

MISHKAN REPEATED. AGAIN

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Mishkan Repeated. Again¹

The Greeks had their Seven Wonders of the ancient world, but the Jewish list was much shorter. No one even thought of submitting more than one entry. No tomb, or colossus, or hanging garden could compete with the greatest feat of human handiwork ever - fashioning a place appropriate for the Divine Presence out of the ordinary materials of our imperfect, material world.

Parshas Pikudei brings us to the end of the story of the construction of the Mishkan. Chazal strain our understanding by filling in one detail that we would be unaware of by looking at the text alone. During the seven days of the Mishkan's inauguration, it was not left standing from day to day.

Instead, says the Tanchuma,² Moshe disassembled it, and then reassembled it each and every day. Twice each day, in fact. Except according to R. Chanina, who held that he did it three times.

This boggles the mind. What possible purpose could there have been in taking apart the Mishkan, putting it back together again, and then repeating this over and over again?

We can appreciate what Chazal are telling us, at least if we view the *parshah* on the plane of instruction in *avodah*. The goal of every Jew is intertwined with the Mishkan. More accurately, the Mishkan is the perfect symbol of the task of each of us: to create a sanctuary so that Hashem will dwell within us. We strive to prepare and ready our physical selves so that we can carry the Divine, and that the Divine can be comfortable, as it were, in us.

The allocation of space within the Mishkan points to the arrangement of multiple spiritual worlds, stacked one above the other in profundity and elevation. Man mimics this, as a microcosm. He, too, contains multiple levels.

The most obvious division of space within the Mishkan yields three different areas. The most elevated was the Holy of Holies, which housed the *aron* and the *cheruvim*. Next to it stood the *Heichal*, in which stood the *menorah*, the *shulchan* and the incense altar. Moving further away we get to the courtyard, with its outer altar.

Man displays the same three-fold division: mind, heart, and limbs. The Mishkan cannot function without all of its components; Man, too, cannot be whole without learning to integrate his three chief components into a smoothly functioning unit.

Along these lines, we can understand the symbolic message of the pillars and hangings that formed the outer perimeter of the courtyard, and therefore the entire Mishkan. They hint at our need to surround ourselves with limits and barriers to properly sustain our *avodah*.

Toras Avos found a beautiful expression of this thought in the story of Bilam's difficult ride atop his she-donkey. "A fence on this side, and a fence on that side...and it pressed Bilam's leg..."³ Homiletically, we can see in this image the way a Jew must conduct his affairs. He requires fences and walls. He needs fences in his acquisition of the good and noble, that his Torah and *avodah* not be tarnished by admixtures of lesser thoughts and motivations. He needs, as well, fences in his dealings with material things, lest he become weighted and bloated through them, rather than using them for Hashem's purposes alone. Through these *mechitzos*, the *regel*/ habits of Bilam within him are pressed and confined as they ought to be.

The curtains can be taken in a quite different sense - as a symbol of the *ohr makif*⁴ of *emunah*. To the Torah Jew, *emunah* is everything. Its quality and its clarity impact on all of his endeavors. It is the *sine qua non* of all his mitzvos, and their animating influence. Only by fully surrounding ourselves with *emunah*, by completely enveloping ourselves in it, can we hope to succeed in our *avodah*.

In any event, the Mishkan charts a course for us to arrive at the terminus of becoming an abode for the Shechinah. We must act with the utmost attention to *kedushah* in relation to all parts of ourselves, from head to toe, applied to all the levels and stages of our being. We must see to it that the Shechinah has a place within us, rather than be repelled and driven away. We must see to it that we are surrounded by fences that prevent any breaches in the sanctuary we build.

The mandatory multiple cycles of building and tearing down during the *milu'im* week are no longer inexplicable. To the contrary, they powerfully hint at a crucial realization. Man will fail. He may fail many times. Each time he fails, without exception, he cannot lose faith or motivation. He must pick himself up and immediately try again. He may build his sanctuary, and then see it not only threatened or breached, but toppled completely. When that happens, he should not fall into depression or melancholy, but once again begin the process of building the next Mishkan. Moshe did this twice a day, morning and evening, alluding to building during periods and moods of light and optimism, as well as times of darkness, when the vision of the Divine is occluded.

Rabbi Chanina opines that Moshe erected the Mishkan thrice daily. In the seven days of the *milu'im*, this amounts to twenty one times. (The Chasam Sofer⁵ explained the halachic legality of including Shabbos in the process. A *medrash* has Bezalel and his helpers unable to erect the Mishkan. They bring it to Moshe, who is also stymied. He complains to Hashem, who tells Moshe to move his hands as if attempting to put up the Mishkan, and He, Hashem would do the rest. Since Moshe in fact did nothing concrete, there was no violation of the laws of Shabbos involved in erecting it on Shabbos along with the other days.) Numerically, twenty-one corresponds to the Divine Name "*Ehkeh*," or "*I*

will be." It is the Divine Name attached to teshuvah, because it indicates that the past already happened; what is important is the new person I will make of myself in the future. Although I may have been in this situation before, repeated failures do not change the need for teshuvah, nor G-d's willingness to accept it. In fact, twenty-one squared 441, which happens to equal the word "emes." It is an incontrovertible truth that no matter how many times he has fallen and failed before, HKBH will accept his attempt at teshuvah.

The serial assemblies and dismantlings of the Mishkan point as well to another important part of our *avodah*. We must be prepared to inspect the quality of what we have built, constantly reevaluating all details of its construction, looking for small flaws we may have been unaware of in the original construction. There is often no end to the upgrading work we can do, to make our personal Sanctuary even more effective.

¹ Based on Nesivos Shalom pgs. 278-280

² Tanchuma 11

³ Bamidbar 22:24-25

⁴ Kabbalah differentiates between two kinds of *oros*, or Divine lights. One is an *ohr penimi*, an internalized light; the other is so powerful that it cannot be contained or structured. Therefore, it is not depicted as contained within, but is a "surrounding *ohr*" of great *kedushah*.

⁵ *Vayakhel, s.v. sheshes yamim*