

A hospital custodian was interviewed about his work. What do you do? he was asked. Rather than talking about mopping the floors or emptying the trash, or even keeping the hospital germ free, he talked about what he did for the patients and their families.

This interview was part of a study by a professor at the Yale School of Management. She found that the custodians, rather than seeing their work as unskilled labor, understood it in the context of their relationships. They reported going out of their way to learn as much as possible about the patients whose rooms they cleaned, down to which cleaning chemicals were likely to irritate them less. They bonded with the patients and at times continued a relationship with them after they were discharged. One paid special attention noticing which patients seemed to have few visitors or none at all, and then doubling back to spend some time with them.

While their job description listed items like "collect and dispose of soiled linen" and "stock restroom supplies," these custodians told stories about times they cheered patients up when they were feeling sad, when they encouraged them or diverted their attention from their pain and fear, and gave them a willing ear if they felt like talking.

Two janitors, insisting on anonymity, described their experiences as defying protocol to do their job better. One told researchers he stopped mopping hallways when he saw a patient who was recovering from a major surgery up and walking slowly down the hall for exercise. Another told them how he ignored his supervisor's instructions to vacuum the visitors' lounge because a patient's family members, who had been at the hospital for days, were napping.

What the custodians did was congruent with the goals of the hospital, to promote health, cure illness and relieve suffering, even if the organization didn't think about it that way. While those looking at the custodians saw only the means of their work, the custodians themselves kept their eyes on its ends.

Through most of the desert wanderings, Moses was able to keep before himself the vision of the people entering the Promised Land. That is what enabled him to lead the people for such an extended time and through so many trials. How do we know that this was the key? Because when he didn't hold onto the vision, it was disastrous.

When Moses' focus on the ends faded- as when he saw the people dancing in front of the Golden Calf, Moses lost his strength and was no longer able to carry the tablets.

This happened also when the people threatened him and Aaron immediately after Miriam's death. At that time, Moses struck out both with words against the people, Hamorim atem, you are rebels, or perhaps you are donkeys, and also with his staff, striking at the rock. We are well aware of the negative consequences of this episode.

Unlike Moses, the people are not as able as Moses to hold onto to their vision of the goals of their travels. Instead of the Promised Land ahead, they see only the sand and the brush. Without that vision, the people are constantly complaining, rebelling and causing trouble. Imagine if you were a hospital custodian who wasn't able to see the higher meaning of your work. I can't imagine you would be cheerful as Monday morning rolled around.

Finally though, in this week's Torah portion, with the distribution of land to each family, the people share more fully in Moses' vision and cease rebelling.

The distribution of the land is for them concrete evidence that this will really happen. At the conclusion of chapter 26, after a long detailed recording of the census, we are told that the land would be apportioned by lot, with consideration to the size of the tribe or family. The reality of the situation then calls forth the

concerns of the daughters of Zelophechad, who want to make sure that their father's descendants are not overlooked.

The remaining chapters of the book of Numbers, reflect this new reality. There is no more rebelling or objecting, instead the people are focused on inhabiting the land. From here on in when they make trouble for Moses, it is not in objection to the entire enterprise, as when they asked to go back to Egypt, or refused to accept the spies good report, but only about where their own particular portion will be.

Many of the things we do require hard work, which is sometimes tedious.

Whether that is learning to play an instrument or a sport, or even preparing for your Bar Mitzvah, there is some drill and repetition that is required. Those hours necessary to becoming proficient are much more meaningful, if you are able to keep the ends in mind. Am I practicing a half an hour because some adult made me, or so that I can participate in a ritual that has been part of my people for many generations?

Adults face similar issues. Two people can hold the same job but for one it is tedium and for the other it is a ministry of love. It all depends on what you think you are doing.