

Dear Chavraya,

On the frontispiece of our holy books, our *sifrei kodesh*, two letters often appear before the name of the town from which the author comes. Similarly, the same two letters have often been fixed above the gates of synagogues throughout the far-flung Jewish world. These two Hebrew letters, appearing as an abbreviation before the name of a Jewish community, are *kuf kuf*, standing for *Kehilla Kedosha*, the Holy Community of.... These letters do not endow a community with holiness, but serve to challenge its members to create a community worthy of being called holy.

This week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayakhel*, is the quintessential portion about community. Built on the root *kahal*, meaning community, as does *kehilla*, *vayakhel* means, and *he* (Moses) *gathered/ vayakhel Moshe*.... A community is an assembly of people gathered together in common purpose. The process of building the desert sanctuary, the *Mishkan*, as it unfolds in *Vayakhel* is about much more than a physical building project. The nature of that physical process offers beautiful teaching about the nature of the deeper, never-ending process of building the community that in body and spirit will fill the building.

As the *parasha* opens, there is a flood of excitement, the people bringing of their own possessions, gold and silver and fine fabrics, bringing out of their own heart-felt desire to participate. The people brought in abundance, like no building campaign ever seen before or since, The men came, along with the women, all moved by their hearts...; *Every man and every woman whose heart had moved them to contribute..., brought...a gift, of their own free will*. Words are then uttered by the project coordinators that can only stun anyone ever involved in fund-raising, *The people are bringing too much, more than enough for the service required for the work that God has commanded to do*.

What inspired such whole-hearted participation that we can draw on? Each person had a task, and thereby a stake in the project. Each person was equally valued for her or his contribution, and thus given reason to feel equal pride in the completed project. The joy and honor of holy service was not vested only in the professionals. The chief artisans were Betzalel and Oholiav, each blessed with skill of hand. Their greatest gift and blessing to the community, however, was not their own creative genius, but the ability to share their knowledge and skills with others. God put into Betzalel's heart *the ability to teach; both he and Oholiav*. Thus would they be able to inspire and empower each and every member to share in leadership and to discover his or her own gifts and potential, which would in turn bring new blessings upon the community. The human dynamics set in motion by the nature of the physical building project would remain in motion as a galvanizing force long after the building itself had been completed.

Through the loving and joyful contribution of each person, the Torah tells us that eventually *the Dwelling Place became one whole/ va'y'hi ha'mishkan echad*, as the people brought to fruition the sacred goal, *to join the tent together so that it should become one/l'chaber et ha'ohel lihiyot echad*. Reflecting on the unified result of so many hands and hearts working together, the Izbitzer Rebbe, Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leyner, the *Mey Shiloach*, explains that because each one was involved

there was no room for arrogance or a feeling of superiority of one over another. As the people saw the sanctuary emerge and become one, as seamless as if created by one person, they each realized how their own work depended for completion upon the work of another. In that way writes the Izbitzer, *Not even the one who made the Holy Ark could boast to the one who made only the courtyard tent pegs.*

As we strive to be and become one, so may we merit the letters *kuf kuf* before our collective name, *Nehar Shalom*, ever becoming a *Kehilla Kedosha*, a Holy Community.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor