

**Rosh Hashanah Family Service – 5770**  
**Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills**  
**Rabbi Jonathan Aaron**

### **Who's More Important in the Community?**

When I was a kid, I loved sports. I still do, but I used to spend all of my recreational time playing any sport that was in season, and sometimes not in season. I still remember playing basketball with my brother in the driveway in the middle of January, snow on the ground, 25 degrees, and we've got our winter gloves on playing "around the world." I was also on teams in school as well. Let's see a show of hands: any of you play on a sport's team now or in the past?

I also remember playing French horn in orchestra and band growing up. Anyone here ever in a band or orchestra?

I participated in Theater, too. Anyone here do any plays, or was ever in a play?

How about being in a choir, anyone here ever do that? Dance show?

How about a tug of war contest. Anyone ever do that?

How about an apache relay? Anyone do that? An apache relay is when you have like 25 people on a team and it's a really long relay race where each participant has to do things like: walk with an egg, do a crab walk, walk a hundred yards with an orange under their neck. Anyone do this?...or is it only me...

All of these things have something in common. They are done with a lot of people. You can't be on a sports team alone (I know, Tennis, swimming, chess, stuff like that is done alone, but there are teams there, too).

Now for me...A lot of the time I was on the second string, or I didn't have the biggest part, or I didn't have any solos. And French Horn – the only time the French Horn is noticed is when they make a big mistake (Beethoven 5<sup>th</sup> – switched on Bach). So let's now see an honest set of hands. Firstly, how many of you were or are the star of the team, have the best role in the play, the biggest solos and so on?

Now, even more honestly...how many of you are like me, on the team but not the star, in the ensemble, but not the lead?

That's more like it...actually I'm sure that we all find that sometimes we have the big part, and sometimes the small part. Life is balanced that way.

I want to try a little experiment. Can I have ten volunteers?

Here I have a ball...I want you to pass the ball to the next person in line. (Line them up on opposite sides of the room – by twos. One person brings the ball all

the way across the room to the next person, who hands it to the person right next to them. That person throws it all the way across the room to the next person, who hands it to the person next to them. Some are required to throw it, others to skip it, still others to twirl around and toss it to the other person. This continues until the last person dances with the ball and brings it to me, and I give that person a big hug and hold their hand up like they were victorious.

Questions:

Who was the most important person in this exercise? Why?

What about the people who handed it off?

And the one's who walked it across the room?

This isn't so different than in real life. Sometimes you are the one who just passes the ball next to you. It's a smaller, seemingly insignificant role. Other times, you've got more involvement like the people who ran it across to the next person, or the ones who had to throw the ball (have to have skill for that one).

Tell me who you think was the least important to this exercise? (take that person out). How am I going to get the ball right now? If that person is not there to take it and pass it, it never gets to me at all – it just stops.

Each and every person is important, significant actually.

Consider this passage from the Torah – when the tabernacle was finished, this is the line.

“And it came to pass that the tabernacle was one.” (Exodus 36:13)

Here's one Hasidic commentary by R. Mordecai Yosef of Izbica on this section of text:

*In the building of the tabernacle, all Israel were joined in their hearts; no one felt superior to any one. At first, skilled individuals did their own part of the construction, and it seemed to each one that their own work was superior. Afterwards, they saw how their several contributions to the service of the Tabernacle were integrated – all the boards, the sockets, the curtains and the loops fit together as if one person had done it all. Then they realized that each one of them had depended on the other. Then they understood that what they had accomplished was not by virtue of their own skill alone but that the Holy One had guided the hands of everyone who had worked on the tabernacle...so that “it came to pass that the tabernacle was one.”*

That's this community. Whether you are the president of the congregation, on the board, or only come to synagogue once a year – everyone is equally important. Elias Canetti, in his famous book, “Crowds and Power,” said that people feel

better in crowds because everyone is equal. That's this community. We are the crowd (although there certainly is a lot of decorum), and there is no difference. I know, how can I say that, I'm standing here in a white robe, with the microphone and all that. (But really, everyone is welcome to put on a white robe. Who would want to?) But my prayers aren't any more powerful than yours, my reflection about my life no more profound than yours, all of us are human beings, period.

And yet, it takes each one of us to put in the effort towards the unity of this community. It takes effort to come here today. It takes effort to come to Shabbat services. It takes effort to refurbish the buildings, it takes effort to send your children to the Early Childhood Center, the Religious School and the Day School. It takes effort to be in a community. It takes effort like the Time Bank, where all of us can volunteer our time for another congregant, and in turn – take time from someone for our needs. Last night I talked about virtual internet communities. If you never turned the computer on, you'd never find that community. Same thing here – you don't open those doors, there is no community.

So what does it take. It takes you, and me, and you, and you, and you, and you. It takes all of you individually and collectively to create something beautiful here. It takes each individual to make this his/her place that makes this place for everyone. Very close up, we all have our individual deeds to be a part of Emanuel. But pull back a little, and you see the crowd – you see individuals as a part of the collective, and they are all equal, all members, all a part of it, and each and every person matters, there is we, there is us, and it is Emanuel.