough.

I saw you at Sinai. I saw you, and you, and you, and you saw me. It's our time to assemble, move, defend, celebrate, and acknowledge. In a world that is imperfect and dangerous. That we will challenge.

Thank you for listening and reflecting, and thinking about LGBTQ+ folks today as we hear the trumpets. They will be extra loud and proud this month but are always sounding.

Listen.

Happy Pride and Shabbat Shalom.