

Beshalach - Shabbat Shira

Delivered by Hazzan Pomerantz-Boro 1/27/18

Thank you, Barbara, for your meaningful words and thank you to all of the Sisterhood Women who have participated so beautifully in our service this morning. It is an honor for me to have the opportunity to publicly tell you how very proud I am of each one of you...for ALL that you do...from reading Torah to making *tallitot* and everything else that you do for our *shul*! We are all so grateful. (I have to say...when I came for my interview weekend, 14 years ago, the only woman wearing a tallit aside from me was Helene Krupnick! Now, I feel *farklemp* when I look out and see the sea of beautiful *tallitot* worn by so many of you.)

Yashar Koach to our Adult Choir, our teen choir, our BEST children's choir and Cantor Leon Sher, for adding such beauty to our service.

In our tradition, we have many ways to say thank you. This will sound familiar to my Wednesday Morning Minyan group and to anyone who has been in my Tallis and T'fillin Class. Every morning, when I wake up, to express gratitude, I say *Modah/Modah Ani*. I feel fortunate to **wake up** every day! I feel blessed to live in a beautiful home with my extraordinary family, with heat, running hot water, the ability to see, to hear, to feel, to experience life completely, and to smell and taste the coffee brewing!

But - what gets me out of bed (aside from the coffee?!?)? Knowing that I have meaningful, challenging work here at Beth El. I hear your life stories. I teach, I sing, I counsel, I *schmooze*. I share your life cycle events and we forge meaningful relationships with each other. The words and feelings of love, support, and appreciation that I receive motivate me as well.

I recently watched a **TED** talk about what factors contribute to longevity. Julienne Holt Lunstad is a researcher at Brigham Young University. She followed tens of thousands of middle-aged people and looked at every aspect of their lifestyle: diet, exercise, marital status, how often they went to the doctor, whether they smoked or drank, etc. She recorded all of the data and then what did she do?

Like Jacob, she waited 7 years, but not for a bride! Dr. Holt-Lundstad waited to see who was still breathing! Well, her real question was: "what reduced their chances of dying the most?" There is some interesting data. One of the least important factors in her research was whether you were lean or overweight! According to her data, getting a flu vaccine protects you more than doing exercise! The top predictors for longevity are two features of your social life. One is having close relationships. In other words, having people in your life that you can count on is a strong predictor of how long you will live. And the number one factor is called 'social integration.' How much you interact with people throughout your day; how many people you talk to, both weak and strong bonds, being part of a social community; those are all 'social integration.' You see, it is all about relationships. We need to build lifelong relationships in our secular and Jewish lives.

Dr. Ron Wolfson, the noted educator, talks about this simple premise in his book, **Relational Judaism**. He describes the work that must be done to ensure healthy relationships with all levels

of interactions...with oneself, family and friends, in creating a Jewish life, in being in partnership with the larger community as well as the Jewish people, with Israel, the world and with Gd.

Dr. Wolfson makes the strong case that this will lead us to a life filled with meaning. And, isn't meaning what it is all about at the end of the day? Having a sense of purpose. Knowing our mission in this world. Answering the questions, "why did Gd put me on this earth?" And "what am I supposed to do with MY talents and gifts?" How can I continue on my path toward meaning and purpose, belonging and blessing?

I have some suggestions. Begin with yourself. Ask yourself the tough questions, "Who am I? What is the meaning of my life? What is my purpose"? In *Pirkei Avot*, Hillel teaches, "*Im ein ani li, mi li*"? If I am not for myself, who am I? If I do not know myself, how can I possibly be in a relationship with others? The Hebrew word for active prayer is "*l'hitpalel*", to examine oneself. The goal of Jewish prayer is not only to praise and petition Gd, but to be moved, to look inward, and to change one's self.

If you are having a difficult time, close your eyes and place your hand over your heart. Try it now. Feel it. Take a few deep breaths. That is called purpose. You are alive for a reason. In each moment, there is a new opportunity to serve. And each of us will encounter tasks which we are uniquely suited to perform. The Hassidic masters teach that there are broken places which only YOU can heal; there are sparks which only YOU can uplift. Please don't give up. Relational Judaism is not a new idea. I have always believed that connecting with others, with prayer, and with Gd is what makes the difference in my life.

Dr. Wolfson states it clearly. He quotes, "I would hope that the friendships and relationships with the people you pray with, you do mitzvah projects with, the people you celebrate your life cycle events with-beyond your immediate circle of family and friends-can, in fact, be a connection point to a greater sense of community." He goes deeper and writes, "when we genuinely care about people, we will not only welcome them; we will listen to their stories, we will share ours, and we will join together to build a Jewish community that enriches our lives."

Isn't this what we all want for ourselves, our families, and our *shul*? Don't we all want to find deeper meaning in what we do, and enrich our relationships, both personal and professional? How fortunate we are at our *shul* to be blessed with such a caring community! I feel blessed to be your Hazzan. I hunger to get to know each one of you better, to build bonds, to work on projects together, to share common experiences, to share times of joy and to be there for you in times of pain, to care about you and your goals. I want to hear your stories, and I want you to know mine.

You know that every year, Rabbi Krupnick presents a 'charge' to you, our dedicated members of our Sisterhood. Through my years here, I have watched as you have taken ownership of each one. Let me list a few of them:

- *Wednesday morning Minyan and Me
- *Rosh Chodesh Group
- *Shabbat Candle Lighting Campaign
- *Challah baking

*Cook For A Friend

*our most recent, the hugely successful Mitzvah Mall!

This year, we propose a new Sisterhood initiative: We would like YOU to start a campaign enabling everyone to make Shabbat dinners at home. We (your clergy) will help you create materials...a Shabbat kit if you will...we will provide instructions and discussion questions for everyone's *shabbes* table...we will even help match up families...we might even offer Shabbat in a box meals! We can call it **Shabbat Across Beth El** or **Shabbat Dinner 101** or **Shabbat. Just Do It!** The name is not important, but we feel the concept and practice of Shabbat dinner will help more of us achieve stronger relationships amongst our family, our friends, and our community.

When you leave shul today, I want you to feel closer to other members of our Beth El family. I want you to invest more deeply in your own spirituality. I want you to feel that you have contributed your voice and your spirit in meaningful ways. I want you to leave here motivated to continue your practice of relational Judaism by engaging with others to maintain OUR Jewish community that enriches all of us.

When the Israelites crossed the Sea and miraculously reached dry land, they were passionate, they were thankful, they had come together as a community-Miriam played music and everybody sang!! Then, as now, each day is gift. Let us continue to learn from Miriam. Let us raise our voices in gratitude and joy as we rise as a community for the Musaf Amidah on page 155.