

## **D'var Torah: Parashat Vayakhel**

by Benjamin Gee - Wednesday, February 27, 2019

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**This week the Chief Rabbi explains to us how Shabbat has been the tool that has unified the Jewish people, even beyond our physical borders.**

Why is Shabbat so important for every Jewish community?

Parashat Vayakhel commences with an extraordinary statement 'Vayakhel Moshe et kol adat b'nei Yisrael' – 'Moshe congregated the entire assembly of the children of Israel'. Now we have in the Torah two different terms which are used for a group of people; 'kehilla' which is a congregation, and 'eidah' which is an assembly, and here both terms are used in the same verse. We are told 'Vayakhel Moshe et kol adat' – 'Moshe congregated the whole assembly'. But why did he congregate the assembly and not assemble the congregation? What is the difference between these two terms?

You see, 'Eidah' is a group of people who happen to be together in one place, at one time, for one purpose. It comes from the root 'eid' – a witness – indicating that they're there for a particular purpose; that they might never have come together before and they might not ever come together again.

'Kehilla' is something very different. It's a group of like-minded individuals who bond together out of a deep sense of commitment. They enjoy each other's company and they have a shared vision for life. When the Israelites left Egypt – we were an eidah, a loosely connected entity of families who happened to have been enslaved together. But once the Torah was given to us, the greatness of Moshe was 'Vayakhel Moshe et kol adat' – he congregated the assembly! Out of an eidah he created that wonderful Kehilla. Thanks to Torah and Mitzvot, we could exist as a bonded and connected nation.

Then, in the very next verse, the Torah yet again gives us the mitzvah of Shabbat! 'Sheishet yamim ta'aseh melacha' – 'On six days you shall perform creative activity and on the seventh you shall rest'. Why is this mitzvah mentioned again? This is because the Torah wants us to know that Shabbat is crucial to the life and success of the Kehilla. It is primarily through Shabbat that we can bond together and appreciate the shared vision we have for life.

Remarkably the power of Shabbat goes beyond the physical kehilla of a particular area. The Torah wants us to know that there is a global congregation. If I am alone in some remote area on Shabbat, and I am keeping Shabbat, I know that I am in touch, I feel a connection with my entire people and it's not only with those people around the world keeping Shabbat at that moment, it's all those in previous times and in future times who are engaging with Shabbat. This is why Shabbat is so crucial and so central to every Jewish community and also to every Jewish soul.

This coming Shabbat, parashat Vayekhel, will be ShabbatUK. Throughout the country, tens of thousands of people will be keeping Shabbat, engaging with Shabbat, enjoying Shabbat and discovering how the power of Shabbat gives us meaning and Simcha in life. Wherever we might be, we are privileged to be

part of the global Jewish Kehilla.

I wish you all ShabbatUK Shalom.

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