

## Shabbat Shalom

When I first read through today's parsha, Vayakhel, I thought to myself, 'uh oh, this is one of *those* parshas.' and I struggled to find the themes that really interested me. In fact it read less like a religious text, and more like a list one of my parents would take to Home Depot – a long list of things in excruciating detail that God tells the Israelites they need to gather, in order to build the tabernacle, and what each person needs to do to make sure that the tabernacle gets built in the most beautiful way possible.

But, once I looked a little closer, I noticed something about this parsha. There was one word that jumped out at me: "commandment." The Torah says that Moses told the people, "This is what the lord has commanded: take from among you gifts to the lord." Referring to bringing gifts to God to build the tabernacle. The reason that this word jumped out at me was because of what Moses says next: "everyone WHO'S HEART SO MOVES HIM shall bring them..." What??!! Why is God giving the Israelites an out? I didn't think a commandment was optional! God just said, I command you, and then says, if you want.

Maybe what's happening here is that God is recognizing human free will. God is recognizing that while you can try, its really hard to force people to do things unless their heart is in it. In other words, "commanding" can only go so far. Some people will follow, some won't follow and some people can't follow. Not only does

God want us to follow, he wants us to want to follow. God wants us to respect our fellow humans enough to not murder or steal from them; to love your parents enough to honor them; to respect God enough to want to build the tabernacle. God wants us to realize that we have obligations, but that fulfilling those obligations have benefits.

If you think of commandments in this way, its easier to see that we have multiple levels of obligations. To ourselves, to our family, to our community. What are my obligations? I'm obliged to go to school, I'm obliged to brush my teeth. But if I don't want to learn, I won't benefit from receiving an education. If I don't want to brush my teeth, I won't and I'll get a cavity. I also have obligations to my family – to be nice to my siblings, to clear my dishes after dinner. Like God wanted the Israelites to want to build the tabernacle, my parents want me to be nice to my siblings and do my dishes. And if I fulfill those obligations, I get the benefits of being in a family – love, belonging, vacations.

Then there are also obligations to the community – follow traffic laws, don't litter, shovel your walk. This got me thinking – what is a community? Maybe it's a group that can agree to and fulfill its own obligations. To work together – according to their ability and means, to achieve things for the group. Suddenly, Vayakhel seemed like a great example of community as well. God commanded, "if their heart moves them" they should bring gold, crimson yarn, lapis lazuli etc. and make the tabernacle, its tent, its bars etc. Not everyone had lapis lazuli or could make the tent. If everyone didn't chip in or lend a hand, there would never have been a

tabernacle. And the community would miss out. The community made the tabernacle because their heart moved them. The Israelites needed the tabernacle and they could only do it as a community. As I look around the room today, I see my community. I see the BK community, the MKA community, my grandparents, my parents and siblings and close family friends from 8 different states and 2 different countries. This is my community. Last year, when working on the 6<sup>th</sup> grade Hebrew school project, I turned to my community to help, gather and donate baseball equipment to charity. I got help from people as close as down the street, to as far away as Washington DC and even San Francisco, and everywhere in between. With all of these people giving as much as their heart moved them, or offering me advice according to their skills, we were able to gather a lot of equipment to help kids in underprivileged places learn about and play baseball. I couldn't have done this without being part of a community.

Communities come in many shapes and sizes. They can be local – our Cooper Avenue community working together to keep the sidewalks clear of snow last winter – and they can be global – helping to preserve our planet. In this case, we are all obligated not to litter, to conserve water, to reduce emissions, to recycle. But, some people's heart aren't in it and they don't fulfill these obligations, maybe because of the extra second it takes to reach the recycling container, or the sacrifice of a shorter shower. We can pass all the laws we want, but if people don't have their

hearts in it, then their local communities and the whole earth will be impacted. We know this is happening today with climate change. But if we all agree to work together, we can make a difference, but our hearts must be in it.

Despite where I started, what I ended us taking away from Vayakhel is the simple truth that commandments, or laws or rules, are useless unless each person chooses to follow them, and that, by choosing to follow many of these commandments – even agreeing on which commandments we are not going to follow – we create a community. And as a community, we can achieve much more than we ever can as individuals.

So I'll end my dvar today - as is BK custom to do so- with a question.

What do you feel commanded to do in your life? And is it optional?