

# Weekly Words of Torah

## From Words to Action: Parshat VaYakhel

### Framing

In this Torah portion, Moshe gathers the Children of Israel and iterates God's instruction to them: Rest on the sabbath, do not kindle flame on the holy day, and bring forth all that is needed to construct the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Unlike Parshat Terumah, however, which details the specifications of the holy vessels, VaYakhel records their construction: implementing the Divine plan through tangible action.

### Access Points

- **What Kind of Gathering Is "VaYakhel"?** This parsha begins with Moses assembling the Children of Israel, stating that he will now introduce what God commands. Rashi points out that the grammatical form of ויקהל is causative, because "one does not assemble people" with hands: i.e., by force. Rather, they bring people together through their speech. We cannot force others to demonstrate solidarity and empathy with the plight of our hostages. Rather, we must usher people in with our words—invite people to share in the struggle to immediately return our family members, friends, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters home.
- **Public Donation Is Willing Donation:** *"Take from yourselves an offering for the Lord; every generous-hearted person shall bring it"* (Exodus 35:5). The Mishkan's very material existence was brought about by the willing – those who could offer from themselves to further the collective mission. So too, it takes our widespread will to mobilize and effect change in our societies and halls of power.
- **Leadership - Bezalel and Oholiab:** *"And He put into [Bezalel's] heart [the ability] to teach, both him and Oholiab...He imbued them with wisdom of the heart.....every-wise hearted man into whom God had imbued wisdom and insight to know how to do, shall do all the work of the service of the Holy, according to all that the Lord has commanded"* (Exodus 35:34 - 36:1). An effective leader is not only great in knowledge, but offers an expansive emotional capacity: the ability to guide others with discernment, judgment, and a profound, sincere empathy. Any community, people, and movement needs collective buy-in. Yet, no amount of popular support will ever substitute for the essential duty of brave leadership. We must demand that our political and societal leaders fulfill the responsibilities that their solemn duties confer and that this grave moment demands.

### Call to Action

Do not compel or guilt, but invite others to join in this movement's actions of their own volition. Explain to them why the struggle to return our family is theirs too. Our success will require a combination of our popular determination and brave leadership to see these loved ones home. Act for the former and demand the latter. Let it be known to our leaders that their abandonment is not an option.

### Closing Intention

Five months on from the horrors of October 7, a creeping sense of normalcy becomes ever more appealing. Approaching 150 days in captivity for 100+ loved ones reminds us that we cannot accept any complacency. Any successful movement is like a symphony. Like the craftsmen under Bezalel's Oholiab tutelage—we, the people, have our role to play, and our leaders must rise to theirs.