

A Community Effort to Build a Sanctuary

A D'var Torah on *Parashat Vayak'heil* (Ex. 35:1 – 38:20)

By Irv and Monica Engel

“Vayak'heil Moshe et-kol-adat b'ney Yisrael....”
“Moses assembled the entire Israelite community....”

Moses gathers all of the people and instructs them to create a Sabbath of rest on the seventh day of the week. Compliance is not optional. Any work is punishable by death.

Moses further tells them that God wants them to gather up all the best they have to offer: materials to build a tabernacle, the construction of which is described in fine detail.

Although the instructions for building the tabernacle are delivered as a command, the people respond from their hearts and their willingness to do God's work. Both men and women bring their finest jewelry, fabrics, wood and skins — far more than needed for the work.

The craftsmen of Israel are filled by the spirit of God to create inspired works of gold, silver, precious jewels and wood carvings. Their hearts are filled with a new wisdom, and the work progresses rapidly.

Along with the tabernacle, a large and very ornate tent, the ark, is created of acacia wood and gold. All of the ornamentation is described in detail. The altar of offerings is then created, and the courtyard is also beautifully described.

This passage describes how fulfilling God's commands imbues the people with a spirit and a willingness and a gladness to do the required work. God's will and our true will for ourselves are always one and the same.

I saw this in action on a build for Habitat for Humanity with thirty other Jews working under the auspices of the Union for Reform Judaism. God has commanded all of us to "repair the world," but we did the work with a joy and a lifting of our spirits. We fulfilled our higher purpose even as we did God's will.

The message in this passage is simple. Surrendering our individual will and deciding to commit to the will of God free us from the complications that we surround ourselves with. We then become open to the possibilities of using our God-given talents for a higher purpose, which lifts us and gives us the joy and peace that so many are looking for.