

**Sermon Parashat Sh'mini**  
**24 Nisan 5766**  
**Rabbi Jay M. Stein**

“The Statue of Liberty features 7 points in her crown - one for each of the continents.” Did you know the Statue of Liberty was a gift from France? Over one hundred years ago, in recognition of the friendship established during the American Revolution, the people of France gave the Statue to the people of the United States. The Statue was a joint effort between America and France. They agreed that the Americans were to build the pedestal and the French were to build the Statue and assemble it here. However, lack of funds was a problem on both sides of the Atlantic. In France, public fees, various forms of entertainment, and a lottery were among the methods used to raise funds, while in the United States, benefits, theatrical events, art exhibitions, auctions and prize fights were used to provide the needed funds.

The lesson is right there in its construction effort. What we could not accomplish with one was made in partnership. The gift could not be accepted without an act of reception. That is why the facts about her crown are so significant. Her highest, most noble ideal lies in the reality that all people's contributions are valued. The Statue of Liberty is a perfect example of the worth of the entire world's efforts together. Today it seems we have lost that sense of cooperation, that sense of shared purpose and goals. The crowning of achievement of the human project must be harmony and cooperation, shared resources and shared gain, a pluralism of ideas and care for each other.

The last generation, the one in which I was raised, has been named generation X as if to suggest there are no defining characteristics. However, there is one very important and distinctive characteristic. I don't believe there has ever been a group that has sought and found more ways of self-satisfaction. Those who have come into adulthood during this time are in the age of self-absorption. This group has also been called the “me generation.” and can be compared to a newborn infant who only cares about having all its needs met. It is now time to grow up and see beyond our self. If modernity is marked by a contrived sense of self-importance, then the post-modern age must be a time of recognizing the value of the other. If modernity has been about pleasing our own interests, then the post modern age must be about partnership.

We have to realize it is not all about us, whether in the international or domestic arena, the political or the personal front. Although it is a fruitful experiment to speak of global partnerships and national partnerships such as the one President Bush attempted to forge this week with China's president Hu Jintao, the fact is real partnerships only occur for the individual. True alliances are built one on one, one at a time. In this week's torah reading we are taught of the brilliance that can happen when two come together. Moses and Aaron can accomplish together what one cannot do by himself.

In a wonderful scene Aaron comes out to bless the people. In a very powerful moment, after having offered a sacrifice, he raises his hands and offers a blessing. Then Moses, seemingly moved by the powerful expression, joins him in the Ohel Moed, the Tent of Meeting. Then they re-emerge and bless the people again - this time together. The verse concludes with an incredible description. *Vayera Kivod Adonai el kol ha'am* - “and God appeared to the entire

people.’ Aaron’s actions were most powerful and they inspired Moses who had been the original inspiration. Aaron got the ball rolling and it was he that inspired the continued partnership with Moses. In the last few chapters we watch as Moses begins to take a step back. The priesthood is established and Aaron, along with his sons, takes the lead. Moses has set up the system of judges and begins to take a back seat. However, Aaron says, “Don’t walk away. There is room under the tent with me.” That is why Rashi imagines an incredible conversation between Moses and Aaron where Aaron says to Moses *bishveli lo yarda shechinah l’yisrael* “God is angry with me and therefore withholds God’s presence from the people.” Then Moses responds to Aaron *aharon achi kidai vehashuv mimeni*, “Aaron you are just more important than me and it is through the sacrifices and service you now offer that brings God to the people.

They are both right. The lessons they teach are profound humility and the extraordinary power of partnership. When we recognize we are incapable of bringing God to the world ourselves, we begin to bring God to the people. When we recognize the value of the other, we begin to bring redemption to the world. When we look for partners in each other we will also find God. The days of isolationism and colonialism are better left in the modern era as we enter the post modern one. It can’t be, it must not be all about us. Whether we move forward creating cooperatives - with other nations, other religions, neighbors or fellow congregants, the human project will only be successful in partnership.

In the words of Ben E. King in his famous song *Stand By Me*

When the night has come  
And the land is dark  
And the moon is the only light we'll see

Well I won't be afraid  
No I won't be afraid  
Just as long as you stand, stand by me

Moses, the greatest of all leaders and Aaron, his spokesman, teach us of the wondrous need for each other. Together they teach the lesson of standing together.

We cannot disenfranchise the more mature of our community and we must not dismiss the younger group for lack of experience. We must come to a place of humility and understand that it is not all about me. We all have insecurities that become fodder for the most abusive among us and we must not let that happen. Together we can accomplish great things.

If globalization is the method of operation in the world economy, then maybe it is time we realize that not only do others have a value economically but humanly as well. If we understand the unique contribution people in India are making to our commerce here in America, then maybe it is time we understand that they might have other offerings to make as well. Everyone must have a seat at the table even if the appetizer has been financial in nature. However, that is just the first course, there is more to come.

Each of us has a gift to give, but it cannot be just about me. We can motivate others and in turn we can be motivated, but we must have *anavah* - humbleness.

Escape from ego based desire, selfish inclinations and the “me first” mentality that ultimately causes isolation and pain in your life. In their place, you will gain life’s true lasting gifts - family, friendship and fulfillment.

If we can meditate on this simple idea then all is possible but without this nothing will be achieved.

I thank Rabbi Rozenwasser for sharing the following story with me. Rabbi David Aaron, a great Kabbalist in his own right, tells a story in his book *Endless Light*. Many years ago I first began the study of Kabbalah and stumbled on the learning center of a great kabalistic master. I saw a crowd gathered and I thought there must be some kind of public event going on. I went in and the great Kabbalist was speaking. Suddenly he stopped. I heard him utter a sigh. I realized that he had noticed me come in and was staring in my direction. Trying to be as unobtrusive as possible, I made my way to a seat on the sidelines, but his eyes followed me across the room. I got a very uncomfortable feeling, which only intensified when he pointed to me and motioned me to come forward.

The entire room was now looking at me. My heart was pounding. I had heard that these masters have the ability to look right through you, to your soul. I didn’t know what to expect as I approached him and I was scared. He was quite old and had a long white beard and bright blue, penetrating eyes. He spoke in a soft voice with a thick accent, but he only asked a few innocuous questions about my family and myself. Then he held out an apple in his hand and dramatically raised it before me, dangling it by its stem.

This great man wanted to give me an apple? I had no idea what this was all about. I reached to take the apple, but the whole crowd shouted, “No!” I became flustered and withdrew my hand. He offered the apple again, and again I tried to take it and again the crowd yelled, “No!” Then I saw the people motioning me to cup my hand and put it beneath the apple. I did so. The great Kabbalist smiled and dropped the apple into my hand. He then bent over and, in a tone that seemed to admonish me, whispered in my ear. “What have you been learning?” Before I could answer, he turned and walked away.

It took years before I realized what it all meant. “Kabbalah” literally means “receptivity” - indeed, it is the art of learning to receive. The master was trying to show me that I had not yet learned the real meaning of Kabbalah. The lesson was: when you are offered a gift do not take it; instead, make of yourself a space that can receive it.

So we must learn to make room for other people. If we are going to accept the gifts others have to offer we have to first make room for them. We must make a space to receive them into our lives and accept them. We must make room for each other.

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