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## Royalty

I have discovered a new source for sermon inspiration. The sign outside of the Broadway Methodist Church often displays an inspiration quip or message and this week the sign said “Congratulations to Prince Harry and Meghan.” And indeed, news of the royal wedding and pictures of the royal wedding filled the papers this week. It has been very interesting to me to see how Princess Meghan’s background as an American celebrity, someone famous in her own right, has prepared her for the traditions and expectations of the British royal family. Meghan, the American celebrity, gave hugs to her fans, whereas a Princess needs to cultivate an aura of distance and a certain regal presence. Her relationships with her new in-laws too are governed by intricate and sometimes ancient court etiquette in which every member of the royal family has his and her own place in an elaborate hierarchy that is created by their place in the line of succession.

Royalty make an appearance in the Torah portion as well this week. The Mishkan is dedicated in *Parashat Naso* by twelve sets of *korbanot* that are offered by the twelve *nesi'im*, or princes, of each of the twelve tribes.

The Torah tells the story of their inauguration of the mishkan in a curious way. Instead of describing how the mishkan was inaugurated once by telling us which *korbanot* were brought and how and then saying something like “and all the *nesi'im* did so for twelve days,” the Torah lists each prince separately and lists each identical set of *korbanot* twelve times.

We had no one signed up to read Torah this morning as late in the week as Thursday and I thought I would do my part to help, and hopefully impress you with my laying prowess by signing up to read the fifth, sixth, and seventh aliyot. Others stepped forward in the nick of time before I could put my plan into effect. But, gentlemen, you should remember that reading the fifth, sixth, and seventh aliquot of *Parashat Naso* is a very easy way to impress a community. Lots and lots of verses, but they all repeat. Prince after prince made the choice to bring an identical set of *korbanot* in inaugurate the *mishkan* and the Torah listed each one.

Why does the Torah devote so many verses to repeating the same information? What does the Torah want us to notice about the ways that the princes brought these inaugural *korbanot*?

Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar, author of an 18th century commentary to the Torah, draws our attention to the Torah’s emphasis on the direct involvement of the *nesi'im* themselves.

**וַיִּקְרְבוּ הַנְּשִׂאִים אֶת חֲנֻכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ בַּיּוֹם הַמִּשַּׁח אֹתוֹ וַיִּקְרְבוּ הַנְּשִׂאִים אֶת קָרְבָּנָם לִפְנֵי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ:**

“The princes also brought **וַיִּקְרְבוּ** the dedication offering for the altar upon its being anointed. As the princes were bringing **וַיִּקְרְבוּ** their offerings before the altar.”

The Torah repeats the verb **וַיִּקְרְבוּ** to emphasize the direct involvement of the princes in bringing their donations to the *mishkan* and to the altar. In the words of the Orach Chayim:

**לומר שהם עצמם טרחו בהבאת הנדבה עד המשכן, הגם שהם נשיאים לא חשו לכבודם.**

They themselves exerted themselves to bring their donation to the mishkan. Even though they were princes they did not worry about the perceived lack of dignity implicated in schlepping their donations to the mishkan.

This is a powerful spiritual lesson and also a crucial element of leadership and also a crucial ingredient of a functional community.

When doing mitzvot, one cannot “call it in.” There is a phrase in contemporary Israeli Hebrew, **אם כבר - אז כבר** which means that if one is going to do something, then really do it. If you’re going to bring expensive *korbanot* to the *mishkan*, you might as well go the extra mile and do it yourself. If you’re going to invest in a kosher kitchen, so go the extra mile and take the time to learn how to do it up to community standards. If you’re going to take two or three hours to come to shul on Shabbat, you might as well open the siddur and say the words with focus. You’re already here. It won’t take any extra time on your part if you listen to *Keriat Hatorah* and follow along in the davening and reserve your conversations for after shul is over.

Any mitzvah that is worth your time and worth your money is worth doing well, out of knowledge and in a meticulous and conscientious way.

At the level of leadership, the princes demonstrated, and the Torah emphasizes, that they did not only donate with their money towards the inauguration of the *mishkan*, but they donated their direct time and energy. They were not content to write a check to support a cause that they admired and then sit back and let others do the work. They dedicated their wealth to a sacred cause, and then they themselves involved themselves in that same cause.

Although I have never convinced anyone else to see things this way, I frequently feel that the shul should remind members when the membership invoices are mailed out that each shul member can decide how much dues will be on an amortized basis depending on how often one attends *tefilot* here or makes use of the shul as a resource in some other way. The more you attend *tefilot* and make use of the shul, the cheaper the membership dues become. You can decide how much membership dues cost per visit.

The princes each donated the identical *korban* because, in an exemplary model of leadership, they were not interested in standing out and being recognized for their generosity or piety. They wanted to make sure that the *mishkan* was inaugurated in an appropriate way and they wanted each of the twelve tribes to feel equal ownership of this new communal resource.

Finally, the princes represent a model for the sort of involvement that is indispensable for a functioning community. It is somewhat awkward to say this right when we are in the middle of soliciting donations for the shul’s annual summer soiree, but it is nonetheless true that generous donations of money are necessary but not sufficient for a well functioning community.

Generations of donors, including many generous men and women sitting here today, have given us this spacious shul, have built an elegant *mikvah*, have purchased *siddurim* and *chumashim*, have sponsored the *Sifrei Torah* that are in this *aron* and we could not gather as we do in comfort this morning were it not for their generosity. But someone has to sign up to read the Torah. Someone has to open the *siddurim* and use them. Someone needs to undergo the training to become a mikvah attendant and then sign up to staff the mikvah. The two-year olds of our congregation, talented and cute as they are, cannot lead their own Tot-Shabbat program! (That’s actually a terrifying thought).

We have dedicated and deliberative board members, members of the shul willing to attend committee meetings and implement programming, worshippers willing to introduce themselves to a first-time visitor and show them the right place in the siddur. Dedication and commitment of that sort cannot be purchased and is indispensable to our community and defines our community.

Every community will look different. We pay shul employees to perform tasks undertaken by volunteers at some shuls and we have volunteers undertaking tasks that are performed by paid employees elsewhere. But every functional community is built on the dedication and actual hands-on efforts of people who care enough to make sure the tasks get done with love and commitment.

Royalty entails a certain distance and distinction. But, our own twelve princes taught us, it also entails a commitment to take responsibility to serve the important causes of one's community with enthusiasm and with ones own hands. In this way, we can all be royalty.