

WRJ CENTENNIAL



D'var Torah

Women's Voices Deepen Our Jewish Legacy

The Power of Unnamed Women of Torah
Parashat Vayak'heil – P'kudei (Exodus 35:1 – 40:38)

On behalf of God Moses, “convoked the whole Israelite community,” to come together first to celebrate the Sabbath and then to work together to build the first *mishkan* (Exodus 35:1).

If ever a Torah portion demonstrated the power of women and sisterhood, it is the double portion Parashat Vayak'heil–P'kudei. Moses told the people what God wanted for the tabernacle, and the women led the way in securing the donations to make it happen. They gave their jewelry and the works of their hands. The women instinctively understood that the *mishkan* would become a sacred holy space. Parashat Vayak'heil–P'kudei is beautifully recorded and interpreted in WRJ's *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (pp. 521 – 566). How empowering it is to know that our matriarchs in Torah acted as models for sisterhoods and women's groups from that time until now!

So much was brought that Moses asked the people to cease bringing their gifts. In reality, Jewish giving had only just begun. We, the women, continue to share the gifts of our hearts and the gifts of our hands, to benefit our congregations, including through our leadership. We might wonder if this Torah portion inspired the founders of National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS) in 1913.

Helene Waranch, WRJ Past President, 2001-2005, shared, “Surely it served as inspiration for our tagline “*Stronger Together*” utilized by WRJ since 2005. Women of Reform Judaism expressed what we all have known and done since the building of the Tabernacle in the desert. When women collaborate and cooperate, especially in supporting our congregations, building our communities, creating activities for our members and perpetuating Judaism, WRJ, as well as our individual sisterhoods, are more productive, more inclusive and certainly much stronger. Thus, Women of Reform Judaism — *Stronger Together!*”

What would our own temples be if it were not for the WRJ women who make so much happen, from the behind-the-scenes support to the big ticket headline contributions, to say nothing of hours and hours of volunteer time?

Very simply, we know that we are fulfilling our ancestral role, connecting ourselves to that first tabernacle... to that first *mishkan*. Rather than shying away from roles of leadership within our

local sisterhoods, we step forward and say *hinei*... here I am! Our women have been raising our hands and saying yes for years... and we will continue! To borrow a quote from WRJ's *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*: "Women are able to discern when a cause is worthy of their generosity." (Lisa J. Grushcow, *Post-biblical Interpretations*, p. 561) And that generosity includes their leadership.

Nominating Committees that base their work in Torah will be better able to convey the connection of the mantle of leadership to our people's history to those whom they ask to serve. And as well, sisterhood boards which ground their sacred work in Torah will inspire leaders to step forward.

Parashat Vayak'heil–P'kudei is therefore, both the "tabernacle model" and a leadership model which might have served as the source for the WRJ tagline: *Stronger Together* and the plethora of ways that the combination of those two words provides empowerment of individuals on so many mitzvah levels!

Stronger Together we stand as we work together on behalf of our individual congregations and sisterhoods.

Stronger Together we stand as we work together on behalf of North American Reform Judaism.

Stronger Together we stand as we work together on behalf of progressive Jews around the world.

May we continue to be *Stronger Together* as God's partners in performing mitzvot at home, within our districts and throughout WRJ as we begin our second hundred years. Amen!

This d'var Torah was written by WRJ executive committee member Cynthia Roosth Wolf for adaptation and use by sisterhoods/women's groups during the 2013 WRJ Centennial year. We are grateful to Cynthia and Michael Wolf and Family for generously sponsoring this Centennial project.