

THE JOB OF THE JEWS!

by Rabbi Label Lam

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Again and again the question arises: "Why does the Torah expend so much ink on reviewing the many details of the building of the Tabernacle in the wilderness?"

There are two different factors that lend value to a given entity, writes the Alter from Kelm. 1) Its rarity. 2) Its necessity. For example, a diamond or some other gem increases in price as a consequence of its scarcity. A rare stamp or even a baseball card becomes a collector's item and an expensive commodity only because it's one or two of a kind. If thousands more would flood the market the price would be reduced dramatically.

There are other elements that are valuable because we need them to live. Air, water, and food have intrinsic value. They may not have a big monetary ticket attached to them but that is only because they are, Thank G-d, plentiful. Try holding your breath for two minutes and then we can talk about the inherent value of air. At the conclusion of a fast day we can all begin to sing the praises of food glorious food. The Alter goes on to observe that the world was organized in such a way that in proportion to how much we really need a thing, so it is to be found around us in abundance. Air is everywhere and we need it most urgently. Water is less vital than air and more crucial than food and so two-thirds of the earth's surface is covered with water. Food which is needed less is granted in less large but still sufficient measure. The implied principle is that to the extent that a certain ingredient of life is abundant so it is important and necessary.

Therefore those things mentioned most often in the Torah are more critical. The exodus from Egypt takes up an enormous space and is associated with many daily, weekly, and yearly Mitzvos. We are commanded not only to speak in depth about the events of leaving Egypt at the Pesach Seder but to remember it each and every day. The Torah uses the expression 50 times "leaving Egypt" in one form or another. We are meant to know that for Jewish survival, remembering what happened in Egypt is like the air that we breathe.

Maybe this idea has a similar application to the subject of the Tabernacle! At an ecumenical gathering of spiritual leaders from the across the globe, they were deciding in which way to unify their minds for some noble purpose. It was proposed that they take some meditative moments

together to transcend this world and to reach beyond the mud of daily life and the constant tug of physical desire. In the final instant a new and surprising suggestion was offered by one of the clerics, "Instead of trying to get beyond worldliness, why don't we raise the physical and create a space for G-dliness here on earth?!" The suggestion was immediately dismissed by the moderator of the exercise, "Nah!" he said, "That's the job of Jews!" Observing the quantity of details and the quality of communal effort that went into creating the Tabernacle is an emphatic reminder of the importance of our unique mission on this earth and the critical task we have of transforming our own little corner of creation. It remains, after all these years, "The Job of the Jews!" Text Copyright © 2004 Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**