



# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

20 - 21 March, 2009

25 Adar 5769

Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudel  
(Exodus 35:1–40:38)

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## From the Rabbi's desk

If one makes the effort to read the weekly Torah portion on or prior to each Shabbat, there is something magical that happens. The reader becomes a bridge between the Torah text and the life the Torah seeks to shape. Text and life become commentaries on one another. We bring our freshest experiences of life, the ups and downs of a particular week, to the text and this informs and enriches our understanding. At the same time, the parasha always seems to address what is happening to us or preoccupying us in any given week. Whether this is objectively the case or whether we see these correspondences between the parasha and life because we are hard-wired to find patterns of meaning really does not matter. What matters is that we experience this interplay between the written and the lived.

I have been experiencing this two way mirroring over the last few weeks as the UJC Gala Committee entered the countdown to the big event. During these final weeks of planning and preparation, the parshiot we read related the instructions and specifications for the construction of the Mishkan, the Israelites' portable sanctuary. No detail is left out. We know the materials and measurements. We even know the names of the chairs of the "Mishkan Committee"—Betzael and Oholiav. This kind of attention to tachlis is something our Gala Committee would understand very well.

Then on Saturday night, when the Gala Committee's hard work came to fruition in an incredible event, the week of parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei began. It is in this double parasha that the Mishkan is finally built. The timing was perfect.

In the parasha, as the Mishkan is about to be assembled, Moses relays God's call for volunteers:

*"And let all among you who are skilled come and make what the Lord has commanded."*

And so they came: weavers, carpenters, metalworkers, incense makers, and lapidaries—all manner of craftsmen. They poured themselves into the work, using their God-given abilities to make something beautiful and holy.

But it was not enough to have talented people willing and able to do the work. The carvers needed something to carve. The guilders needed gold; the weavers needed fine wool. And so the Torah tells us:

*"Moses said further to the whole community of Israelites: This is what the LORD has commanded: Take from among you gifts to the LORD; everyone whose heart so moves him shall bring them—gifts for the LORD: gold, silver, and copper; blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, and goats' hair; tanned ram skins, dolphin skins, and acacia wood; oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense; lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and the breastpiece."*

Each element of the Mishkan narrative had its analog Saturday night. We had our inspired artisans who crafted a thoroughly enjoyable and successful evening. We were also blessed by the participation of many people whose hearts moved them to great generosity in a difficult time. Like the Mishkan, the Gala was a project that would have failed had our mishpacha not been willing to give one or more of the three "Ts"—Talent, Treasure, and Time.

Obviously, a gala is not the same kind of undertaking as building a dwelling place for the Divine Presence. Still, we should not underestimate the significance of this event or of our other efforts to secure the UJC's future. In our world, in our time, this is how we build our Mishkan. Like the generation of the Exodus, we are responsible for building this Sanctuary ourselves. Saturday night should reassure us that we can muster the vision and resources we need to fulfill the commandment:

*"Let them build Me a Sanctuary that I might dwell among them."*

All Blessings  
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19<sup>th</sup> March, 2009