

Naso 2014

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick, May 31, 2014

Mrs. Goldberg was confronted with an enormous spiritual problem, and desperately needed to seek out the advice of the greatest guru in the world, who was located in the high mountains of the distant Himalyas. She was told by his operatives in the US that no one, but no one meets with the Guru, but she was undeterred. But even though they told her there was no chance to meeting him, she got herself a ticket and she flew as far as the plane would take her. The she got a on a bus and took it to the end of the line and was finally met by some sherpas, got on the back of a yak and took that to the base of the mountain where his staff told her, "No one can meet the Guru." She said, "I HAVE TO SPEAK TO HIM I HAVE A MESSAGE ONLY FOR HIM!" "If so, they said, then you must take off your shoes and crawl on all fours until you reach the ledge where the Guru is sitting in meditation and solitude, and you must wait until he opens his eyes and That will be the sign that he is prepared to receive fro you whatever message you have to give him." She was a courageous soul and so she crawled for hours to reach the summit of the mountain until she found the Guru deep in meditation. She waited and waited and waited until finally he opened his eyes and gave her the sign that he was ready to receive her message and she said to him, "SHELDON, COME HOME ALREADY, IT'S ENOUGH!"

And I share this joke because, in many ways, it is a uniquely Jewish one. For many people, for many religions in fact, spirituality is about what we do on top of a mountain. Over the past few weeks we have been addressing the sermon topic: "How To Study The Torah", and surely one of the ways, one of the reasons to study the Torah is to gain an understanding of Jewish spirituality. But what makes this joke funny, is that Jewish spirituality is not attained on a mountaintop, but we know that this is not true. This joke assumes that the world is a diversion from our quest for spirituality, and that we need to escape from the world to find our spiritual truth and to live spiritual lives. There are spiritual traditions that say that other people, even your own family, are a hindrance to gaining spiritual perception. There are religious traditions that say you need to divorce yourself from your real family and everyday people and embrace only Gd. But when we study Torah we learn that the opposite is in fact true.

A quick review of the section of Torah read this morning reminds us of what Jewish spirituality is all about. When we study this section we see that it starts with an in-depth description of the work of people known as the Gershonites, whose task it was to assemble the holy Tent of Meeting, which was where the Jewish People gathered to seek a closer sense of Gd. It served, in many ways, the function of our synagogue today. Spirituality was found in building and maintaining the synagogue, and in going there for worship. But not six verses after the description of this sacred task we read, "The lord spoke to Moses and said, "When a man or a woman commits any wrong toward a fellow person, thus breaking faith with the Lord, and the person realizes his guilt, he shall confess the wrong that he has done and he shall make restitution of the principal amount plus one-fifth to the person he has wronged."

One important way of Studying the Torah is to take note of these very important juxtapositions. In Hebrew this method is called "Smeechoot Parshiyot," the deliberate laying of seemingly random texts that seen together teach a deepertruth than what might initially be apparent. The Torah here is not nearly as random as you might think. The reason the first text, of building the

Holy Temple, is followed by the section of paying 20% penalties for theft is to say that both of these acts are holy and that there is no separation, from Gd's perspective, between the two. Jewish spirituality is not found on the mountaintop, or even just in the Temple, but in the way we do everything. The operative phrase in that passage is "when a person does wrong **THUS BREAKING FAITH WITH THE LORD.**" If spirituality is the quest for Gd, then wronging another person is its antithesis. So if you want to find spirituality you need to understand that in our Jewish tradition, it is not found through transcendence. Spirituality is found in all that we do, both in shul and outside of it. And this definition may not be as sexy as meditating on a mountaintop, but it is far more likely to make the world into the kind of place that Gd would **LIKE TO BE FOUND.**

The Torah refuses to distinguish between what we would call "ritual", what the Gershonites did, and what we would call "ethics," the way people make it right when they have wronged someone else. And one of the ways that this is emphasized is by laying these texts out next to one another. Seeing them as two sides of one whole is an important tool in Studying Torah and in living a meaningful, fully spiritual Jewish life. Connection with Gd is found through connection with other people. That's why we don't have many "Sheldon on the Mountain Tops." It is why the 10 Commandments that we will read this week on Shavuot are a combination of "Don't Steal, Don't Murder, Don't Lie in Court" laws **AS WELL AS** "Observe Shabbat, Don't Commit Idolatry, and Remember the Miracle of Getting Out of Egypt." There is no separation between Ritual and Ethical Laws because Judaism is spirituality lived in public. That's why if we are going to pray we need to get nine other Jews to pray with us - our spirituality is lived in community, in public. And that's why when we celebrate a bat mitzvah we don't take our kids far away from the community; but by making them stand in front of the community; they become adults with us.

The Torah is structured not as a hodge-podge of random laws and stories, of construction plans and laws of personal conduct simply because the Torah lacked a good editor. Rather, the juxtaposition of these texts is a powerful, albeit subtle reminder that holiness, and spirituality are not attained in isolation. We are part of a web of relationships, to Gd and to each other that make us who we are...