

# FOCAL POINTS

*by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

The commands for the building of the Mishkan were fully meted. The job was winding down, and this week in Parshas Vayakhel Moshe instructs the nation with the final directives of the monumental task. First, however, he has a message. The portion begins telling us that Moshe gathered the nation and told them that "six days you shall work and the seventh day shall be holy - you shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day" (Exodus 35:1-2). Only then does he continue with the directives that pertain to the erection of the Mishkan.

The strange juxtaposition of the laws of Shabbos in the midst of all the instructions of building a sanctuary is cause for concern. That is why our sages explain that Moshe was informing the Jewish people that despite its importance building a Mishkan does not pre-empt the Sabbath. All work must cease on Shabbos regardless of how it may impact the progress of the Mishkan.

Yet what must be analyzed are the seemingly disconnected verses. Why didn't the Torah tell us of Shabbos' power in a straightforward way, by openly directing the nation "thou shall not construct the Mishkan on the Shabbos." Why juxtapose Shabbos as a stand-alone unit, leaving us to infer its overriding power through scriptural juxtaposition? In fact the words "you shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath" make the command seem totally irrelevant to Mishkan per se and applicable to each and every individual homemaker. If so, the command truly seems out of place. It seems that regardless of its relation to the laws of construction, the theme of Shabbos plays a greater role vis-a-vis the Mishkan. What is it?

**A famous Magid was asked to lecture in a prosperous and modern city. Before he was to speak he was told to consult with the synagogue's president. "This is a very distinguished community," he was told "and we must be careful. We surely would not want to offend anyone with, even the slightest rebuke." The Magid met the president who was sitting in a richly upholstered leather armchair behind a mahogany desk. As the Magid entered, the man rested his lit cigar on the corner of a brass ashtray.**

"Rabbi," asked the president, "you have a reputation as a remarkable speaker. One who inspires crowds and makes - might I say - waves. Pray tell me," he continued "what are you intending to speak about in our town?"

The Magid promptly replied, "I intend to talk about Shabbat observance."

The president's face turned crimson. "Oh no dear rabbi, please. In this town, such talk will fall on deaf

ears. We all struggle to make a living and Shabbos is just not in the cards. I implore you. Talk about something else."

The rabbi pondered. "Perhaps I should talk about kashrut." "Kashrut? Please," begged the president, "don't waste your time. There hasn't been a kosher butcher in this town for years."

"How about tzedaka?" offered the Magid. "Charity? Give us a break. Do you know how many shnorrers visit this town each week. We are sick of hearing about charity!"

Meekly the Magid made another suggestion. "Tefillah? (prayer)"

"Please. In a city of 1,000 Jewish families, we hardly get a weekday minyan. The synagogue is never filled except on the High Holy Days. No one would be interested."

Finally the Magid became frustrated. "If I can't talk about Shabbos, and I can't talk about tzedaka, and I can not discuss kashrut, what do you want me to talk about?" The president looked amazed. "Why, rabbi" exclaimed the president. "That's easy! Talk about Judaism!"

By placing the concept of Shabbos in general, and one of its detailed laws in particular, smack in the middle of the architectural directives of a most glorious edifice, the Torah was telling us that although we may build beautiful palaces in which to serve the Almighty, however, if we forget the tenets of our faith, those great structures are meaningless. Shabbos was mentioned as a separate unit because its relevance is even greater than its ability to halt construction. A Jew must remember that without Shabbos, without kashrut, without tefillah, a beautiful sanctuary is no more enduring than a castle in the air.

***Dedicated in honor of the naming of Shantal Ariana Kash, daughter of Donna and Peter Kash***  
**Good Shabbos!**

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