Happiness is Found by Those Who Have Sought and Found How to Serve
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February 9, 2008
Terumah 5768

Let me let you in on a little secret. When I was in high school I used to knit. When I was a child, I really couldn't sit still so I always needed to be doing something with my hands. If my hands weren't occupied with a task, they would often get me in trouble. So my mother thought it would be a good idea for me to take up a hobby that would keep my hands busy. She told me that if I started knitting, typically a girls' hobby, I would be the only male doing it and I would have all the girls to myself and I must say, the plan seemed reasonable. I agreed that it was a girls' hobby, if there was such a thing, and that if I were the only male doing it, then I would be the only male doing it. So, I applied myself to the task and got quite talented. I even learned how to crochet because if you want to finish a nice sweater, the best technique is to crochet the finish. Interestingly enough, even though my skills got better and the stitches were more uniform, there were still no more girls then before. For some reason, my knitting simply wasn't attracting the attention I thought it would and I decided it was because I wasn't doing it in a high-profile location. Since I knew knitting in the courtyard at school was not going to fly, I decided to get a job at a knitting store. Once again, I imagined that I would be the only male there and I was certain to become the chick magnet I had always thought I was, but had not yet been discovered. So, I walked over to the knitting store, went up to the counter of "Knit One Pearl Two" and asked for an application. I was hired immediately and put to work replacing stock, yarns of all types, pattern books, needles and hooks of all shapes sizes and gauges. Then, I slowly made my way out onto the floor, first to help with crocheting finishes, then to actually knit – and my plan was working. I was surrounded by women all of the time. The only problem was, most of them were over seventy. However, they did want me to meet their granddaughters.

Of course, this wasn't the most proficient method for meeting girls, but it's all I had going for me, that and my full head of red hair and attractive personality. However, the approach was short lived and shortly thereafter I left this job. I didn't knit for twenty-five years. Until two weeks ago. As many of you know, two weeks ago, through the extraordinary and at times I believe superhuman effort of Andy Coren and her able co-social action committee members, we hosted once again, Martin Luther King Jr. Day of service.

In 1994 Congress passed the King Holiday and Service Act, designating the King Holiday as a national day of volunteer service. Instead of a day off from work or school, Congress asked Americans of all backgrounds and ages, to celebrate Dr. King's legacy by turning community concerns into citizen action. The King Day of Service brings together people who might not ordinarily meet, breaks down barriers that have divided us in the past, leads to better understanding and ongoing relationships, and is an opportunity to recruit new volunteers for our ongoing work. On that day, opportunities to volunteer in our building were highlighted through a concerted and directed effort. The focus of our

publicized effort that day was ongoing projects that are regular activities for our social action committee.

Now, I'll be honest, last year I walked through the building and said "Hello". I offered my support and then off I went to my next event and I felt badly all year. So, this year I cleared the day and made sure I had a few hours to spend in service, not offering support and encouragement, but actually rolling up my sleeves and helping.

I walked through the door to be met by Gladys Shubin. So I said, "What can I do?" She said, "Just look around and then you decide." So, I walked around the building saying "Hello" to people while trying to find the issues that spoke loudest to me. Some issues that spoke to me were the letters to senators and the president in support of bringing assistance to Darfur; applying pressure to release Israeli soldiers held in captivity; recording books for Philadelphia school children; sorting clothes for the homeless and needy; preparing meals for the hungry; making jewelry for women getting back into the work force; giving blood and the list went on and on. I was amazed by the efforts of this day and not because of this one time struggle, but because this endeavor is ongoing. So it seems our community is dedicated to helping Jews - and humanity is at the very core of our mission.

Next on my journey, I went into the Levin room to see Charlotte Muchnick, Joyce Rhodes, Anne Stein, Judy Weinberg and Ruth Hirshey Lincoln. They were knitting squares that would eventually be sewn together for blankets - blankets that would bring warmth to someone who is cold. Then it all clicked. Once again I was a chick magnet because, the next thing I knew, I was surrounded by women. Then Missy walked in and sat down next to me, hmmmm. The next thing I knew, she was learning how to knit. That day I learned five really important lessons about volunteering:

1. Plan on actually doing it. You must set aside time and plan for it, otherwise it won't happen.
2. Volunteer with people you like. You can't do it alone because it can't be sustained.
3. After you're done, look back and reflect on what you did.
4. Then tell someone else because they may want to volunteer with you.
5. Do what you like to do.

The words of Martin Luther King Jr. rang loudly in my ears. "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." He was so right - and I was changed. Not earth shattering, mind numbing change, but just a little happier, a little more purposeful, a little more meaningful. It was then that the words of this week's parasha came rushing in. *Me'et kol is hasher yidbenu libo* - when teaching about the holy tabernacle the Torah says, "We are to accept from every person whose heart so moves him." (Exodus 25:2). So powerful… our legacy teaches a magnificent lesson. If we are going to build anything holy, anything sacred, we are going to have to accept that which our hearts long to give. So, let me ask you to sit quietly for a minute and listen to your heart. Listen to what it is

telling you to do. Shhhh, feel the quiet… can you feel your heart beating? So, what is it telling you? Who needs your help? What is your heart telling you?

In the biblical narrative, the Jewish people are in the middle of the desert with absolutely nothing around. No food or shelter, except that which is provided through God's grace. There is no stimulation and no distractions, making it very easy to be aware of *only* self. It's easy to become self-absorbed worrying about the next day, the next meal. So God teaches us what to do. Focus on something holy. God is subtly telling us that it is not good to sit and do nothing. If we have nothing to do, we can get into trouble, or worse, we can become apathetic. In the desert, a place devoid of stimulus, God says to change your approach. Before the golden calf, God said, "You have to make something. You have to produce something."

Prophetically, the Torah teaches two of my lessons. 1. Do what you like to do. 2. After you are done, look back and see what you did. The description we read this morning says that the Torah offers options. There are lots of things we can provide such as wood, gold, copper and silver and if you aren't into metal works or woodworking, how about fabric? The list goes on and on. You must make or provide something. You can't opt out. You must be able to look back and see what you've accomplished. This is how the system will perpetuate itself. When you see what you have done, how many boxes you have delivered, how many faces you have lighten upon your arrival, how many lives were saved through your effort, how many squares you made, how many pints of blood you donated, how many stories you read, then you will come back to do more. I doubt you will ever say I did enough already. The system is great. That is why our rabbis taught - *gidol l'lmod torah sh'halimud maivi liyidei ma'aseh* – "Great is study, when it leads to action." (Baba Kama 17a) Our rabbis teach us and brilliantly so, that learning is really important – but it must be a means to an end, not an end in and of itself. We must build and support those institutions that lead us to study because study leads us to action. Full Jews fully participate in our world and its repair. You must be engaged.

The days of "I gave at the door." are over. The days of, " I am giving within these doors." has begun. We are a congregation doing the work of God everyday, and we want you to join in. No, we don't want you to join in, we demand it. As Rabbi Rozenwasser said while encouraging us to work the phones for Federation on Super Sunday, "It is your obligation to volunteer." We are the place where people come to find God and each other. People come through our doors for the safety and security they find in our holy sanctuary. They are energized by what they find here and they go out into the world to make it a better place. At my installation, I offered the following words because I believed my dream to be quite doable.

"Together we will energize and empower our people to live lives in concert with God and with each other, because we know, better than most, the pain of discord. We are going to force a messianic age. We are going to bring on *Yimot HaMashiach*. We are going to rebuild, reshape, and rebirth the modern Jewish experience one Jew at a time. We are going to nurture commitment and we are going to, mark my words, bring meaning to all of our lives. Frank Kafka instructs, "The Messiah will come only when he is no longer

needed". We stand ready to *l'havi yimot hamashiach bimharah biyameinu*, to bring a messianic age speedily in our day, and we're going to do it one life at a time, one minute at a time. There are 525,600 minutes in a year and we are going to use every one of them. We are going to measure time the way we have for centuries, according to the rhythm and the cycle of our sacred calendar, from Shabbat to Shabbat, from Hag to Hag. I implore you to come along for the ride and help me steer this ship.

Albert Schweitzer suggested "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know, the only ones amongst you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve".

This past Tuesday, Charlotte dropped off some more yarn. Now that Missy and I having been knitting, Mia and Nina have started as well. They see what we are doing and they have joined in and they will find joy in their lives as they have begun to learn how to serve.