

The fundamental tenet of all Jewish Torah commentary is that the plain, clear meaning of a text is very important—but it never exhausts the meaning of a text. **There is always more.** Case in point: every commentator would agree that this morning's Torah reading describes a convocation of Israelites that took place shortly before we were to enter the promised land. The beautiful idea of that convocation and consecration could fill a hundred volumes of commentary, a thousand volumes. **But there is always more.**

In order for us to experience some of this “more,” some of this abundance of meaning, we are going to try a little guided meditation as we sit here together, just as our ancestors long ago would have stood together. If you like, I'd recommend that you sit up as straight as you can while still being comfortable, and close your eyes gently. Now imagine... imagine that your feet are the feet of a little child standing amid that great convocation in the desert. You grew up out here; your feet are desert tough. But they are still the feet of a child. They run, they jump, they climb,

they scamper. [Oh, we were all a lot lighter on our feet back then!]. Right now, your feet are probably bouncing up and down on their toes, trying to find an angle to see through the crush of taller, older people around you. You wonder what's the fuss? why are all the older people acting so funny? What is this excitement that seems to have taken hold of everyone? Imagine how it would feel to be that little girl, that little boy, waiting for some great, unknown excitement.

Okay, let's all take a few slow, deep breaths; try to clear our minds. We are not children anymore. But imagine... imagine now that your shoulders are the shoulders of a water-drawer, the lowliest of occupations. The "you" that is sitting here in Temple Shir Shalom—think of the hardest, most thankless work you have ever done, physical, emotional, intellectual, whatever. Think of how your shoulders felt doing that work, the stress they endured, the resentment they carried, the ache of your muscles. Now imagine you work that hard all day, every day, endlessly walking back and forth to the well, balancing a long pole over your

shoulders with two heavy buckets on either end. Sure, being a free Israelite and no longer a slave in Egypt, you get a day off every Saturday, but you have to work doubly hard on Friday and Sunday, because everyone needs their water, after all.

Occasionally, very occasionally, you receive a smile in return for your hard work, or a "thank you." Mostly, you are invisible, your efforts unnoticed and unappreciative. But today you have been summoned along with everyone else. Your pole and buckets are off your shoulders, and you stand as an equal among the elders and leaders, the women and children. Something is happening here and you don't what it is. You are a little bit afraid of the work that is piling up as you stand here. You are also exhausted, almost asleep on your feet. What would it take to not be so tired?

Now let's take another few deep breaths, clear our heads once again. Imagine... imagine that your hands are the hands of an elder—this should be pretty easy for most of us! Your hands have been working every day forever by now; they have earned their

every gnarl and wrinkle, their every ache and pain. They have washed and scrubbed; they have stroked and comforted; they have hewn and sculpted; they they have formed and shaped; have given pleasure and inflicted pain. You feel every bit of that history now, as you flex your hands in anticipation of whatever this new challenge will be. Our perhaps you are holding in your hands the hands of a grandchild, both of you vibrating with anticipation. All the heartache, all the anxiety of the past forty years in the wilderness seems to be bearing down on you right now. This gathering; what will this be? A blessing? A curse? A conquest? A defeat? A plague? A birth?

A few more deep breaths and we continue, a little more quickly now. Imagine that your legs are the legs of a young warrior, trained in the defense of your tribe, uncertain if this is another moment to leap into action. Imagine that your lap is the lap of a mother, always giving comfort or care to a young one, while you worry constantly, every minute, about the future that your children will inhabit. Imagine that your brow is the brow of a

judge, furrowed with the strain of providing justice. Imagine that your face is the face of a stranger, here at the sufferance of these strange Israelites, but unsure that their welcome will last.

And now, finally, let's come back to ourselves, but understanding now all of these people are a part of us. Each one of us is a child, a laborer, an elder, a warrior, a parent, a judge, a stranger. In fact, we are only fully ourselves when we are **all** of our selves, standing together as our ancestors stood, each one of us a united community within, part of united community without. When our ancestors were able to stand together, all of them united in readiness and anticipation, they merited a great gift. When each one of us stands today, recognizing and acknowledging and honoring our multiplicity within, we, too, merit a great gift.

Let's actually rise together now, to receive that great gift:

11For this instruction with which I charge you today is not too wondrous for you nor is it distant. 12It is not in the heavens, to say, ‘Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?’ 13And it is not beyond the sea, to say, ‘Who will cross over for us beyond the sea and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?’ 14Rather the word is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you might do it.

When we stand together, wholehearted inside, wholehearted outside, we receive the great and startling gift of knowing that God is not something separate and apart from us, something up in heaven or beyond the sea, something that is difficult to find and difficult to reach. When we stand together, wholehearted inside, wholehearted outside, we know that God is always right here, part of each one of us, waiting eagerly to be found.

Amen.d