

Shabbat Shalom.

This evening, as we gather to celebrate, we know we are also ending a week that was pretty painful. Though fortunately yesterday's attack at Temple Israel did not cause any serious injuries for the targets of the attack, obviously the *attempt* at far worse shakes us up. A shock like that frightens us. It reminds us of our vulnerabilities. It invites us to build further bridges with *other* peoples, to reaffirm our commitment to humanity writ large, and a shock like that prompts us to feel closer to Jews of all different kinds, across space, time, and ideology.

I was reminded of that latter fact last night when I found myself at 770 Eastern Parkway – the Chabad world headquarters – and I noted that many of the Lubavitchers there were talking about what had happened in West Bloomfield. Now nevermind that Temple Israel is Reform and Chabad is not, there are still some shared experiences that remind us of the ties between us. These days, it frequently feels like it's *only* the sad times that we share, across denominations – when at every other moment, Jews have endless reasons to dislike each other, and to see ourselves on different sides of political and philosophical chasms. And that feature of Jewish life today is something I'll return to, as I tell you what's on my mind heading into my sabbatical.

But first, a word about the Torah portion.

In the opening verse of this week's parsha we read, Vayak'hel Moshe et Kol Adat B'nai Yisrael, And Moses convoked the entire community of Israel.

All of them are there, men and women, across every line of difference. And before going on to describe what the parsha is really about – building the tabernacle that is supposed to bind the people together, and bind them to God – before getting into that, the Torah doubles down on a commandment they've actually already received a few times.

Sheshet Yamim Taaseh M'lacha, For six days, work may be done. Uvayom hash'vi'i yihiyeh lachem kodesh Shabbat Shabbaton Ladonai. But on the seventh day you shall have a sabbath of complete rest, holy to God.

Now this by itself is interesting. That the Torah emphasizes Shabbat again this week, which marks the fourth time in just the book of Exodus. But this section about Shabbat comprises only the first four verses of the parsha. And all of the chapters that come after are devoted to the hard *work* of building the tabernacle. It is a famously bizarre juxtaposition.

And it would be right to wonder: why should the Torah go out of its way to mention *rest* before describing the *work* of building the Mishkan, with all its fabrics and metals and appurtenances?

This was the question of Isaac Abarbanel in the 15th century. “We might have thought,” he explains in his commentary, “that [building the tabernacle] outweighed in importance all the other Biblical prescriptions, and most certainly the Sabbath rest.” He goes on to point out that as a people that prioritizes deed over creed, the Jews might be inclined to believe that building a sacred space should outweigh the need to rest.

But precisely because the people would naturally *believe* that, Abarbanel explains: “God told Moses to say to Israel...though the work of the Tabernacle is sacred, nevertheless, you must not override the Sabbath on its account, but *observe* it.”

Now friends, when I read that earlier this week, in advance of addressing you before my sabbatical, I was like: that’s pretty good. Might as well say Shabbat Shalom and leave it right there. Because that is the whole point! Barring only a handful of commandments like saving a life, virtually everything else must be put on hold to take care of ourselves. To breathe. To rest. To remember each week what is *holy*, as opposed to what is merely *urgent*.

And I’ll admit to you that in rabbinic work, though rabbis go on and on about the value of rest, we often lose sight of the difference between holiness and urgency. And usually, that oversight comes at the expense of something else in our lives. Our bodies. Our time. The spark of holiness that we, too, must tap into if we’re to serve our people.

Now I hope it’s obvious that I love being a rabbi. And I love serving the Jews. Specifically you guys. In ways big and small, at the most random of hours, in the most preposterous of ways, sometimes. I love it all. But, I’m very tired.

Because it’s been a long time! When I started working at CBE, Obama was president. And given everything that came in the years thereafter, every one of us deserves a sabbatical just for living through it. And also COVID, and personal ups and downs, and October 7th, and its aftermath. And the 2024 election. And the last five years of 17 Eastern Parkway. Vey. Iz. Mir. It’s been a lot! But you don’t need to hear the reasons why I’m going on Sabbatical. That all boils down to the fact that we are part of a community that values sustaining its leadership through rest. And you must know how grateful I am to all of you for making this possible. How thankful I am to my superlative clergy colleagues, for taking on a little extra work while I’m gone. And to the staff and the board of CBE who have been so supportive.

Tonight instead of telling you all of the reasons why I'm tired, I want to tell you about my plans.

So let me say that after April 1st, my plans are primarily to sleep. To go to the gym. To go on a honeymoon because for some reason I thought it was a good idea to get married three weeks before Rosh Hashanah. And Elon and I want to take some time away together.

Our travels will take us to Barcelona and Tel Aviv and London and San Francisco and Michigan and who knows wherever else. But as I travel far away from this building, I will be thinking about us. Not just us in this room. Or at CBE. But about the Jews. My lifelong obsession.

Over the past two and a half years, and well before then, frankly, I've embodied the reality that the Jews have, collectively, been pretty messed up. And when I say I've embodied it, I mean that. I have held in my body the fact that we are not well – it has kept me up at night, and unsettled my own sense of self as a Jew and a Jewish leader. Because I feel cosmically bound to our people. But as we know, at this moment – American Jews don't have a clear idea of who we *are* as a people, we don't know how to relate to one another, and we don't know what to prioritize philosophically. Caught, as we are, between nationalism and humanism, secularism and religiosity, universalistic values and particularistic commitments. And though I love my totally strange role in helping guide us all through it, I want to get back in touch with myself. Because...as I was reminded last night at 770, and on many other days...the lines that divide our people feel like they run directly through me – in my family and my friendships and my work.

So I'm going on this adventure. I've got a whole long syllabus of reading, and a new pair of tefillin. And I'm going to trace the contours of my own family story, and the story of our people, in the pursuit of answers. I suspect I will not find THE answer. But I pray I will return with *an* answer, or multiple answers, about how to hold the constituent parts of myself together as I try to better understand my *role* in our collective.

Commenting on the first phrase of this week's parsha, Vayak'hel Moshe et kol Adat B'nai Yisrael, meaning "and Moses convoked the entire community of Israel," Rashi points out that the verb, Vayak'hel, is in the hifil, the causative form of the verb. In other words, Moses doesn't gather the people outright. He doesn't say, "come on 'round!" But instead he *causes* them to gather, with the premise of a project. Specifically one that involves the entirety of the Israelites – both men and women contribute, which is

notable, as they build the Mishkan, or tabernacle. A project that allows the Israelite community to feel whole, by contributing to building a portable sanctuary with materials they volunteer. A project that allows them to feel God, and be in relationship with each other. After the enormous rupture of the Golden Calf last week.

And ever since this episode of building the mishkan, Jewish history has been inflected with myriad collective projects. Nationhood, and monarchy, and Diaspora, and halacha, and Reform, and nationalism, and movements for justice, among so many others. In these projects, we have sought, as a people, some way of forging ahead with a grand vision for who the Jews are, and what our role in the world might be. Whether or not they were enduring, each of those historic projects sought a maximal number of Jews to be part of them, and they were successful.

But when we look closely behind us, we see that the last century's Jewish consensus has been torn asunder. The ties that once bound us have so obviously frayed. And I'm sad about it. So inevitably, I will ask myself over the course of my travels, what a 21st century project for our people might look like. I will indulge, I'm sure, plenty of visions for the work we're already doing here at CBE and at Grand Army Plaza. But more realistically, I hope I will find, in my seeking, how we might continue to relate to one another...even if there isn't ONE single project that galvanizes us all as Jews. How might we get in touch with the holy, as opposed to the merely urgent...in the coming decades of our collective experience? How might we find positive ways of relating to one another, *without* tragedy or violence. Against us, or against another.

How might we buck the trends? And come up with something so much better than we ever thought possible?

That is a grandiose set of questions. But I'm going to think deeply about them. And as I embark on this path of seeking many different answers...following this week's parsha, I will begin by resting. I will sleep, I will meditate. I will pray and I will play. And I will miss you.

Shabbat Shalom.