

May 14, May 21, May 28, 2010
Shabbat Shalom!

May 14, 2010:

The nomination of Elena Kagan to the Supreme Court brings with it the story of a young girl who was a trailblazer at her congregation, Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York City.

This tale was recounted in The New York Jewish Week: “I remember she was very definite,” recalled Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, the congregation’s spiritual leader. “She came to me and very much wanted it; she was very strong about it. She wanted to recite a Haftorah like the boys, and she wanted her bat mitzvah on a Saturday morning.” Never having officiated at a bat mitzvah before, Rabbi Riskin said he had to “figure out what to do for a bat mitzvah. ... I was playing it by ear.” He said he “could not give her everything” she wanted. For instance, Rabbi Riskin said she could have her bat mitzvah on a Friday night, not a Saturday morning. And instead of reciting a Haftorah, she chanted, in Hebrew, selections from the Book of Ruth. “I was very proud of her,” he said. “She did very well. After that, we did bat mitzvahs all the time. ... She was part of my education. This was for us a watershed moment.”

Elena Kagan’s Bat Mitzvah experience reflects a modern interpretation on this week’s and last week’s Torah readings which would teach these principles:

- 1. There is an equality among all people that must be maintained (Leviticus 25 and following: a quick end to slavery; forgiving debts; noting that the earth belongs to God and we are caretakers, so that, in the Jubilee Year every 50 years, land could revert to previous owners, at least in theory.*
- 2. Every person who positively takes his or her place in the community counts! (While it was only the men who were counted at the beginning of the book of Numbers, it is significant that Elena Kagan’s rabbi, Shlomo Riskin, was prepared to learn that SHE should be counted in the same way!).*

In any congregation and community, every person has a role and the possibility of making a difference and a positive contribution. May we continue to find new ways to lead each other and to make every person – and every act – count!

-- L’shalom, Rabbi Larry

May 21, 2010:

One of the greatest privileges I have as a rabbi is to offer the priestly blessing - “May God bless you and keep you” - at a special event in the community. This excerpt from this week’s Torah portion remains as a marker of special memories and milestones. Some of

you may have received this blessing at Consecration, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Confirmation, a Wedding or a Conversion ceremony. And, you may not even remember being blessed with these words at a birth ceremony! In the last month, I have blessed a member at a conversion and pronounced these ancient phrases at two weddings. I will recite the priestly blessing at a b'rit milah later today (May 21) and at B'nei Mitzvah services on four of the next five weeks. I interpreted these words in my prayer that began a recent congregational meeting (see below). This past Wednesday, during our Religious School Shavuot service, we celebrated the Consecration of nine of our first and second graders. Go to the Temple facebook page by clicking on the link on the home page (you do not have to be a member of facebook to go to the Temple page) and click on the "photos" tab to see photographs from our May 19 service, including Consecration. There is one of me on my knees in front of the consecrants, who are standing under my tallit which was held by our Madrichim (Religious School aides). Rather than bending over the children, I decided to get on my knees to be at their level and look into their eyes. The words YAEIR ADONAI PANA V'EILECHA VIY'CHUNKA – "May the light of the Eternal One's face shine upon you and be gracious to you" – implied for me the necessity that the children should see faces shining upon them with pride and blessing, and not only that of their rabbi, but also their parents and the Temple community.

That vision of a special moment in the present holds a special promise for the future. May the spirit and vitality of our students, teachers, peers and fellow members lead us to greater closeness and accomplishment as we continue to work together to build our Temple community.

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry

May 28, 2010: (Commentary on Numbers 11:24-29):

Two young men spoke as if a special spirit had touched them in the same way that their leader Moses hoped that a godly wisdom would rest upon the "elders" enabling them to take on responsibilities tasks and authority while Moses would watch them lead with trust and pride. 70 of those "leaders" joined with Moses at their center of community the Tent of Meeting waiting for the confidence that would inspire them to great heights. But the two young men Eldad and Medad Were not elders at the Tent. They were among the people And still, a spirit had come upon them A still small voice that had come alive In a public way. Moses' deputy...intern....assistant A leader-in-training, Joshua, cried out, "Moses, restrain them!" But Moses knew That it would not take only the elders To lead with wisdom but, also, individuals among the people Who would reflect a divine and godly spirit by exhibiting in their behavior trust respect creativity ingenuity kindness a soft voice matched with a clarity and unity of purpose that they hoped to share with the whole community. It was not rebellion That these two men "prophesying in the camp" represented but, rather, hope and partnership, not meaning in any way to undermine but, merely, to complement their leaders' efforts leaving their egos behind and joining their souls with the collective communal spirit. So Moses welcomed their sudden inspiration That, he knew, was not unauthorized. He realized that it had to have originated with an

eternal Source. So he said, "Would that all of the people of the Eternal were prophets, and that the Eternal would put a godly spirit upon them!" May we Find and reflect a positive and productive spirit In our efforts and our work as a community That demonstrates the best we have to offer As we move forward As partners and companions Towards a common goal.

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry