

# A REAL PLACE OF HOLINESS

by Rabbi Label Lam

*You shall make the Altar of acacia wood, five cubits in length and five cubits in width-the Altar shall be square- and three cubits in height. You shall make horns on its four corners, from it shall its horns be; and you shall cover it with copper. (Shemos 27:1-2)*

We find ourselves flooded with so many intricate details describing the building and its individual vessels. The hard question has to be asked. What is our motivation to in learning this seeming archaic lesson in architecture? The truth is that there are more than principles of building at play here. This is Torah and the Torah is neither teaching history nor cosmology alone but is rather a teaching book. Let us then rephrase the original tough question. What lessons of life can we gain from reviewing the construction of the Tabernacle?

The Midrash HaGadol offers a tiny key-hole-opening for us to see the Tabernacle as a teaching tool: "Why is the Altar compared to copper? The sages learned that there were two Altars. One was gold and one was copper. The one of gold is comparable to the soul of man. The one of copper represents the body of man. The golden Altar rested in the inner sanctum while the copper Altar was in the outer courtyard. The gold covered Alter was not seen by the nation but the copper one was available to be seen. The Altar of gold was more expensive than the Altar of copper. Upon the golden Altar were brought incense and spice offerings while on the copper Altar they would sacrifice the flesh of animals. Just as gold is more valuable than copper, so is the soul more valuable than the body. Just as each day they drew close through animal sacrifices before the Holy One blessed be He on the Altar of copper, so a person needs to acknowledge- confess, and review his deeds each and every day constantly before the Master of the World and serve Him with body and soul." The Chovos HaLevavos devotes one of thirty items of a suggested list of things to contemplate about to meditating on the advantages of the soul over the body. He quotes King Solomon (Mishlei 4:23), "From all the things you guard, protect your heart (mind) because from it flows out life." The heart is superior to any other organ or limb because it is the key to life in this world and the next explains the Lev Tov.

The more inward a thing, the more valuable and advantageous it is. Therefore more than all the things that a person watches, protects, secures, and ensures, he needs to do so for his intellect. When we see a high gate, planes overhead or a police presence one can only begin to imagine what King Solomon had in mind for the mind.

We also learn that the physically active bodily has to be checked and kept in check daily. Our

actions require constant scrutiny and maintenance to be a proper vehicle for the holiness it carries and represents. Again King Solomon writes, "The righteous one knows the nature of his beast..." (Mishlei 12:10) It is not ignored but neither is it to be aggrandized and adorned out of proportion.

From the Tabernacle amongst other things we can learn how to rank various values and how to prioritize our material and spiritual resources. Maybe some of these ideas are too obvious when stated but with a brief scan of the world around it seems to be an all too rare combination, this simple balance and proportion between inner and outer worlds, between shows of symbolism and the presence of lasting substance.

I once heard that the difference between a great person and everyone else is that a great person is greater in his private life than in his public life and everyone else is just the opposite. It is harder than it looks to create a real place of holiness. Text Copyright &copy 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and

**Torah.org**.