

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick 3/12/16
Pekuday

I try to live my life with no regrets, but of course that is impossible; we all regret having done, or not done, something at one time or another. And one of my biggest regrets was that, because I did not want to inconvenience her, I told my mother she did not need to come for the ceremony when we marched our Torahs across town and dedicated this building. It was a big moment in my life, in the lives of so many of us here today. We all could take great satisfaction in the work that we had done. We took pride in having created this magnificent sanctuary and this building that enables us all to feel a little bit closer to Gd. We celebrated that day, and I stood up, on this pulpit, and blessed the fruit of our labors, I blessed the work that we had done.

And I knew just what that ceremony should look like, and what I should say at that great moment, from this week's Torah portion, Pekuday (which was, coincidentally, the first Torah portion I ever read as a young boy in Junior Congregation.) At the end of Pekuday we read that the people did exactly as Moses had told them at Gd's behest. They built the sanctuary known as the Mishkan. And the Torah says that when Moses saw that their labors were complete, Moses blessed them. It does not say that Moses blessed "IT." He did not bless the building. He blessed the people who worked on it, all the people who contributed to it, all who helped in the planning and the labor; he blessed them one and all. He blessed and sanctified the PEOPLE, not the building.

This was a blessing that the People needed to hear. Many of them, after all, had danced around the Golden Calf, or at least were complicit in not stopping it. But then they all came together and built this sacred space and they once again felt good, or at least better, about themselves. It was a blessing that they clearly, so very clearly, needed to hear. It was reassuring, it validated them as a People and as individuals. Moses knew the blessings and the praise they needed to hear and, as a great leader, he gave them the praise and blessing they needed to hear.

All of us need that kind of validation; we all need blessings and praise and admiration. Hearing that the work we do is appreciated can make all the difference in the world. We instinctively know this about kids- that they thrive on praise. There have been extensive experiments with inner-city schools that show that praising and celebrating the accomplishments of children, even and especially those with behavior issues, raises not just their self-esteem but their productivity. But it's not just kids. Everyone feels better when they feel appreciated, praised and valued. So why doesn't it happen more? Why don't we bless and praise and celebrate the accomplishments of others more?

Well, the simple answer is that we tend to take people for granted. We just don't think about it. And so the simple antidote is to be more conscious about who needs praise and what you can do to lift the spirits of other people through praise.

But on a deeper level, I have come to believe that we don't praise others because we often walk around thinking that we ourselves are under appreciated. The work we do, the responsibilities we carry, the efforts we make are not noticed. If those people we care about would only show some appreciation we might be more likely to do the same for others. And I have a theory about this - one that may seem strange at first. But I think we could all have healthier relationships,

and indeed healthier lives, if from time to time we told the people we care about what we really need to hear. "...But if she really loved me, she'd know just what to say..." No. Sometimes he cannot intuit the things you hope he would have noticed and appreciated. We need to tell them.

In so many other areas of our lives we have little problem speaking up about our wants and desires... So why don't we give the people we really care about the critical data that they need to draw us closer? Maybe we don't because it's weird and awkward. OK, I get it. But I don't think that's the whole story. I think we won't tell people we care about the words of appreciation we'd like to hear because we are afraid. If I tell you what I am longing to hear it'll highlight my vulnerabilities and make me look weaker in your eyes. I'm telling you where I am insecure. I am telling you where I need your help. And we don't do this very often, not just because it might be awkward, but also because it makes us vulnerable. We want to be strong and independent, not needy and vulnerable. But the truth is the world needs more empathy, more courage when it comes to opening up and sharing at a deeper level. And it starts in our homes, in our workplace, in the small interactions of our daily lives. We can't do this with everyone, nor should we, but there may be one or two, or a few special relationships where this could go a long way...

Moses tells the People what he knows they need to hear to validate them as individuals. And maybe there are people sitting here today who are longing to hear that affirmation of someone who means a whole lot to you. I challenge you to articulate and share what it is you need instead of walking round grumpy feeling under appreciated. And maybe a person STILL might not know the right thing to say, but at least you are giving them a chance to get closer to your heart. And when it comes to having the people who mean the most to us share in our lives we should never have to look back with regret. Simply put: The world will be a more blessed place when we share more of our blessings with others.