

What do we have? And is it enough?
Rabbi Jay M. Stein
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I spent this last week learning with fellow rabbis. Each year I look forward to this week of learning and growing and it was particularly appropriate because I recently gave a sermon about being open to new ideas while giving the idea three days to sink in, so I went with a really open mind. Each year I attend this conference, affectionately known as Rabbi Camp, trying to find material to bring back and share with the congregation. The way the week works is that we go to class from 9:00 in the morning to 9:00 each night. Just like a child in a candy shop, my eyes widen with each text and with each nuanced reading - and then I put them in my briefcase all the while figuring out how I might translate these incredibly important texts to my people at home. However, this year along with the varied texts and there are many, I also collected people - a poet, a musician, a scholar, a meditation teacher, a rabbi, a student and a new friend.

You remember the game we used to play during long car rides - and how that game has morphed into an adult version. As a child my mother would begin with, "I am going on a trip and in my bag I packed a pair of pants." Then my younger brother would say, "I am taking my pants and my teddy bear." Then my older brother would say, "I am taking my pants, my teddy bear and we would all giggle, and then he would say, "I am taking my baseball glove." Then my other brother would say, "I am taking my pants, my teddy bear, my baseball glove and my lucky rabbits foot key chain." Then my father would say, "I am going on a trip and in my bag I packed a pair of pants and my tallis and tephilin." Of course we would yell out, "You can only take one thing each turn." So he would say, "How can you travel without your tallis and tephilin?" Then we would have a good laugh. With each person another item was added to the suitcase, until we could no longer remember the list of what each person had taken. We would have to review by asking what did you take, and what did you take? At this point game would come to an end but the message wasn't lost on me. You see, you didn't need to take everything yourself, you just had to remember what you took and then travel with someone else who was also taking stuff. As an adult, this game is now transformed into a few moments of silence as we start our trip and then my wife turns to me and says, "Did you remember to turn the alarm on and I usually respond - I think so." "Did you take the kids medicine? Do you have the gift?" "Yes, did you pack my belt? "I don't know - well we are too far to turn back. I guess if I have to I can either borrow a belt or buy one when we get there. You can always replace objects."

This seems to be the mindset of Moses when they are about to leave Egypt. Just after the plague of darkness Pharaoh says, "I give, you can go. Take what you need to worship, to sacrifice - but just go." To which Moses responds, "We have to take a lot more than you think because *V'anachnu lo neidah mah navod et adonai ad boeinu shama.* (Exodus 10:26) We must take everything with us, because we have no idea what we are going to need." Moses says again, like he said just 17 verses earlier, "We are taking everything and everyone. We are taking the men and the women, the young and the old. We leave no one behind." Perhaps this is the original and truly meaningful, "No child left behind." Therefore, Moses makes it clear that they have no idea what they're going to need, they have no idea what they're going to build, they have no idea what the new world will demand of them. "We have no idea what our God will

demand of us – but I do know we will be ready as long as we have everyone with us.” Everyone is significant. Everyone has a contribution to make. Everyone who wants to play gets chosen for a team. Everyone gets to participate, everyone get access and most significantly without everyone, no one gets access. If everyone takes what they believe to be needed, then together we will have all the material necessary - and if we don’t get it from the text, Rashi makes it explicit when he says, *Kama tichbad ha’avodah, shema yish’al mimenu yoter mi’mah sheyeish b’yadeinu*. “The holy work of providing for the needs of another is hard work, but it is within our reach, it is in our hands.”

That may be the most unique contribution of our movement. In the next century, I don’t know if reform, orthodox or conservative Judaism will exist, but I’m sure we will have made it clear that every voice is needed for the service of God, just as the school of Raban Gamliel and the school of Rabbi Yehoshua made contributions about the sacred rhythm of Jewish living - and Beit Hillel and Beith Shammai made critical contributions to how we offer our prayers – we as Conservative Jews will have offered this mandate. We are taking the men and the women, the young and the old. We leave no one behind, the original and truly meaningful, “No child left behind.” Therefore, Moses makes it clear, we have no idea what we are going to need, we have no idea what we are going to build, we have no idea what the new world will demand of us. We have no idea what our God will demand of us – but I do know we will be ready as long as we have everyone with us. Everyone is significant. Everyone has a contribution to make. Everyone who wants to play gets chosen for a team. Everyone gets to participate, everyone get access and most significantly without everyone no one gets access.

People sometime ask more of us than we can deliver, and the people we love and whom love us realize it and accept it. God never asks for more than we are able to give - but be prepared to give it all. As parents, we often recognize how ill equipped we are for the tasks we are asked to do. The disappointments that our children feel are devastating to us and we wish we could make the hurt go away. When I was a little boy, I got the chicken pox along with my three brothers. As always, my father used to say, “I wish I could have that cold for you.” So he called his mother and asked if he had ever had chicken pox. She told him that he had had all of the childhood illnesses – so he got into bed with us to make us feel better and to distract us from the scratching. He just wanted to, like all parents, make their children feel better - and if they couldn’t have the illness for them, they certainly would stand by trying to ease the pain. I have watched parents nurse a sick child. I have watched a parent put a cold compress on a child’s feverish forehead, and I have done the same, hoping the fever will break by morning. I have sat in the shower with a baby suffering from the Croup. Our children ask so much of us and sometimes we are so ill equipped. Sure enough, my father got the chicken pox and, as an adult, it was quite serious. When he finally recovered, he called his mother and said, “I thought you told me I had already had the chicken pox?” – to which she responded, “So I made a mistake.” We all make mistakes. We all wish we were perfect, we wish we could take away the pain, we wish we had the answers. But alas, we do not.

About a month after we married, my father-in-law died unexpectedly. We had gone to the theater in celebration of my wife’s birthday and returned to a message on the machine. I remember the shock and horror on Missy’s face – and then we moved into action. Arrangements had to be made such as return flights for my brothers-in-law from Israel, there were funeral

arrangements to be made and then, of course, shiva. I remember this like it was yesterday – returning to our new apartment where my wife and her brothers would sit for the week. After they settled in, I made my way off to the bedroom of our one-bedroom apartment for some quiet. They were well taken care of and I needed a brief respite. So, I sat down on the corner of our bed and began to cry. I wasn't crying over the loss of my father-in-law. I barely knew him. I had only met him a few times. I cried because I was afraid. I had a new wife and I had no idea how to care for her. I knew about bringing flowers and I knew about silver and china patterns. I had learned all of that through our engagement – but I had no idea how to truly care, deeply for another. I knew how to construct a successful date. I knew how to hold her chair out when she sat down and I knew how to hold the door when we entered a building. At this point my wife's aunt came in and sat down next to me. I said, "I don't know how to do this?" To which she said, "You don't have to... we are all going to do this together."

As it turned out, she was right. It's not what you pack in your bag, it's who is in the car. As long as you have all of the right people in the car, it doesn't matter if you pack your socks. You can always buy socks when you get there – but you can't replace your son or daughter.