It has been an up-and-down time in the Jewish calendar. I was impressed by the large number of folks here who were willing to engage with the pain and mourning around Tisha B'Av. We have made it through the mournful season leading up to Tisha B'Av, and gotten, at least theoretically, to the joy on the other side. This year, however, we have had ample reminders that brokenness in the world is not a thing of the past. In some ways, it would have felt easier to respond to a knife attack like the one that occurred at the Jerusalem Pride parade last week or to the arson in a Palestinian village, had they occurred on Tisha B'Av. But they occurred on Tu B'Av, the Day of Love. How are we then to respond? We are supposed to have moved beyond the brokenness. I'd love to focus for just a moment on the fact this weekend is Pride here in Eugene - but the brokenness still asserts itself on a supposedly joyous day. Tisha B'Av is a double-edged challenge. During the day itself, we practiced staying present with pain, when pain is at the forefront of our minds. Afterward, now, we are challenged to be present with painful reality when we really thought we were ready to move on.

In our Torah portion this week, Eikev, there is a related double-edged challenge. Moses, in recalling the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, mentions the manna, the mysteriously nutritious but ephemeral substance that sustained the Israelites during their wanderings. In Chapter 8, verse 16, he repeats that "[God] fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your ancestors had never encountered, in order to try you and in order to put you to the test."

In what way did manna constitute a test?

On the face of it, this was certainly not like other Biblical tests, such as when Abraham was tested with the demand that he sacrifice Isaac. Manna was a gift from God that required no sacrifice from us - how could this be a test?

Nachmanides, a medieval Spanish philosopher, opined that the manna was a trying experience for two reasons. First, it was exotic and strange - hence the line, "Your ancestors knew it not." Second, it felt food-insecure. We read in Exodus how every day the Israelites had to go collect it, because it would not keep when stored overnight. They had to collect it first thing in the morning, because it would melt away as the sun rose, and then, no matter how much or how little they collected, everyone would have exactly as much as they needed, no more or less.

While that does sound like a Marxists' dream, . . .for anyone who likes to feel like they are in control of their fate, it would be a harrowing psychological experience: every day, to wake up in the wilderness and wonder if God would keep providing; every day in a different place, having to trust that the strangely nourishing substance would fall from the sky yet again.

That, says, Nachmanides, was the test. Can we stand to live in total dependence on the universe, knowing that we are not in control? That is the test of wandering in the wilderness, of not being securely settled in a place to call home.

This test is related to our experience on Tisha B'Av. Tisha B'Av is the holiday that focuses on the fact of exile, on the historic dispersion and persecution of our

people. Even though the wilderness was not the desert, and even though there was no manna to feed us, the Jewish people have wandered, have been vulnerable. Have not always known where next they could lay their heads, or if there would be food in the morning.
That is a test that the Jewish people have withstood for thousands of years. We have responded with great creativity, producing works of law, philosophy and culture that have made our tiny people as close to immortal in this world as a culture could be. We have developed new theologies. We have incorporated our encounters with other cultures into our own. We have managed to make poetry out of longing.

And yet, there is another side to that test. Because in that same chapter of the Torah portion, Moses warns us, that when we arrive in the promised land of abundance and fertility, we should be careful, lest we be tempted to say, "My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me."
The test of the manna was vulnerability. The test of the land was arrogance.
There is some truth to Moses's warning. We all want to believe that we have fairly earned what we have. In his speech, Moses reminds us that we are just as vulnerable when we have a steady job and a nice house, just as dependent on grace, as when the Israelites were harvesting manna every morning. The manna challenged the Israelites: can we stand the vulnerability when it is staring us in the face? Entering into the land challenged the Israelites: can we acknowledge the vulnerability when it feels very comfortably distant, and can acknowledge our responsibility in the land?

Moses reminded the people not to assume that they came into the land of Israel because of any special merit. Once there, however, sovereignty in the land is a kind of test, carrying certain obligations.

The test continues every year. When a Jewish terrorist, acting to protect the sanctity of the land of Israel, stabs a marcher in the Jerusalem pride parade, our whole people is failing a test. When a Jewish terrorist, acting to protect the sanctity of the land of Israel, sets fire to a Palestinian home, or to a Christian church, we are failing the test.

I say we, even though we live on the other side of the world. Because just as the whole global Jewish community carried the burden of exile, the global Jewish community must wrestle with what it means for there to be a Jewish state, which welcomes all Jews as potential citizens, and which claims to speak for and act in the interests of the Jewish people.

I like to be proud of Israel; of the technological advances and environmental innovations that have been produced there. I take pride in the flowering of a renewed secular Jewish culture. But if I get to take personal pride in the inventions of individuals there, then I also must find myself personally implicated by the negative actions of individuals there.

What does that mean for us here at TBI? For one thing, I am interested in creating the space for a series of communal conversations about what is happening in Israel - that which inspires us as well as that which dismays us. It is not particularly

controversial to condemn either of the hate crimes that occurred last week. But it is nearly inevitable that sooner or later, there will be events in Israel that will be controversial in our community.

I'd like us to practice communicating with each other about Israel before the next war, and before the next Tisha B'Av. I'd like us to practice thinking about it at a time when pressing events are not forcing us to think about it, so that we will have trust built, and structures, when the time comes that we really need them. Since even before I officially assumed my duties as your rabbi, I've been thinking about how to craft such structures for a communal conversation about Israel.

To that effect, after the High Holidays, I will begin working to set up a task force to work on Israel related programming. I hope you will let me know if you're interested in being involved.

This is the challenge: when everything is going well, or good enough - to remember how vulnerable that well-being is. To acknowledge it. To be able to talk about it. Even when we are not wandering in the wilderness. Even when Tisha B'Av is over.