# Wisdom of the Heart--Thoughts on Parashiyot Vayakhel-Pekudei, March 21, 2009

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In describing the qualities of the men and women who aided in the construction of the Mishkan, the Torah repeatedly refers to them as "hakhmat lev", wise of heart. This may mean that they were particularly skillful, or creative, or excellent at following instructions. But the phrase implies a special quality that combines wisdom and emotion. These artists were technically proficient, but they also brought a genuine enthusiasm to their work. This combination of skill and piety led to the creation of the sacred space of the Mishkan.

Being "wise of heart" entails the ability to perform routine tasks with a spirit of freshness and excitement. It means infusing action with meaning, with spiritual content. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik once wrote that we need to maintain a child-like enthusiasm for life, in order to live properly. Otherwise, we fall into a rut and become tired and stale. He taught: "The great man, whose intellect has been raised to a superior level through the study of Torah, gifted with well-developed, overflowing powers--depth, scope, sharpness--should not be viewed as totally adult. The soul of a child still nestles within him...naive curiosity, natural enthusiasm, eagerness and spiritual restlessness, have not abandoned him. If a man has aged and become completely adult, if the morning of life has passed him by and he stands, in spirit and soul, at his high noon, bleached of the dew of childhood...he cannot approach God."

This Shabbat's Torah reading begins with a passage relating to Shabbat, and then goes on with a description of the building of the Mishkan. It has been pointed out that these two themes--Shabbat and Mishkan--refer to the sanctification of time and space. Through our observance of Shabbat and festivals, through the interlocking of our spiritual lives with the rhythms of nature, we sanctify time. We don't "kill time", or "waste time", or view time as a burden. Rather, each moment is a precious opportunity, each moment is fresh and latent with hope. Through the construction of holy sites, such as the synagogue, we sanctify space. We create an earthly framework for contemplating the eternal God. We build the sanctuary--and God dwells in us. Our religious rituals are technical observances that can open the gates of heaven for us--if we are spiritually attuned and awakened.

If we are to be people who are "hakhmat lev", wise of heart, then we constantly need to renew ourselves, maintain our enthusiasm, bring our emotions into play with our intellects. When we sanctify time and space, we thereby sanctify ourselves.

Angel for Shabbat