

THE NOTION OF COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

A commentary on *Parashat Pekudei*
By Sammy Lee

Parashat Pekudei is the last in a series of five parashot describing the building of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) and spends a lot of time acting as a manual for how the Jews should go about building the Tabernacle. Fundamentally, we can understand the Tabernacle to be a paradigm for all of the world. The 'manual' which lays out how to build the Tabernacle, can be specifically adapted as a 'manual' for how to build a strong Jewish community.

The *Parasha* goes into explicit detail of how the *Mishkan* should be built. The very fact that the Torah gives such detailed instructions on the materials, design and construction of the communal structure, affirms that every minute detail played a vital role in contributing to its construction. The Tabernacle was

built by everyone. The Torah mentions the men and the women, with special emphasis on the skill and artistry of the women; the Sages add that the children also took part. Even if one was physically unable to do the work required to build the *Mishkan*, every person played a crucial part in its construction, whether it be through donating materials, or providing the necessary support for its construction. It was very much a communal effort and without all the other hundreds of thousands of people also taking part, the Sanctuary could not have been completed. The *Parasha*, too, even while recognising the leadership of the *Mishkan's* chief architect, Bezalel, emphatically attributes the project to the entire community: *'The Israelites did so[...]just as G-d had commanded Moses, so they did.'*

The Tabernacle was a place where Jews could come together to pray as a *'Klal'* (a cohesive group), and

not just as *'Pratim'* (a conglomeration of individuals). Judaism understands that the presence of others enhances prayer and the spiritual experience; it was for this reason that the Tabernacle was constructed.

This concept of community, modelled by the Tabernacle, defines the core of what Jewish communities to the Diaspora should look like today. The notion of collective responsibility applies not only in the building of the Tabernacle thousands of years ago, but in all our collective endeavours today as the Jewish people, as we work to build a holy global community centered around an ethical core.

We may not be able to do the intense physical labour required to build community centres in developing countries, but we are able to contribute funds/support to those who can, just as some were unable to offer their physical labour to build the *Mishkan*, so instead donated materials/provided support. We also may not be able to provide medical/psychological care to refugees, but as a community we can commit to keeping such crises at the forefront of our thoughts and actions. If we can come together as a *'Klal'*, as the Jews did in the *Mishkan*, we will have more voices to speak for those who cannot, and can create a more powerful impact than a single individual could do alone. We must all feel responsible for each other and the only way this is possible is if we all feel part of a unified community.

The Tabernacle was not only the spiritual and civil centre of the people, but also the physical centre of the community for the Israelites. However, today there is no Tabernacle (I wouldn't even know where to find acacia wood and tanned ram skin!). So where is our spiritual centre today? Some would argue that it is their Synagogue; but for many others this is not the case. The truth is, every Jew has their own Tabernacle, their own haven where they feel most connected to their Judaism and the Jewish people. The beauty of the modern world is that we have many different Judaisms, and thus many different physical and spiritual centres for Jews all around the world. Whether it be a Synagogue, a Youth Movement, a School, a Charity etc.; community is always at the forefront of Judaism.