

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

After eleven chapters of narration of directions for the components and vestments of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), the construction finally began. "From Moses' presence they took the entire gift that the Children of Israel had brought for the work for the labor of the Sanctuary, to do it...All the wise people came, those performing all the sacred work, each of them from their work that they were doing." (Shemos/Exodus 36:3-4) The mitzvah (Divine command) to build a Mishkan was given, according to Sforno and other commentaries, as a vehicle to restore G-d's presence amongst the Jewish people following its removal due to the sin of the Golden Calf. Thus, the design instruction and construction process occupied the eight and one half months from the sin of the Golden Calf - on the seventeenth of Tammuz, three months after the departure from Egypt - until the assembly and dedication of the Mishkan - on the first of Nissan, just before the first anniversary of the Exodus (see Bamidbar/Numbers 7:1).

A mere four months and eight days after its dedication, on the ninth of Av, the Children of Israel were already poised to enter the Land of Israel (see Devarim/Deuteronomy 1:21), at which time they would have entered Israel under Moshe's leadership, the Messiah would have come, and the one and only Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple) would have been built immediately. But that day was the original "Tisha B'Av": the spies had just returned from the Land of Israel and the Jewish nation had just accepted the slanderous report offered by ten of the twelve messengers (see Bamidbar/Numbers 13 & 14). In the end, the Jews were punished with another 39 years of wandering throughout the wilderness, and they would spend 440 years in Israel before Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) would finally build the Bais HaMikdash.

But they did not know that when they built the Mishkan. The Mishkan was built - utilizing tons of materiel, from precious metals to exotic textiles - with the assumption that it would be used for a matter of months. Moshe solicited the services of hundreds of volunteers for many months of continuous labor, for an edifice with a useful life of a half a year. How could such a mammoth expenditure of time and resources be utilized for such a short-term benefit?

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky (1891-1986; Rabbi of Tzitevian, Lithuania and Toronto, Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivta Torah Vodaath in New York; a foremost thinker and Jewish leader, his discourses on the Pentateuch are published as Emes L'Yaakov) explains that the Jewish nation was simply fulfilling the mitzvah of "they shall make a Sanctuary for Me so that I may dwell among them" (Shemos/Exodus 25:8). No one can possibly know the Divine value attributed to any one mitzvah in contrast to any

other and we are charged to approach simple mitzvos and complicated ones with similar interest and gusto, demanding that we not cheapen mitzvos simply because they appear easier or fleeting.

Our sages compare mitzvos to precious stones. A diamond cutter will work with great patience and deliberation to perfect an object he has no intention of keeping. Hours will be spent planning the cut and executing it with precision, assuring that the finished product is a priceless gem and not a clump of carbon. All the efforts are an investment in one moment - the sale. The Jewish people well understood the spiritual diminution caused by the Golden Calf. They appreciated the import of every mitzvah - another unique opportunity to forge a connection with the Divine - and how this mitzvah was specifically geared to that end. All of the effort, thousands upon thousands of hours of labor and all of the materiel, were simply an investment in one simple objective - "so that I may dwell among them". The anticipated useful life of the Mishkan may have been short-term, but the benefit of this mitzvah - like every mitzvah - was eternal!

Have a Good Shabbos!

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