

Va-yakheil 5780

Exodus 36:1-8

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“Let, then, Bezalel and Oholiab and all the skilled persons whom the Eternal One has endowed with skill and ability to perform expertly all the tasks connected with the service of the sanctuary carry out all that the Eternal One has commanded.”

Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab, and every skilled person whom the Eternal One had endowed with skill, everyone who excelled in ability, to undertake the task and carry it out. They took over from Moses all the gifts that the Israelites had brought, to carry out the tasks connected with the service of the sanctuary.

But when these continued to bring freewill offerings to him morning after morning, all the artisans who were engaged in the tasks of the sanctuary came, each from the task upon which he was engaged, and said to Moses, “The people are bringing more than is needed for the tasks entailed in the work that the Eternal One has commanded to be done.”

Moses thereupon had this proclamation made throughout the camp: “Let no man or woman make further effort toward gifts for the sanctuary!” So, the people stopped bringing [contributions]: their efforts had been more than enough for all the tasks to be done.

Then all the skilled among those engaged in the work made the Tabernacle...”

We are living in, for my generation and younger for sure, unprecedented times. We have never experienced quarantine or rationing. Perhaps that is why a general response has been panic, exemplified by horrible scenes of scuffles and elderly and vulnerable people struggling to buy simple products.

There is understandable concern and stress for so many regarding their physical health, especially among those who euphemistically have ‘underlying health conditions;’ not to mention those who will inevitably be directly affected by Coronavirus / Covid-19.

The mental and psychological stress and anxiety is perhaps even more acute and widespread. New phrases have entered our language such as ‘self-isolation,’ and only the most cavalier could say they had not had a moment of concern. There are many of us who are in any case anxious; those who will not be taking GCSEs or A Levels or potentially final exams at university or professional qualifications; and those whose livelihoods are on the line.

Perhaps understandably concerned and yet best-equipped are those of our most mature members: and we have many. Whilst not necessarily able to be out and about as they may wish it is their spirit that can be inspiring to us all, and the ability to accept support – a skill as high as that of one of Bezalel’s artisans.

We all have skills to contribute to this situation, and can bring them generously to others, until our leaders can call out 'maspik,' 'dayeinu,' 'enough,' a new season has arisen and we can walk out into it with our heads held high, in the knowledge that we have all made our contribution to the community: our community of Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue and of all your communities, relevant to the many joining us from around the UK and world this Kabbalat Shabbat.

And of course, when we have enough then to think beyond us. In our local community we have appeals from New Hope and the Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership for support and you will have forged your own partnerships with social action/justice organisations. We can all give at this time. Whether it is currently under-utilised skills, our efforts, our time and our money.

Towards the conclusion of this sidrah, indeed the book of Exodus, we read:
"When Moses had finished the work, the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of the Eternal one filled the Tabernacle."

There will still be times to come, the human contact and community we are allowed is insufficient to fill us and our homes, each one a small Tabernacle. May we then look up: Seek a Presence we have not known or felt before. May we find that Presence and be open to being filled by the Presence of the Eternal: skill, ability, wisdom and a little bit of nous, to know what is right to do at this time when we are all somewhat fumbling.

Let us in times of need, 'look up to the hills.' "*Esa einei el he'harim*. I lift my eyes to the hills, where will my help come from. My help will come from God, Maker of heaven and earth...Psalm 121."

May the Ever-present God, guard our coming in and going out, now and always.