

## The Power of Community



**BRACHA WEINIGER**

Youth Director  
@ St John's Wood  
Synagogue

In the parasha of Vayakhel, the Jewish people give generous donations to make the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), a place for God within the camp.

The root of the word *vayakhel* is 7-ה-ק and is used here and in last week's parasha for two very different stories. The first is at the beginning of the episode of the Golden Calf, where the Torah explains that the people gathered (*vayikahel*) around Aharon and asked to make something to replace Moshe who had not yet come down from Mount Sinai. The second is in the opening verse of this week's parasha: "Moshe assembled (*vayakhel*) all the community of Israel

and said to them: these are the things that God has commanded you to do".

While the verbs sound similar there is a key difference between them. The first gathering was leaderless but the second had a leader, Moshe. The first was a crowd, the second a community.

In a crowd, individuals lose their individuality. Group thinking takes over, and people find themselves doing what they would never consider doing on their own – a phenomenon called 'herd mentality'. Together, they act in a frenzy, lacking the inhibitions that form our inner controls as individuals.







The *vayakhel* of this week's parasha was quite different. Moshe created a community by getting the people to make contributions to a collective project, the *Mishkan*. In a community, individuals remain

individuals. Their differences are valued because they mean that each has something unique to contribute – bringing different offerings to help build the *Mishkan* in this case.

What united them was not the dynamic of the crowd, but rather a sense of common purpose, of helping to bring something into being that is greater than anyone could achieve alone. Communities build; they do not destroy. They bring out the best in us. They speak to our higher aspirations, like this common goal of building a symbolic home for God among the people.

The Torah teaches us that by coming together and contributing to a common goal, we can become part of something where we are valued as an individual in a bigger whole, a community.

## Parasha Number Crunch

1. There are  main creative activities that are forbidden on Shabbat.
2. The Menorah in the *Mishkan* had  lights.
3. The book of Shemot contains  *parashiyot*.
4. The portion of *HaChodesh*, which speaks about the Exodus, is the last of the  special *parashiyot* which are read before Purim and Pesach.
5. The priests had  special garments to wear in the *Mishkan*.
6. We exclaim "*Chazak chazak venitchazek!*" at the conclusion of each of the  books of the Torah.

**Bonus:** The total amount of silver that the Jewish people donated to the *Mishkan* was  talents (the heaviest Biblical measurement) and  shekels.

