

Shabbat 03 08 19 Sermon

I don't know guys, up there with public speaking, which I do pretty regularly, and some other things. Moving, moving where you live, is broadly considered to be one of the more stressful things in the world. Has anybody moved recently? How many people moved in the last two days? I'm here. And as a mover, meaning not that I was moved as a movie, but I was once a mover, meaning the very company that moved us used to be my employer way back when I was, I don't know, 20 something. And as they were working tirelessly for like two days, I kept waiting for the one guy who wasn't going to be picking up as much stuff as the other guy. Anybody know people like that? Because I tell you something, I knew somebody when I was a mover that he needed like a special invitation because he was very, very, you know, he was senior. He wasn't always leading by example. And so he needed like a special invitation in order to participate in lifting the load.

I don't know about you, but it sounds really selfish and something that none of us would ever be guilty of, but maybe, maybe, maybe, some of you here have once in your lifetime felt insulted, not seen, invisible, overlooked, unappreciated, underappreciated, undervalued, because you didn't get a personal invitation to participate in something. You weren't one of the first on the list. And you felt at that moment like, wait a second, I'm chashuv, I'm important. I'm a leader in this community, I'm a leader in this family, and nobody invited me. I didn't receive a personal turning towards. I didn't receive like a, will you please? And I waited, and it never came. If anyone has ever felt that, I want you to, no, I'm not going to ask you.

Some of us know this intimately, that something in you believes that you are conferred with a special status because of something, power, intimacy, familiarity, something, and that that special quality entitles you to a special invitation, a personal invitation, a moment of care and consideration that makes you feel like the other recognizes how much you have to offer. Some of the problems with that perspective, and the reality that it assumes, is a question I want to lift up for the next ten minutes or so. I feel like the Torah has a very powerful message for us to hear tonight about that. This sense of having to wait to participate, and realizing that maybe waiting to participate means that you might wait until it's too late.

It comes up tomorrow morning. You see, tomorrow morning in the Torah's weekly wisdom, the Torah will bring us to the end of the second book of the five books of Moshe, Exodus, or Shemot, and at the end of the five books of the second book of Exodus, we are going to be recounting the building of the tabernacle, that sacred sanctuary that was the mobile unit, Wi-Fi logon space for the Jews, or the Israelites as they were then called in the desert. And as the Torah comes to an end of the book of Exodus, recounting the construction of the tabernacle. Essentially, the second book which began with Yitziah will end with Exodus, with leaving or being closed in, will also end with being closed in. But it will give us a laundry list of all of the things that were put into the construction of the tabernacle and all of the things that were brought. It's a list, right, of all of the materials and all of the things that went into making this beautifully ornate and very intricate and very, very complicated structure. And just after it finishes, the last of the gifts and the construction of the garments of the holy priest, the stones that were placed on the high priest's shoulders and on the breastplate,

these stones, which we'll get back to in a moment, right when it finishes, that it's done. We hear in chapter 39, verse 32, The Torah as a kind of capping verse on this entire construction says, and all the work was completed, it was all done, all the construction materials had been given, everything was built, and then the Torah decides to tell us that it's finished. And then it adds this little piece. It was done by all of the Israelites.

Now everybody, is that true? Did all of the Israelites actually participate in the construction, actual, the word *lasod* means to do. Did all of the Israelites do the actual work of building the tabernacle? Of course not. It was a small group of artisans, a small group of construction workers. They weren't going to go out and let everybody, I mean, three million people building a small tabernacle? That would be crazy. And yet the Torah bears testimony in its use of a very particular form, *vaya'asu*, and they did. Lest you think that it's accidental, that word appears a very important number of times. It's a very important word in the *mishkaning*, tabernacled process, and to attribute all of Israel as the makers of the tabernacle is significant.

Says the Or Chaim, says one of the great commentators, why does the Torah go out of its way to tell us that everybody made the tabernacle? It teaches us, the Torah says, a general rule about the way Torah can be observed by showing how the Israelites conferred merits one upon the other. The Torah in its entirety is only capable of fulfillment by means of the entirety of the people. Every individual person is charged with the duty to perform those commandments which he is able or she is able to fulfill, and not ones that she is not able to fulfill.

This is the true meaning of you shall love your fellow Jew or your fellow person as you love yourself because they are not other than yourself. If we are to imagine, says the Or Chaim, Rabbi Chaim Ibn Attar, that the entirety of the *mishkaning*, the tabernacle process, is analogous to nation building, community building. Each of us has a role to play, each of us is supposed to bring something, unless we think that only what I brought is how I will be merited. He says no, everyone will be merited as if they built the whole thing in their entirety. And what's even more profoundly important for us, he says, remarkably, that there were a group of very, very wealthy leaders in the Israelite community that's not mentioned here in the Torah, who when time came for Moses to ask people to volunteer their gifts, they said, well, we're going to wait, because he clearly told everybody to bring their gifts, but we are special, says the Or Chaim, and so we're just going to wait. Whatever is not brought forward, we'll fill in the gap.

Anybody ever hear that campaign strategy? We'll let everybody else fill it in, and then whatever is not there, we're going to fill in the gap. And what happened? If you look back at the tabernacle construction story, Moses has to come to the people and say, enough giving, there's too much, no more giving. All of you brought so much, there's no more room for volunteers to bring anything, nothing. And so that small group of people who were waiting for the differential were left out in the dark. And says the Or Chaim, the reason why we read about those stones right before this capping verse is because those stones were brought by those people, because it was a last-ditch favor. There was more than enough, and they gave that last moment to those people.

The people that waited found themselves realizing that they were not indispensable. The people that waited to participate, those people were too late. There was already enough, and then the Or Chaim goes on, what I just told you originally, there's an even deeper reason, not just that you will be indispensable, you will feel and realize that you are not indispensable, that all of us have something to give, and that if we wait to participate, it might be too late.

He says it's also an erroneous understanding of what role we each have to play. The people who have to wait are in the erroneous assumption that we're not a totality, under the erroneous assumption that it doesn't really matter for me to begin giving. I have to get a special invitation, no, you are part of the totality of the whole, if I speak to everyone and say please give, it means you too, and if your ego can get out of the way, the Or Chaim says, then you too will be able to participate.

Man, imagine this for a moment in our community, in your relationships, imagine this in the world. People that realize that each and every one of us has a role to play, that each of us, our role is important to play, that we can't wait to participate because it might be too late. What kind of proactivity might we see with our lovers? Man, you didn't invite me to buy you flowers, and so I didn't. I was waiting, you should have asked me and I would have told you what I wanted. Imagine if you have to wait before someone tells you to do anything around the house. Imagine if you had to be told to give to a community that supports you. Imagine if you had to be told to do the thing that by very definition of what it is reminds us that we are all in this together. You have some weight to carry, so don't wait to carry. You have weight to carry, so don't wait to carry. Don't carry to carry. I could go on like this all night.

And the Mishkan came to a close, reminding us that as it came to a close, there were some who didn't realize that it was imminent and who waited, and then it was too late, and then God said, okay, fine, let them bring the stones, they'll be the last ones on the list, and then we're going to... We each have a weight to carry, but if we don't carry it, someone else will, and we will be left out. And in being left out, that's a travesty. Being left out is a tragedy. Not pulling our weight is painful.

We're living now in a moment where more and more the American polity and the international polity, we divide each other, one against the other, using language of difference, using language of painful separation, but the Mishkaning and the tabernacling are here to remind us that we are all part of one fabric, says the Urachayim. We are part of one group, and we can't do it all, and we can't be waiting for our foreman to come along and say, hey, pick up a box. Hey, pick up a chair. Hey, pull your weight. There's work to done. There are sleeves to roll up, whether it's in this community or in your love relationship or if you're a mother, a father, a sister, brother, under any category, don't wait, don't procrastinate. It might be too late. So carry your weight. Each of us, when we proactively and energetically and intentionally and compassionately, when we pull our part, when we say I will step in, I will help, I will lead, I will be a pioneer, I will step forward, whenever that happens, we think it's just social or civic responsibility.

We think it's just something that you do, but our tradition says you are affirming a deep metaphysical truth in that moment. You might not have a high. You might not be tripping.

You might not be at the revelation at Sinai, but something profound is happening at that moment. You are recognizing that we are part of one fabric and that when someone stands on principle, when the ego gets in the way, we tear the fabric that binds us. In that moment, in some way, I want to say tonight, and it's pretty heretical to say this, but it is ultimately the purpose of all religious tradition, from the word religion to religare, to ligament us again, religamenting, that when we recognize our connected and interconnected lives, when we are woven from one tapestry, whether we receive an early phone call or invitation is immaterial.

There's work to be done. So don't wait to participate.

Please rise.