

“Hi. My name is Lara. I’m here to keep you company.”

During the Summer of 2021, I worked at a hospital as a Chaplain. This is how I would introduce myself to every patient whose room I would enter. In my experience, I was there for whatever the patient needed. If it was someone to pray with, I prayed. If it was someone to eat lunch with, I’d sit while they ate their lunch. I listened, I witnessed, and I simply kept each patient company. Whether they had family and friends visiting often, or if they were regularly alone, I was there as a friend and as a presence to remind them that I was in their corner.

The Rabbis in my own life did just this. When I was the sick patient as a young teen, and then in the same year the joyous bat mitzvah, my Rabbi was there. When I was grieving as a college student after the passing of my father, and during the months that followed as I healed and turned back towards joy, the Rabbis in my life were there. They set the example for how important meaningful human connection is.

As our tradition urges: *“find yourself a teacher, find yourself a friend”* (Avot 1:6). As a teacher, I am a facilitator of Torah and prayer, engaging in learning and teaching others around me. As a friend, I am deeply committed to being a consistent presence in the lives of my community in moments of grief and joy, and each day in between.

This teaching reminds me of the declaration of love and commitment that Ruth made to her mother-in-law Naomi, which leads me to becoming a Rabbi:

*“For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”* (Ruth 1:16).

*“For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge”*

Wherever you are, whatever place you are in, I will sit by your side and keep you company. If you need to pray, I will pray. If you need someone to sit with and just be, I will be. I want to meet your community where you are and I will travel with you where you need to go, even when you are unsure of the path ahead.

*“Your people shall be my people”*

I am committed to Jewish peoplehood in its many ways of expression. As your Rabbi, your community will be my community. I will create connections with people of all ages. I will play with the youngest members of the pre-school. I will laugh and learn with the children, teens, and young adults of the religious school and youth group. I will engage in community events and participate in teaching, preaching and conversing with adult members.

*“And your God my God”*

I find the most meaningful connection to what is holy through praying and singing. I believe that when people are gathered in community, God is there too. I hope to help people in every stage of life find connection to one another, and to find a pathway to Judaism in whatever way feels inspiring to them.

At my older brother's wedding this past June, I spoke about his and his wife's relationship and the deep love and respect they have for one another, affirming the powerful friendship that guides them. I lifted up one particular Jewish virtue that so beautifully describes their journey. This virtue also happens to be one of the guideposts of my own life. *Middah Nosei B'ol Im Chavayro* - To Share the Burden with One's Friend. Making a friend to share life's burdens means being deeply seen and acknowledged by another human being in both sorrow and in simchas. The word *Nosei* in this phrase can mean to bear, but it can also mean to lift, or to carry. I will bear your burdens and the community's burdens as well. I will lift you up in celebration, and I will carry you through from one moment to another. I am not a fair weather friend.

I am hopeful that through our own journey, we too, will learn to lift up one another and keep each other company along the way.