Imagine the scene: It’s summertime at Camp Louise. On the stage in front of 500 other kids and their counselors are five girls who had never before picked up a guitar, never had a piano lesson, never thought they could or would be part of a rock band. Those 5 girls are jamming out with instruments and vocals. They are performing a song they learned in just under a week on instruments they didn’t know how to play. And the crowd goes wild!!!!

What I love about this scene, replayed at Jewish camps and schools around the country under the direction of rock musician, worship musical leader and educator Naomi Less, is not that the girls created the best music ever. They did not. It is not that they uncovered musical talent that they would go on to use professionally. I doubt they did. (though who knows?) It is not even that they were so incredibly brave to try something they didn’t know they could. Although they were. No, what I love about this scene is the other 500 girls who danced and sang and cheered for the admittedly mediocre music this incredible new rock band was able to create. That cheering, that coming together in community, was a spiritual revelation.

A 19th Century commentary by Reb Hirsch Leib Berlin (Haamek Davar), writing long before the advent of electric guitars and power amps, inspired me to think about the preceding scene with his commentary on a verse from this week’s Torah portion. In Vayakhel-Pekudei, we read about the building of the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary that would accompany the Israelites through their wilderness wanderings: “And let all among you who are skilled come and make all that Adonai has commanded.” The Hebrew that is translated here as “skilled” is בל םכח, literally “wise-hearted.”

In his commentary, Reb Berlin says:

“All those who are wise in heart” This included not only scholars but all who feared Heaven. If they would come to participate in the making of the Tabernacle, Hashem would assist them even if they had never learned a skilled craft prior to this.

Imagine now the scene in the wilderness. The people are gathered, ready to undertake the building of the sacred space where the holiest moments of the community’s life will be experienced together. Moses lays out the blueprints and says, now who is wise-hearted? Who will craft this sacred space? We might imagine that the ones to step forward would be the ones who spent their lives training in the crafts needed to build the Mishkan – weaving, carving, construction and so on. But Reb Berlin throws a wrench into that assumption. He says that not only were all those scholars (his ideal of a highly trained
person) the ones to build it, but everyone who, as it says in a subsequent verse, “whose heart so moves him” 
כל נוח לזר. Anyone, if they have the heart for it, if they care and want to try to bring their gifts, is welcome. Even more than welcome, just because they stepped up to the challenge they will be imbued with skill they didn’t even know they had.

That’s what I learned from those five brave girls and the 500 who cheered them on. Being brave and trying is what creates a sacred community. And a lot of support from the crowd.

Rabbi Sachs-Kohen