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*D'var Torah*¹

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To put it mildly, each of us who serves a congregation carries a heavy load. We organize, promote, teach, administer, guide and manage. We are prods, peacemakers, fund-raisers, pastors, spiritual leaders, father-figures, ambassadors, invocators, sometimes janitors. If time should allow, we even hope to study. When we look at our desk calendar after a busy week, we are amazed at how diffused and varied our job is. At the end of a long day, our weary bones testify eloquently to the burden we carry.

Despite our busyness, we find it hard to measure our effectiveness. The doctor has his patient, who lives or dies. The lawyer has his case; win or lose, he collects his fee. The businessman has his accountant who tells him to the last penny how he is doing. We have our people. They are the measure of our success and failure. But how can we measure? We don't trust numbers, thank God. If we did, we'd all quit tomorrow. We don't believe the inane flattery that sometimes reaches our ears. We try to measure our effect. It's intangible; often it seems negligible. Our people often seem untouchable, and unchangeable. They make it very clear to us that they prefer dancing to "davening" and that the "Bar" is the crucial emphasis in Bar Mitzvah. So much of what they are involved in Jewishly is, at best, peripheral to meaningful Jewish living. And so when we attempt to measure our effectiveness, our burden becomes heavier, for we know not what our busyness has accomplished.

¹ The text is as it was delivered in 1965. It does not reflect the gender revolution, Had it been delivered more recently, it would reflect those immensely useful changes.

We are not alone in this. Nor are we the first. Moses himself carried a fantastic work load. His father-in-law tried to organize it for him, but Moses often wondered how he would carry the awful burden his God had placed upon him. And he did not hesitate to complain that it often seemed beyond his capabilities to change a stiff-necked people into something better.

We are told that when Moses was in the presence of the Almighty on Sinai, with the complete *luhot*, God informed him rather petulantly that the people whom Moses led out of Egypt had made themselves a calf and were dancing deliriously around it. Yet interestingly, it is not at this point that Moses shatters the *luhot*. It would seem that the shock and disappointment of that moment would drive anyone to such an act. But the fact remains that the tablets are destroyed only after Moses has made the long and tedious trek down the mountain.

The mystics tell us that Moses could not and did not break the *luhot*, because they held the word of God. When Moses came down from Sinai, he was still holding the *luhot*. But when the letters on the *luhot* saw what was happening in the camp of the Israelites, they became so irate that they left their place on the *luhot*, flying back to heaven. Without the letters, the tablets were only stone, too heavy for Moses to carry. They fell from his arms, and were shattered.

If we are carrying stones without letters, our work load will be unbearable. It will crush us. But if each act of each part of the day is a letter added to another letter in a meaningful framework, the words formed can make our burden lighter. To form the words we must be aware of the ultimate importance of our work. We are trying to make a covenant people out of good, but recalcitrant, Jews.

There are few congregations which do not reflect the kind of rabbinic leadership they are given. Our responsibility to a long and venerated past is great, and it is just that responsibility which can help give meaning to all that we do towards creating a great future. An evening raising funds for a Ramah scholarship, a hospital call, teaching a Hebrew high school class, getting the bulletin out, spending time with someone when time is so precious, a kind word in time of grief, creating an institution when men are measured by standards different than those in the daily world in which they live—all of these and all the rest of the things that we do are either disconnected acts or the letters out of which meaningful words are made. And the words make of the stone tablets *luhot*, they make the load bearable. They may even do what the original words did. They may even make of our people Jews. But if that remains for a time beyond what we will see, let us at least take comfort in the thought of the mystics that the *luhot* carried Moses. May they carry us, and inspire us to even greater efforts on behalf of our people and our God.