

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

From here to the end of the book of Exodus the Torah describes, in painstaking detail and great length, the construction of the Mishkan, the first collective house of worship of the Jewish people. Precise instructions are given for each item—the tabernacle itself, the frames and drapes, and the various objects it contained—including their dimensions. So for example we read: "Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim woven into them by a skilled worker. All the curtains are to be the same size—twenty-eight cubits long and four cubits wide... Make curtains of goat hair for the tent over the tabernacle—eleven altogether. All eleven curtains are to be the same size—thirty cubits long and four cubits wide... Make upright frames of acacia wood for the tabernacle. Each frame is to be ten cubits long and a cubit and a half wide..." (Ex. 26:1-16)

And so on. But why do we need to know how big the tabernacle was? It did not function in perpetuity. Its primary use was during the wilderness years. Eventually it was replaced by the Temple, an altogether larger and more magnificent structure. What then is the eternal significance of the dimensions of this modest, portable construction?

To put the question more sharply still: is not the very idea of a specific size for the home of the Shekhinah, the Divine presence, liable to mislead? A transcendent G-d cannot be contained in space. Solomon said so: "But will G-d really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built." (1Kings 8:27)

Isaiah said the same in the name of G-d Himself: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?" Isaiah 66:1

So no physical space, however large, is big enough. On the other hand, no space is too small. So says a striking midrash: "When G-d said to Moses, 'Make Me a tabernacle,' Moses said in amazement, 'The glory of the Holy One blessed be He fills heaven and earth, and yet He commands, Make me a tabernacle?'... G-d replied, 'Not as you think do I think. Twenty boards on the north, twenty on the south and

eight in the west are sufficient. Indeed, I will descend and confine My presence even within one square cubit.'" (Shemot Rabbah 34:1)

So what difference could it make whether the tabernacle was large or small? Either way, it was a symbol, a focus, of the Divine presence that is everywhere, wherever human beings open their heart to G-d. Its dimensions should not matter.

I came across an answer in an unexpected and indirect way some years ago. I had gone to Cambridge University to take part in a conversation on religion and science. When the session was over, a member of the audience came over to me, a quiet, unassuming man, and said, "I have written a book I think you might find interesting. I'll send it to you." I did not know at the time who he was.

A week later the book arrived. It was called *Just Six Numbers*, subtitled *The deep forces that shape the universe*. With a shock I discovered that the author was the then Sir Martin, now Lord Rees, Astronomer Royal, later President of the Royal Society, the oldest and most famous scientific body in the world, and Master of Trinity College Cambridge. In 2011 he won the Templeton Prize. I had been talking to Britain's most distinguished scientist.

His book was enthralling. It explained that the universe is shaped by six mathematical constants which, had they varied by a millionth or trillionth degree, would have resulted in no universe or at least no life. Had the force of gravity been slightly different, for example, the universe would either have expanded or imploded in such a way as to preclude the formation of stars or planets. Had nuclear efficiency been slightly lower the cosmos would consist only of hydrogen; no life would have emerged. Had it been slightly higher there would have been rapid stellar evolution and decay leaving no time for life to evolve. The combination of improbabilities was immense.

Torah commentators, especially the late Nechama Leibowitz, have drawn attention to the way the terminology of the construction of the tabernacle is the same as that used to describe G-d's creation of the universe. The tabernacle was, in other words, a microcosmos, a symbolic reminder of the world G-d made. The fact that the Divine presence rested within it was not meant to suggest that G-d is here not there, in this place not that. It was meant to signal, powerfully and palpably, that G-d exists throughout the cosmos. It was a man-made structure to mirror and focus attention on

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the Divinely-created universe. It was in space what Shabbat is in time: a reminder of creation.

The dimensions of the universe are precise, mathematically exact. Had they differed in even the slightest degree the universe, or life, would not exist. Only now are scientists beginning to realise how precise, and even this knowledge will seem rudimentary to future generations. We are on the threshold of a quantum leap in our understanding of the full depth of the words: "How many are your works, Lord; in wisdom You made them all" (Ps. 104:24). The word "wisdom" here-as in the many times it occurs in the account of the making of the tabernacle-means, "precise, exact craftsmanship" (see Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:54).

In one other place in the Torah there is the same emphasis on precise dimensions, namely, Noah's ark: "So make yourself an ark of cypress wood. Make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around" (Gen. 6:14-16). The reason is similar to that in the case of the tabernacle. Noah's ark symbolised the world in its Divinely-constructed order, the order humans had ruined by their violence and corruption. G-d was about to destroy that world, leaving only Noah, the ark and what it contained as symbols of the vestige of order that remained, on the basis of which G-d would fashion a new order.

Precision matters. Order matters. The misplacement of even a few of the 3.1 billion letters in the human genome can lead to devastating genetic conditions. The famous "butterfly effect"-the beating of a butterfly's wing somewhere may cause a tsunami elsewhere, thousands of miles away- tells us that small causes can have large consequences. That is the message the tabernacle was intended to convey.

G-d creates order in the natural universe. We are charged with creating order in the human universe. That means painstaking care in what we say, what we do, and what we must restrain ourselves from doing. There is a precise choreography to the moral and spiritual life as there is a precise architecture to the tabernacle. Being good, specifically being holy, is not a matter of acting as the spirit moves us. It is a matter of aligning ourselves to the Will that made the world. Law,

structure, precision: of these things the cosmos is made and without them it would cease to be. It was to signal that the same applies to human behaviour that the Torah records the precise dimensions of the tabernacle and Noah's ark. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and *torah.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8)

"The word of the Lord came to Solomon, saying, 'This Temple that you build - if you follow My decrees, perform My statutes and observe all My commandments to follow them, then I shall uphold My word with you that I spoke to David your father. I shall dwell among the Children of Israel and I shall not forsake My people Israel'" (1 Kings 6:11, concluding verse of the Haftorah [Prophetic reading] for Terumah).

How secure should we feel about the future of the State of Israel? Certainly, our future is far more secure in Israel than in any diaspora community. If there is anything to be learned from history, it is the precariousness of Jewish life in any "host" country, no matter how long we enjoy relative freedom and prosperity within their borders. Witness Babylon, Spain and Germany - countries where Jews experienced "golden ages," only to find that the gold could turn into the ashes of crematoria under a cruel tyrant who "did not remember Joseph."

I believe - and insist on proclaiming in the Prayer for the State of Israel every Sabbath and Festival - that this is the "beginning of the sprouting of our redemption." There are many facts which would assuredly buttress this pronouncement: our phoenix-like return to Israel after almost 2,000 years of exile, our miraculous victories on the battlefield, the ingathering of the exiles from the four corners of the globe, the phenomenal growth of our agriculture and economy alongside of the amazing development of our scientific and hi-tech industries after only six decades of statehood. Moreover, despite anti-Zionist-Semitic canards, many countries and many Christian leaders stand squarely in our corner, an amazing sea-change after the last 2,000 years of persecution and enmity.

Indeed, I am thrilled every time I read Chief Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevy Herzog's response to a delegation of prominent American rabbis, who came to the New York airport to attempt to dissuade the great Torah luminary from boarding a plane to return to Israel after the outbreak of the War of Independence in 1947 (when it looked as if the State of Israel would die before it was born). He assured them that they need not worry; "Our Bible only mentions two destructions [in the portion of Behukotai in the Book of Leviticus, and in the portion of Ki Tavo in the Book of Deuteronomy]; this

third Commonwealth must lead us to the days of the Messiah and will never be destroyed."

Nevertheless, "the beginning of the sprouting of redemption" is a rather modest declaration. Sprouts do not always develop to fruition, other variables can interfere. And although the classical commentaries would seem to take our verse, "They shall make a sanctuary for Me so that I may dwell among them" as a promise and a guarantee, we dare not forget that the desert sanctuary was only temporary, the two Holy Temples were destroyed and we were forced into exile after the demise of each of the two commonwealths.

Yes, our prophets promised eventual return, repentance and even world redemption, but these are clearly dependent upon our repentance, as Maimonides rules in his *Mishneh Torah* (Kings 11: 12). Take note once again of our Biblical verse: "They shall make a sanctuary for Me so that I may dwell among them." Not so that "I may dwell in it," but rather, "in order that I may dwell in each and every one of them."

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch links our verse to a verse sung by the Israelites in the Song of the Reed Sea; "This is my G-d and I shall become like His house." My being and my body must be vehicles to express His unconditional love, His compassion, His loving-kindness and His truth. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt"l, writes that just as the skins and the walls of the sanctuary housed the presence of the Divine, so must our human skin and our mortal bodies manifest G-d's will in our every word, in our every action. G-d's sanctuary will endure only as long as we - His people - express his message of compassionate righteousness and moral justice; "I shall make you a great nation, and through you must be blessed all the nations of the earth" (Genesis 12: 3).

Hence in the Prophetic reading cited above, King Solomon is clearly told by G-d that the existence of the Temple is dependent upon the Israelites' fealty to His words. The Midrash Rabbah to the Biblical words "And I shall dwell among them" links our verse to the prophecy of Jeremiah "Mend your ways and your deeds and I will cause you to dwell in this palace" (7:3). The prophet of the destruction of the First Temple warns that we dare not listen to the lying words of those who claim that since the Temple is G-d's, so He will never destroy it. They are false prophets! The Jews must become the expression of G-d's compassion for all the weaker vessels and then, only then will our presence in the Temple and in the land endure. © 2011 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The detailed description of the dimensions and materials of the mishkan/tabernacle as listed in this week's parsha must contain great cosmic, if murkily unknown importance. The question of the

purpose of these myriad details being included in the Torah has been asked by all students of the Torah over the ages. While the answers advanced have also been many, few of them have been truly satisfactory. The matter remains a mystery.

It is an example of the continuing inscrutability of the Creator and the finite and limited ability of His creatures to divine His methods and instructions. And perhaps this itself is the greatest and strongest message of the parsha. G-d does not need structures to be built to His service. The words of the prophets of Israel make this point abundantly clear. Yet somehow the building and its exact method of construction and its size and dimensions are part of the service of Israel to its G-d.

The very mystery of it, the difficulty of human rational logic to encompass and understand the entire subject, is the object lesson of the parsha. Humankind has always attempted to create gods in its own image-to have a human god that we can somehow recognize and deal with.

However the Torah states that the opposite is true-humans were created in the image of G-d, so to speak, and throughout life and the ages, the quest to reach and understand that image has been the focal point of human history and existence. G-d will soon tell Moshe that no human being can "see" Him and remain alive. The mystery of the mishkan/tabernacle is part of that quest to "see" Him and understand our relationship to the Creator.

The mishkan/tabernacle also illustrates the partnership, so to speak, between G-d, Israel and humankind generally. The mishkan/tabernacle required human effort and resources. People had to, of their own volition, give material of great value and labor of great talent to the project. This fact alone signifies the relationship between G-d and Israel.

If there is a movement of goodness and spirituality on the part of us here in the lower world there will be a commensurate response in the Heavenly world above as well. The famous parable is the phrase in Psalms, that the Lord is the shadow of our right hand. When a human being moves his hand, the shadow it makes moves with it. So too do our actions and behaviors here on earth call forth a movement and response from Heaven. Thus the words of the rabbis that the Temple built below is parallel to the Temple built above in Heaven.

Therefore the dimensions and instructions given to us for building our earthly Temple are meant to allow it to match, in exactly, the Heavenly Temple that it is to mimic. This is part of the goal of humans to imitate, so to speak, their Creator in attitude, values and behavior. The mishkan/tabernacle stands as the symbol of this symbiotic relationship between Heaven and humans that is in itself the basic axiom of Judaism and Jewish life. © 2011 *Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection*

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

From a strictly halakhic perspective, the kindling of the menorah is not an act of serving G-d. No doubt the menorah is a holy object, but still the Talmud concludes that "lighting [it] is not considered a service." (Yoma 24b)

Perhaps this means that the lighting of the menorah creates a holy atmosphere that serves as a backdrop to the actual Temple service where we approach G-d. This is accomplished through its representation of three major themes in human experience--- creation, revelation and redemption.

The menorah brings us back to the creation story, where the first creation was light. (Genesis 1:3) In the center of the Garden of Eden were the tree of knowledge and tree of life. The menorah looks like a tree. It is adorned with flowers, knobs and cups. The flowers represent the buds that spring forth fruit; the knobs are shaped like a round fruit; and the cups are symbolic of vessels into which nectar is poured. (Menahot 28a) As Eden was a society of peace, so the menorah sets the tone for what hopefully would be an experience of inner peace as we serve G-d in the sanctuary. Its lighting accentuates the powerful beauty of the tree; it ignites serenity within us.

The menorah resonates with the image of Sinai as well. It brings us back to the moment when the Torah was given where light was abundant. (Exodus 19:16) The three branches on each side are associated with worldly knowledge. Yet, the wicks in each of these branches turn toward the inner shaft - teaching the idea that everything has its source in Torah. The lighting of these wicks focus our energy on our primary means of connecting to G-d-love of the light of Torah. (Mishlei 6:23)

The menorah may also allude to the Messianic world. Not only do the wicks point inward, the flames reach toward heaven, reminding us of our mission to be a light to the nations of the world. (Isaiah 42:6) From this perspective, when viewing the lighting of the menorah our thoughts focus on the fact that the tabernacle experience should encourage us to fix the world, bringing it to ultimate redemption.

These ideas should speak to us today. Upon entering a synagogue and seeing the eternal light, it ought to echo inner peace, love of Torah, and a striving toward perfection. When creation, revelation and redemption converge in the synagogue we can't help but feel spiritually drawn to G-d. © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Speak to the Children of Israel, and they should take for Me (G-d) donation(s); from every person whose heart is willing shall you take My donation(s)." This verse (Sh'mos 25:2) begins our nation's first fundraising drive, one that was initiated by G-d with the express purpose of building a sanctuary within which G-d's divine presence could dwell. The commentators discuss why the verb chosen to solicit materials for the Mishkan was "kach" (take), rather than "tain" (give). Wasn't G-d asking us to "give" materials for the project, with G-d doing the "taking?" What does it mean to "take to/for Him" rather than "give to/for Him" if we are donating our own things by giving them to Him?

The Talmud (B'rachos 35a) discusses how the "the land" could be described in one place (T'hilim 24a) as belonging to G-d, if elsewhere (T'hilim 115:16) it says that He gave it to us. In order to explain this apparent contradiction, the Talmud says that before we make a blessing over something it belongs to G-d, but after acknowledging that He is the Source of everything, He gives it to us. Similarly, everything we "own" really belongs to G-d until we put it to its proper (holy) use. Therefore, the materials that were donated by the Children of Israel to the Mishkan didn't become "theirs" until after they designated it for the Mishkan, thereby "taking it" (Chasam Sofer and others). Another suggested approach (see Tz'ror HaMor and HaK'sav v'HaKabbalah) is that since we gain more by donating to charity than what we give, the transaction is described as "taking" rather than "giving."

The Brisker Rov, Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik, zt"l, points out that besides using the word "take" rather than "give," there is also a change in the forms of the words within the verse. First there are numerous people "taking," then individuals with a generous heart (singular form) are referenced, followed by a return to people (plural) "taking" these donations. Therefore, the Brisker Rov continues, the verse is not focusing on those donating the materials, but rather on those collecting the materials from the individual donors. There is a communal obligation to build the Mishkan, whereas (except for the mandatory half-shekalim), donating was optional and voluntary. The community (represented by the community leaders) "takes" the donations "given" by the individual donors; since the obligation is on the community, the verse only discusses the "taking" part. This idea is fairly explicit in S'forno, B'chor Shor, Abarbanel and Malbim; Mahari"l Diskin says it appears in the Zohar as well. The question then becomes why G-d placed the obligation to

contribute towards the Mishkan on the nation (as a whole), rather than on each individual.

The obvious answer, it would seem, is that G-d wanted the donations to be made voluntarily, and He therefore commanded the nation to build Him a sanctuary in a way that only those "whose hearts were willing" donated. By describing the process of the community-appointed collectors "taking" the donations, rather than of the donors "giving" them, donating for the Mishkan remains a voluntary mitzvah for each individual, while building the Mishkan is a communal obligation. A footnote in Nesivos Rabosainu, which quotes the Brisker Rov's approach, suggests that if the obligation was placed on every individual, each individual's contribution would be integral to the Mishkan, and therefore if even one person did not fulfill his obligation, the Mishkan would be incomplete. By placing the obligation on the community as a whole, as long as the community provided all the materials necessary, the Mishkan itself wouldn't be lacking-even if some individuals didn't contribute.

The word for "donation" ("t'rumah," which literally means "something separated in order to be elevated") appears three times in this commandment, as does the word "take." Rashi explains that there were three separate accounts that were donated to/collected for; the mandatory half-shekel that went towards "adanim" (the bases for the beams that formed the walls of the Mishkan), the mandatory (yearly) half-shekel for the offerings brought in the Mishkan, and the voluntary donations of materials that were used to build the rest of the Mishkan's structure, its vessels, and the priestly garments. Since two of these "t'rumos" were mandatory and the donor really had no choice, the word "take" is at least as appropriate as the word "give." And since the list of materials to be donated follows the third "t'rumah," it is only this third "take" that could have been positioned as "giving" rather than "taking." [Even though the second "t'rumah" is collected from "those with a willing heart," and this "t'rumah" refers to the mandatory half-shekel that went towards the Mishkan's (and eventually Temple's) offerings, this was only a mandatory minimum; anyone with a "willing heart" could donate additional funds towards offerings, or bring additional offerings themselves. The first "t'rumah," on the other hand, which was used for the "adanim," was limited to a half-shekel; "the wealthy could not give more and the pauper could not give less" (Sh'mos 30:15). Since there is a mandatory half-shekel minimum, and it can be collected whether the individual wants to give it or not (see Rambam, Hilchos Shekalim 1:9), describing this "t'rumah" as being "taken" is appropriate.]

The Yerushalmi (Shekalim 1:1) says that the first "t'rumah" refers specifically to the mandatory half-shekel donations that were melted down and formed into the "adanim" (see Ralbag and Rokayach). Therefore, when Moshe was told to speak to the nation

about their donation requirements (which must be met before any voluntary contributions can be made, see Gur Aryeh), he was told that "they," i.e. those that collect the donations, must "take them," the mandatory half-shekalim, from the nation, even from those who are reluctant to give it. These collectors are also required, on behalf of the nation, to "take" the donations that are completely voluntary, which will be used to build the Mishkan. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Transcribed by David Twersky;

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

When speaking about collecting the various materials used in building the Mishkan [Tabernacle], the Torah enumerates various materials in descending order of value (Gold, silver, copper...). However, at the end of the list, after having enumerated relatively inexpensive items (wood, oil, spices), the Torah lists the Shoham stones and the precious stones used in Ephod of the High Priest's breastplate (the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim).

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks the obvious question-Why are the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim out of order in this catalog of solicited items which is apparently arranged in descending order of value? The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh suggests three reasons for this. We will briefly discuss the first reason, and then we will discuss the third reason more elaborately.

In Parshas Vayakhel, the Princes (of each Tribe) were the ones who brought the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim donations. However, the word used there for Princes (Nesiim) is spelled defectively-without a yud. Our Sages explain that the Almighty was upset with them for delaying their donation until the end of the campaign. Although their motives were ostensibly good (they wanted to wait until the end to see where the shortfall was and they planned to make up the difference), Chazal tell us that this was not the correct attitude. They should have enthusiastically been among the first to give donations. Because of their lack of haste in making their donations, a letter was removed from their title.

So in his first explanation, the Ohr HaChaim explains why the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim were listed last here in Terumah-because in fact they were the last things to be donated. This is to remind us of the foible on the part of the Princes in making that donation.

In the past, we have attempted to understand what exactly was wrong with what the Princes offered. In our experience, anyone who would make such a proposal to a fundraiser (you do the best you can and then come back to me-I will cover the deficit) would be a hero.

I recently heard a new approach which helps explain the sentiment of Chazal from my good friend Dr.

Marcel Reishcer. By assuming there would indeed be a deficit, the Princes were underestimating the generosity and the dedication of the Nation of Israel. They should have expected that everyone would give generously and that if they waited too long, they would have no contribution to make to enable them to have a share in the Mishkan. Who gave them the right to make such an assumption about the holy nation of Israel? They were in fact wrong. Everything WAS given to the extent that their contribution did not go for any part of the Mishkan-only for the stones of the garments of the High Priest.

Be that as it may, according to the first answer of the Ohr HaChaim, the reason Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim were listed last in the sequence of materials was because they were the last things to be brought.

In his third interpretation, the Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh quotes a Gemara [Yoma 75a] that the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim were brought to the Princes on clouds from Gan Eden. Since these were donations that in effect "came from Heaven" and did not represent and blood, sweat, or tears-there was no toil involved-they were listed after the oils and spices, which, although they may have cost only pennies, did represent a gift that came from people's labor and efforts and in that way were superior to the much more "expensive" gifts of precious stones.

That which counts in the eyes of the Almighty is not the value of the gift received but what the gift represented for the person who brought the gift. A poor person's check of \$18, which may be something he had to scrape for, can very well mean more in the Eyes of Heaven than a six figure gift which is "pocket change" for the person who wrote the check. This is the lesson (according to the 3rd approach) of the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim's sequence at the tail end of the list of materials donated.

Apropos to this, I would like to very briefly read an article that was published in a newspaper in Vilna called "Dem Vort". This is a reporter's description of the dedication of the new building of the Yeshiva in Kletzk. [Rav Aharon Kotler, before he founded the Lakewood Yeshiva in Lakewood, New Jersey, was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Yeshiva in Kletzk.] The dedication was a major event. Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer came from Eretz Yisroel, Rav Elchanon Wasserman was also in attendance for this "Chanukas HaBayis" of the Kletzker Yeshiva, as was Rav Shimon Shkop, and all the leading Torah personalities of the pre-World War II Eastern Europe.

The reporter describes the massive parade through the town from the house of the Rosh Yeshiva to the new Yeshiva building. They entered the building and the Gabbaim (financial officers of the Yeshiva) went to the Bimah. People came up to the Bimah and gave their small donations to the Gabbaim. In the presence of all the Roshei Yeshiva, the Gabbaim made a blessing (Mi SheBerach) for each of the contributors. The reporter

further writes (which may be startling to us) that the women too marched into the Beis Medrash. They took their ruble coins out of their purses and gave them to the Gabbaim so that they too could have a portion in the new Beis Medrash in Kletzk.

The reporter describes how a short old woman slowly and with difficulty made her way through the Beis Medrash towards the bimah. With a trembling hand she stretched out her very modest donation to give it to the Gabbai. Tears were rolling down her shriveled cheeks. "She was not just giving her few pennies; she was giving her very Jewish soul towards the building costs of that Yeshiva building." The reporter writes how inspired he was to see the joy and emotion that radiated from her face at having the privilege to participate in this historic event.

This is what the Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh means in the answer cited above. A donation of goat hairs given with self-sacrifice may be deserving of being listed ahead of the most magnificent gift of precious stones, which come about without any toil or labor on the part of the donors. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the parsha of Trumah, meaning donations. Different materials were given by Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} in order to build the Mishkan. After listing those materials the passuk {verse} states: "And make for me a Mikdash {Sanctuary} and I will dwell in your midst. [25:8]"

The term Mishkan refers to the Tabernacle that accompanied us on our travels through the wilderness and into Eretz Yisroel {the Land of Israel} until the time that the Temple was built in Yerushalayim. At that point, the Mishkan was incorporated into the Temple that was now referred to as the Mikdash.

The Ohr HaChaim explains that this passuk, "And make for me a Mikdash," is a positive commandment to build a House of G-d where the Divine service can be performed.

We've discussed earlier that any physical destruction brought upon the Temple can only be the coup de grace that follows the spiritual decay that caused the Shchinah {Hashem's presence} to leave. The Talmud [Yoma 9B] teaches that the first two Temples were destroyed for very different sins: "The First Temple, why was it destroyed? Because there was idolatry, adultery and murder. But the Second Temple where they were involved in Torah, mitzvos {fulfillment of the commandments} and acts of kindness, why was it destroyed? Because of the 'sin'as chinam,' the baseless hatred, that existed between them."

The Mahara"l of Prague [Netzach Yisroel: 4] explains that the First temple was unique in that the Shchinah clearly dwelled there. Its destruction came about when we no longer merited having that Shchinah

amongst us. When our spiritual standing was one of 'tum'ah,' spiritual impurity, the antithesis of that presence of the Shchinah, the physical edifice of the Mikdash could no longer house that Shchinah. As such, those three sins, each referred to as 'tum'ah,' brought about the destruction of the First Temple.

The Second Temple was lacking that clear presence of Shchinah, manifested by the absence of the Aron {Holy Ark}. Its essence was based upon the unity of Yisroel that it itself helped to promote-one Kohen leading the nation and one altar where all of the sacrifices were brought. The Temple transformed us into a unified nation and it was our unity that gave the Temple its unique kedusha {holiness}. As such, it was sin'as chinam, baseless hatred, which tore apart our unity and thereby tore apart the very fibers that held the Mikdash together. Sin'as chinam brought its destruction.

Of the many lessons that can be learned from the different keilim {vessels} of the Mishkan, perhaps the most pertinent ones are those that deal with this badly needed concern for one another and unity.

The Kli Yakar explains that the shulchan {table of the Mishkan} exemplified the heavenly source of all material sustenance and wealth.

"And you shall make for it four rings of gold... [25:26]" These (round) rings teach that worldly success is like a wheel that constantly rotates. Those who are down eventually make their way up as those who are up take their turn having some downtime. This will help remind a person to kindly and generously share his gifts with those less fortunate than he. The rings, having no beginning and no end, also portray the infinite reward awaiting those who apply the lesson of the rings to their lives.

"...l'vatim {as houses} l'badim {for the poles}... [25:27]" These four rings served as 'houses' for the two poles that were inserted into them. The word 'badim,' meaning 'poles,' also means 'alone.' The lesson of the rings is that we must share what we have with others, opening our 'houses' to those who are 'alone,' be it in a financial sense or an emotional sense.

"...la'sais es ha'shulchan {to carry the table}. [25:27]" These poles were used to carry the table when the Mishkan was being transported. In a deeper sense, these 'badim,' manifesting the poor, seem to be carried and supported by the wealthy table-owners. However, the opposite is true-they actually carry the table of the wealthy. It is the merit of helping others that causes Hashem to fill their tables.

The same idea can be seen earlier in the parsha [25:7]. The last item listed amongst the donations is the 'avnai miluim-the fill-stones' used for the choshen {the high priest's breastplate}. These were twelve precious gems. Rashi explains that they are called 'avnai miluim-fill-stones' because the choshen was made with a cavity-like indentation as a setting for these stones. These stones filled that cavity and as such earned their title as 'avnai miluim-fill-stones.'

This is a somewhat puzzling name to give these gems. When buying a diamond engagement ring, one doesn't need something in order to fill the hole in the setting and therefore decide to stick in a diamond! The diamond is the primary part of the ring! Why were these gems called 'avnai miluim-fill-stones?'

The Torah here is teaching a profound lesson that is a necessary building block for the Mishkan. It is so necessary that without it, it won't remain standing, as we can all personally attest to. The lesson is that a person or an object's true value is only what it does for others. There is so much emptiness in the world. The degree to which one dedicates oneself to filling that emptiness will determine the ultimate value of that individual. The preciousness of the gems lay in that they filled an emptiness. They were given the greatest possible praise, they were called 'avnai miluim-fill-stones.'

The empty void of the Mikdash can only be filled with the spiritual bricks that are created by acts of caring concern and harmoniously helping others-ahavas chinam, the opposite of sin'as chinam. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

In this week's parashah, we begin to read about the design and construction of the mishkan / Tabernacle.

R' Menachem ben Meir Tzioni z"l (Speyer, Germany; 15th century) quotes the kabbalistic midrash, Sefer Ha'bahir, as follows: The structure of the mishkan parallels the creation of the world. We read about Creation (Bereishit 1:1), "In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens...," and regarding the mishkan G-d said (Shmot 26:7), "You shall make curtains of goat hair for a covering over the Tabernacle."

On the second day, G-d said (Bereishit 1:6), "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate...," and regarding the mishkan He said (Shmot 26:31), "You shall make a partition..."

On the third day, G-d said (Bereishit 1:9), "Let the waters be gathered," and regarding the mishkan He said (Shmot 30:18), "You shall make a copper basin... for washing."

On the fourth day, G-d said (Bereishit 1:14), "Let there be luminaries," and regarding the mishkan He said (Shmot 25:31), "You shall make a menorah."

On the fifth day, G-d said (Bereishit 1:20), "Let there be fowl that fly about over the earth," and regarding the mishkan He said (Shmot 25:20), "The keruvim shall be with wings spread upward."

On the sixth day, man was created, and regarding the mishkan G-d said (Shmot 28:1), "Draw close Aharon, your brother..."

About the seventh day, it says (Bereishit 2:1), "The heaven and the earth were finished," and about the mishkan we read (Shmot 39:32), "All the work of the

mishkan, the ohel mo'ed / Tent of Meeting, was finished."

In addition, R' Tzioni writes, the mishkan parallels the revelation at Har Sinai. For example, just as Hashem spoke at Har Sinai from within a fire, so in the mishkan, His voice seemed to emanate from between the keruvim made of fiery gold. (Sefer Tzioni)

"Like everything that I show you, the form of the mishkan / Tabernacle and the form of all its vessels; and so shall you do." (25:9)

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) explains: Some commentaries attribute symbolic significance to the mishkan and its implements. In fact, though, the Torah's instructions for building the mishkan are specifications for bringing the Shechinah into our lives and our world. Our verse is teaching that the mishkan and its implements must be made exactly to the specifications described in the Torah; only then will the Shechinah "rest" there. If there is a single deviation from the Torah's specifications, the Shechinah will not rest in the mishkan.

R' Wolbe continues: This may be understood based on the teaching of the Kuzari (11th century work discussing the fundamental beliefs of Judaism) that there is no such thing as nature [in the sense of a world running on its own]; rather, everything is controlled by the Creator. "Nature" exists only in the sense that G-d has established certain principles by which the world runs. For example, a person who eats and sleeps can live, while a person who refuses to eat and sleep will die sooner rather than later. Another example: G-d has arranged that if parents engage in a reproductive act, then He can send a soul into this world; otherwise, there will be no child and no soul. These natural acts are not the causes of life, but they are rules by which G-d allows life to exist. (R' Wolbe adds: Thus, we can speak of "nature," but to ascribe intelligence to it [as in the phrase "mother nature"] is a mistake. Only the Creator has that intelligence.)

He continues: The specifications of the mishkan, and the particulars of the mitzvot in general, are the "laws of nature" of the spiritual world. If one builds the mishkan and performs the mitzvot exactly as G-d revealed in the Torah, then the Shechinah will rest on the Jewish People. If one makes changes, then the mitzvot will not have the desired effect and will not bring about the presence of the Shechinah. R' Wolbe quotes his teacher, R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (mashgiach ruchani of the Mir yeshiva; died 1936) who said that one must study the laws of the mishkan as one studies the laws of tefilin. We don't know why tefilin must be square and black, or why the tefilin on the head must have four compartments while the tefilin on the arm have only one compartment. But, we don't need to know this. Rather, if one dons kosher tefilin and observes the particulars of the mitzvah, he will feel the resulting holiness; otherwise, he will not. This is simply a fact of "spiritual

nature," just as a pharmaceutical prescription can work if it is taken as directed but can have dire negative effects if taken differently than directed.

R' Wolbe concludes: Perhaps the foregoing is not inconsistent with the idea that the mishkan has symbolic significance. In fact, we read in Shmuel I (2:2), "There is no Tzur / Rock like our G-d." Our Sages comment: "There is no Tzayar / Artist like our G-d." But, unlike an artist who paints with oil and canvas, G-d's works of art are very much alive. Thus, we must understand the "symbols" as being "interactive." When we interact with them as intended, we bring about positive spiritual consequences, and the opposite if we interact with them other than as intended. (Shiurei Chumash [unpublished manuscript]) © 2011 S. Katz & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

The Aron (Tabernacle) contained the most precious gift the Jews got: the Tablets handed from G-d to Moshe. The receptacle had to be worthy of the insert, and therefore the Aron had to be intricately constructed with symbolism as meticulously configured as its beautiful design. The Aron consisted of three contiguous boxes of gold, wood, and gold, each inserted into the other, and gold plated wooden staves with which to carry the Aron. The Torah goes on to state that "The staves shall remain in the ark; they shall not be removed" (Exodus 25:14). Rabbi Kamenetzky asked that if this is meant as a prohibition for anyone to remove the staves, why didn't the Torah just command us not to remove them, instead of telling us that they won't be removed?

Rabbi Kamenetzky answers that perhaps the Torah is making a powerful prophecy in addition to a powerful regulation. The wooden staves represent the customs and the small nuances of the Torah (wood being the only element of the Tabernacle that was living and growing). They may not be as holy as the ark, but they will never leave its side. When the cherished handles of those staves are invoked into use, the entire Torah is raised with them. As the Torah is clearly demonstrating, the Torah is moved by the little actions that we do, the inconspicuous little actions that impress no one, but mean the world to G-d! © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

