



Rashi Annual Dinner
7 June 2006

11 Sivan 5766

Honoring Arthur Winn

Keynote Address by Jeffrey Swartz

At the end of Masekhet Berachot in the Babylonian Talmud, on daf 64a (אדא), there is a brief discussion that bears on tonight's honoree. There, the Talmud states:

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר אָמַר רַבִּי חַנִּינָא: תַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים מְרַבִּים שְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם,
שְׁנַאֲמַר: וְכֹל בְּנֵיךְ לְמוֹדֵי ה', וְרַב שְׁלוֹם בְּנֵיךְ, אֵל תִּקְרֵי בְּנֵיךְ אֶלֶּא בּוֹנֵיךְ.

“Rabbi Elazar said in the name of Rabbi Chaninah: Torah scholars increase the peace of the world, as it is said: ‘And all your children will be students of Hashem, and abundant will be the peace of your children;’ do not read ‘your children,’ rather read ‘your builders.’ (Isaiah 54:13)”

Torah scholars--children who attend the Rashi School, who learn the theory and practice of social justice, who learn Torah values as they breathe in math and science and music and English--Torah scholars are our children, and our children are builders--builders of peace in the world, and of a more perfect society on earth.

The Gemara's play on words--using the same Hebrew consonants to form two separate words, builders and children, is more than a casual word play. The relationship between our children and our builders is absolutely more than etymological; look around tonight, that relationship is ontological and visceral. Arthur Winn, as we have heard eloquently, is a builder of buildings, a builder of community, and the builder of a family. And the children who flow through the building that currently houses the Rashi School, let alone the campus that we will eventually build to house the excellence that is the Rashi School, these children--our children--are the builders of our future, the guarantors of our community, the purpose for which we struggle. The link between builders and children is a very powerful Jewish notion...Builders build for the children...

I am a proud supporter of the Rashi School and its students, part of the community that will see this institution built and its purpose realized. My family's commitment to Rashi, both directly and through the Peerless Excellence Initiative at CJP are not because my three sons attend this school--in fact, my children are enrolled at the Maimonides School, they learn in a different building--no, my commitment to Rashi is a reflection that *our* children--Jewish children in my community--must have a peerless academy of Reform Jewish day school learning available to

them. And so whether our kids literally attend this school or not--we are accountable, we must be builders of this School, investors of time and money for the Rashi School's future. It is not someone else's task to build Rashi for our children--it is our task.

This week's Torah parsha is the longest parsha in the Torah--parshat Nasso, in sefer Bamidbar. Nasso describes the hanukat ha'bayit for the Mishkan--the ceremony of inauguration of the Tabernacle placed at the physical center of the Jews' encampment in the desert. For nearly 40 years, from the slavery of Egypt to the responsible freedom of the Land of Israel, the Mishkan was a physical presence at the geographical center, and the spiritual heart of the Jewish nation. In parshat Nasso, we read a detailed description of parts of the ceremony of inauguration for the Mishkan. One very detailed account focuses on the gifts brought in honor of the "grand opening," by the 12 tribal princes. In incredible detail, the Torah recounts that for 12 consecutive days, each of the 12 tribes, represented by their prince, brought their gift to the community, in front of the community--one day per tribe, one set of gifts per day per tribe. On its face, the length and detail of the accounting of the tribute brought forth by each tribe is really striking--because, for 12 straight days, the 12 distinct tribes brought precisely and exactly the same gift--and in excruciating detail, the Torah recounts the ceremony, using the exact same language, 12 times in a row:

וַיְהִי הַמִּקְרִיב בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן אֶת־קָרְבָּנוֹ נְחֹשֶׁת בֶּן־עַמִּינָדָב לְמִטָּה יְהוּדָה: וְקָרְבָּנוֹ
קְעֵרֶת־כֶּסֶף אַחַת שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאָה מִשְׁקָלָהּ מִזָּרֶק אֶחָד כֶּסֶף שִׁבְעִים שֶׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ
שְׁנֵיהֶם | מְלֵאִים סֹלֶת בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן לְמִנְחָה: כַּף אַחַת עֲשָׂרָה זָהָב מְלֵאָה קְמֹרֶת: פָּר אֶחָד
בֶּן־בְּקָר אֵיל אֶחָד כֶּבֶשׂ־אֶחָד בֶּן־שָׁנָתוֹ לְעֹלָה: שְׁעִיר־עִזִּים אֶחָד לְחַטָּאת: וּלְזִבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים
בְּקָר שְׁנַיִם אֵילִם חֲמִשָּׁה עֲתוּדִים חֲמִשָּׁה כֶּבֶשִׁים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה חֲמִשָּׁה זֶה קָרְבָּן נְחֹשֶׁת
בֶּן־עַמִּינָדָב: בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁנִי הַקְּרִיב נְתַנְאֵל בֶּן־צוּעָר נְשִׂיא יִשָּׁשְׁכָר: הַקָּרֵב אֶת־קָרְבָּנוֹ
קְעֵרֶת־כֶּסֶף אַחַת שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאָה מִשְׁקָלָהּ מִזָּרֶק אֶחָד כֶּסֶף שִׁבְעִים שֶׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ
שְׁנֵיהֶם | מְלֵאִים סֹלֶת בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן לְמִנְחָה: כַּף אַחַת עֲשָׂרָה זָהָב מְלֵאָה קְמֹרֶת.....

For 61 pesukim, the rhythm of the language is almost hypnotic; the Torah repeats the same words, describing the exact same gifts, brought on consecutive days, varying only the names of the princes from day to day. In parshat Breisheit, G-d creates the entire world in 6 days, and the Torah dedicates no more than 31 pesukim to that account. Why in the name of brevity being the soul of wit doesn't the Torah simply say, each tribe brought the same thing, list it out once, and move on?

There are many thoughtful and insightful answers to this question--but I am neither thoughtful nor insightful, rather wicked passionate about day schools in general and Rashi in particular, and so I came up with three self serving answers to my question--why all the detail of 12 seemingly identical gifts?

1. Every builder has his or her moment to lead from out in front--the moment for which he or she was created, that unique instant, when the leader is called to step forward... The Torah

describes each prince individually, just as tonight, we honor a builder prince--we call Arthur Winn by name to stand up in front of the community to be rightfully acknowledged as the unique leader he is. And yet if we truly seek to honor this unique leader, we cannot leave him standing out in front, all on his own. It is not enough for us to honor Arthur passively; in parshat Nasso, at that critical moment in Jewish history, one at a time, each of the princes of that Jewish community stood up to be counted. And there are many leaders here tonight, many more who make up the Rashi community. And if you are sincere in your desire to honor Arthur, be the next leader to stand up for this School, as he has tonight. No one leader--no matter his stature, no matter her generosity or his leadership, no matter which tribe he or she hails from--no one builds and perfects community alone. Each of the 12 princes depicted in the Torah was an heroic leader; each was separated out for deserved individual recognition--but each 1 made part of the community of the 12 leaders it took to inaugurate the Mishkan. To really honor Arthur's leadership--to truly be grateful to the Slivkas' for their extraordinary leadership--we have to consider our own. Who are or who will be the princes and builders of Rashi? Are you here tonight, sitting in this room, at this critical moment in the future of this School and this community? To see Rashi built out requires certainly no fewer than 12 princes--12 families that will commit at least \$1 million to building this institution. And while we have some heroic types--Gilda and Fred, and others, some by name and some anonymously who have already stood up--we don't yet number 12....And that is not because we don't have the means within this community--I see the names of Jewish princes alongside the names of the most prominent non-Jewish families in greater Boston, on the rolls of hugely important civic institutions--symphonies, hospitals, museums--but I don't see the name of one single non-Jew listed on the rolls of our day schools. Does this sound parochial? Call me parochial--but Jewish leaders need to build Jewish institutions--including the Rashi School--because ain't no one else going to build these institutions but us...We are the princes...and we own what comes with that role...

2. Building communal institutions requires princes to lead from in front--and for leadership to emerge, tribe by tribe from within. It is not enough, even if 12 princes do step forward--without the tribes arranged behind them, fully committed to the same outcome, princely gestures of leadership are courageous, but not sufficient. NACHSHON WENT FIRST...BUT YEHUDAH FOLLOWED...Maybe this is why each of the offerings is identical to the others--to emphasize the linkage from prince to prince, and from tribe to tribe. The Torah narrative is clear--to build sacred institutions like Rashi at the center of our community, we need the leaders in front, and we need the tribes--each of them and all of us--committed to the same outcome. So, individual acts of leadership, set against the backdrop of קולם -- **באחד** -- "all as one." For too long in Boston, we have worked around an insufficient communal commitment to day schools. That the Torah shows us each distinct, individual, differentiated tribes, each with their own agenda, yet equally and passionately committed to building the necessary communal institutions is profound and challenging for all of us from our separate tribes in this community. We need to change our worldview in Boston about Rashi and about day schools in general--the question cannot be "do my kids go to this school"--the question instead has to be, "what kind of community will we have if we fail to build these institutions?" There is a story circulating in the day school world nationally, that analogizes funding day schools to the national commitment to fund central functions of the

Federal government--including the Navy. The citizens of Iowa, as the story goes, fund the Navy, even if they are far from the shoreline. Those good citizens understand that the issue of coastal defence is relevant to their worldview, even if saltwater is hundreds of miles distant from their personal reality. They recognize their communal, tribal obligation to the broad thesis of how a nation is built and governed. Why as Jews in this community are we not equally sighted? Why are day schools the sole purview and exclusive responsibility of the parents whose children attend them? Doesn't every Jew in this community recognize the value of educating our children Jewishly? That our children can quote Shakespeare and the Black Eyed Peas, execute a cross over dribble and and recite fantasy baseball statistics with facility, but don't know who Rashi was--doesn't each member of the disparate tribes of Jewish Boston see the existential threat that Jewish ignorance poses? Why do we require external threats in order to generate an affirmative hypothesis about the value of Jewish communal existence? The princes can lead, by standing up as Arthur does tonight--but the Mishkan will not be built, unless the tribes commit together...Not everyone here needs to be a prince--but everyone here can, and I say humbly but with passion must accept the tribal responsibility of helping to build this School.

3. Last suggestion as to why the Torah details each of the princely gifts in such detail, with such repetition--it is fitting that it takes more than twice as many pesukim to describe the gifts of inauguration, let alone the hundreds of pesukim it takes to describe the design and construction of the Mishkan, by contrast to the few verses the Torah uses to describe G-d's creation of the entire universe. Because the human, communal act of building is hard work, heavy lifting for princes and tribal members alike. Building this School's community requires enormous dedication and effort. Just like building a peerless educational experience for each unique Jewish child at Rashi--building is individual effort, hard work, over time, through time and despite whatever obstacles we find in our path. One brick at a time, we can and must build this School. One child, one class, one teacher, one transformative educational experience...at a time, we must build a relationship with every child who hungers to learn.

Do we dare to reformulate the Gemara's play on words: **אֵל תִּקְרִי בְנֵיךָ אֱלֹהֵי בְנֵיךָ** as **בְּנֵיךָ תִּקְרִי בְנֵיךָ כַּנְגֵד בְּנֵיךָ, וּבְנֵיךָ כַּנְגֵד בְּנֵיךָ**? Are we ready to see ourselves as builders accountable to this generation of Jewish children? Are we willing to define "our children" as all the Jewish children in our encampment? Will we own with honest hearts our deep obligation to educate all of our Jewish children? If we dare this, then we must accept the personal responsibility of being builders, in this time and place. In order for our children to build the community we dream of, we owe them--here and now--a Rashi School fully developed and built.

Through the active, hard work of our deeds, may we merit to be called **בְּנֵיךָ**, builders; in due time, may we be blessed to be inherited by our **בְּנֵיךָ**, our children, educated, proud, self aware Jews, repairers of the breaches in our world. **בֵּן יְהִי רֵצוֹן**