

Rabbi Emma Gottlieb

Rabbinic Vision Statement

No more shall you be called Jacob, but Israel...for you have struggled with God (yisra-El) and with human beings, and you have prevailed.

- Gen. 37:29

Our movement's most recent Torah commentary teaches that the original meaning of "Israel" is difficult to concisely define. It can be construed as "he struggles with God," or "God struggles," or "God rules," or "his struggle is mighty," and more. Our commentary also teaches us that, "a name change often signifies a change in character". This change of character not only redefined Jacob, it *predefined* what our nature as a people would be – a people who struggle with God; a people who witness God's struggle; a people who are contracted through a *brit* (covenant) to consider God's rules; a people who, over the course of history, would struggle mightily; and more.

My understanding of the Jewish People's purpose and of my own role as a Jew in the world is deeply rooted in this teaching. I believe that we as a people (and thus I as an individual) are meant to struggle – for meaning (*Emet*), for self-betterment (*Shleimut*), and for the betterment of the world in which we live (*Tikkun Olam*). Jewish tradition teaches us that everything stands on three pillars – **God, Torah, and The People of Israel**. Indeed, each of these pillars is necessary to the struggles for *emet, shleimut, and tikkun olam*.

The search for meaning is bound up in our awareness of and our struggles against limitation. It often seems a tragic irony that humanity is simultaneously advanced and restricted; that being able to comprehend our potential, we are also painfully aware of what we *cannot* do. If this is the curse, than I believe the blessing can be found in the simple fact that we are not alone - that together we improve our odds, increase our resources, maximize our potential and provide for one another. I believe that **God** made a choice to give us awareness, to give us freewill (thereby limiting God's own power to be directly involved), and perhaps most importantly, to give us one another.

Based on experiences in my own life, and on my observations of the lives of others, it seems to me that while God has chosen not to *directly* act in our world, we have the power and the potential to act on God's behalf. We have the ability to choose right from wrong, to reach out and help one another, and to use the **Torah** that God has given us as a guide for when and how to do so. When we act to our full potential, we actualize God in our world. When we don't, God is silenced.

Thus we, **The People of Israel**, are responsible for enacting and activating God in both our daily interactions and in the world at large. If God is to take care of our world, *we* must take care of our world; if God is to protect us than *we* must protect ourselves and one another; and if God is to be present for us, *we* must each be present for others. I have seen for myself how, with the support of others, and a faith that there is meaning even when it escapes us, we are able to push ourselves beyond our wildest imaginings – when we discover that we are not alone, we discover a strength we did not know we had.

This understanding has the potential to inform all of our actions and interactions. If I truly believe that I am not only created *b'tzelem elohim* (in God's image), but even more so, that I act on God's behalf in all that I do, I hopefully - on my best days - feel the weight of that duty motivating me and encouraging me to be the best person I can be – to treat myself and others as well as possible, and to do what I can to make the world a better place.

These foundational beliefs will hopefully continue to inform not only my choices and interactions as one person in the world but also as a rabbinic caregiver and counselor in both formal and informal interactions. Keeping this worldview in the back of my mind reminds me to do a better job of listening, of trying to afford others dignity and respect, of getting out of my own-head and into the world more often, and of considering God's will as I understand it to be revealed in our sacred texts and traditions whenever I have a choice to make.

As a rabbi, I hope to guide others through their own struggles toward *emet*, *shleimut*, and *tikkun olam* through the guidance of **Torah**, the sense of obligation that **The People of Israel** have to one another, and the motivation that comes from knowing each of us has the power to act in the world on **God's** behalf. I see my role as being a facilitator for others throughout the journeys of their lives – acting as a resource for them to access the wisdom and rituals of our traditions and providing counsel and comfort along the way. As a rabbi, I also believe it is my duty to set the bar high and to support people in reaching for their full potential, both as Jews and as human beings. This will necessitate both encouraging others to think and act beyond their comfort zone as well as continually pushing myself to ensure that I practice what I preach.

I hope to accomplish all of this through **teaching and dialogue**; through setting an example of living a life based in **Jewish values**; through **empowering others** to act; through the teachings and **rituals** of our heritage; through **inspiring others** to pass these teachings and rituals on to those around them; and through engaging others in **meaningful worship**. I believe music to be an integral part of this last piece of my mission and of my rabbinate. I understand music to be a powerful vehicle for bringing people and God together in sacred time and space.

My serving of the Jewish people would be incomplete without an inclusion of music and I feel blessed to be able to lead others in song – especially when in cooperation with those who share my passion for its efficacy.

I have come to understand that **being a rabbi also necessitates striking a balance between one's own vision and the vision of one's community.** Therefore the above statement is just that, a vision rather than an expectation. While it is important for the rabbi to have and to set standards, I believe it is equally important to be realistic about the community one serves and to find ways, through dialogue, education, and shared visioning, of bridging the natural gap between reality and idealism. Some of my proudest accomplishments as a rabbi thus far have come from working in partnership with others for the betterment of the community.

To move beyond Jacob - to truly become *Yisrael*, a people who struggles - means that the road will not always be easy or pleasant. Jacob is injured in his struggle and each of us, in our own way, will meet with pain and adversity along the way. **As your rabbi I promise not to watch you struggle, but to struggle along beside you** - to share what I glean from my own struggles and to learn from your lives as well. I promise to share in your joys and in your sorrows and to help you shape the powerful and poignant moments of your lives with the beautiful language and rituals of our people.

May each of us be blessed by the struggle and may we, together, find meaning and fulfillment in a world we continually strive to make better.

Kein Yehi Ratzon, May it be God's will.