

THE MISHKAN: BLUEPRINT OF PERSONAL GROWTH

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

The Mishkan: Blueprint of Personal Growth ¹

"Praises to the one whom You choose and draw near to dwell in Your courts. May we be sated with the goodness of Your house, the holiest part of Your sanctuary."² In precise sequence, this verse recapitulates the three chief regions of the *Mishkan*, attaching unique importance to each. What this suggests is nothing less than a roadmap of personal progress, a blueprint for structuring an edifice of personal dedication to Hashem's service.

"Courts" refer to the outer courtyard, and its prominent altar upon which were brought the animal offerings. Beyond it stood the "house," the enclosed structure in which stood the lion's share of the special appliances of the *Mishkan*: the *menorah*, the *shulchan*, and the incense altar. Cordoned off within it was a section visually even more remote, a place "within the within." The Holy of Holies was indeed the "holiest part" of the sanctuary, and housed the *aron* and the *keruvim*.

Man, both morphologically and functionally, is easily divided into three portions. Each has a distinct function; each presents a different challenge to every person dedicating himself and his energies to the service of his Creator.

We begin with the lowest organs - physically and figuratively. These organs mediate and represent Man's lower passions and desires. Above them, around Man's middle, is the heart, symbolizing Man's emotion-laden essential will. At Man's highest point, the brain mediates the higher-order functions of thought, including Man's opinions and ideologies.

Common man, a flesh-and-blood creature mired in a world of deceit, is guaranteed an opportunity to rise to the highest levels of spiritual accomplishment, to scale the walls of earthly insignificance and attach himself to G-d. The *Mishkan* is the all-purpose tool that aids and assists each and every subcomponent of the human apparatus. The concern of each aspect, each implement of the *Mishkan* is Man's growth towards greatness and spiritual elevation.

The process begins, of necessity, with the outer "courts." Here, the halachically pivotal element of all animal *korbanos* is the offering of blood on the altar. Atop that altar burned the constant flame, not to be extinguished. We begin our *avodah* in regard to our lower functions by focusing on these images. Firstly, we must commit ourselves to strenuously toil for Hashem, without any expectation of feeling the sweetness of spiritual uplift. We must be ready to spill our blood before Him, from a

position of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation. At the same time, we must be willing to recognize that within us burn fires of impure passions. We must work at transcending them, at turning those fires into flames of holiness, drawing from the "fire that consumes fire"³ atop the altar, meaning the ability of a fire of *kedushah* to engulf any fire of *tumah*. (This is included in Chazal's message when they tell us that the morning *Tamid* atoned for nocturnal sins, while the afternoon *Tamid* atoned for daytime *aveiros*.)

At the penultimate level, our hearts are "sated by the goodness" of Hashem's house. All of the elaborate appliances of the *heichal* serve to instill within each individual a sense of *kedushah* and purity - and joy! - in the service of Hashem. The *menorah* dispelled all manner of darkness, material and spiritual, lighting the way with Divine illumination. The incense altar, bound up with the notion of creating a "pleasant aroma" before G-d, also creates a sense of pleasure in the service of Hashem.

The *shulchan* makes its contribution⁴. They all share the common element of firmly planting a sense of *kedushah* and *taharah* within us.

In the *Kodesh HaKodoshim*, the figure of the two *keruvim* lovingly intertwined dominates our conception of *avodah* on the highest plane. They symbolize the possibility of complete *deveikus*, of the loving bond between Hashem and His people. They sit atop the *aron*, the repository of the *luchos* that stand for the Torah itself. The highest and most prominent part of the human apparatus is the mind; its refinement comes through the illumination of the Torah, gained by studying it deeply and intently.

The three metals used correspond to the three parts of Man to which the *Mishkan* ministers. They differ not only in their color, but in their value, suggesting a hierarchy of value - going from bronze/copper to silver to gold - which parallels the arrangement within Man of extremities, heart, and mind.

The *seforim hakedoshim* emphasize that the *churban* of the *Beis HaMikdash* took place only in the "outer chambers," but never touched the "inner chambers." If we continue to see the *Mishkan* as an auxiliary to Man's *avodah* culminating in *deveikus*, then the "outer chambers" means a place of continuous connection between Hashem and *Knesses Yisrael*, without pause or exception. This ceased to be after the *churban*, leaving *deveikus* for the "inner chambers," or a more limited connection, restricted to episodes of bonding on Shabbos.

Shabbos brings about the union of *Knesses Yisrael* and its bride, the *Shechinah*. The relationship between them progresses as the day unfolds, charting a course in time that parallels the divisions of the *Mishkan* in space.

Shabbos eve corresponds to the courtyard, and the first stage of Man's *avodah*. As stated earlier, the beginning of *avodah* requires that we take all we have and offer it unconditionally to Hashem.

(Chazal teach⁵ "If one dies on *Erev Shabbos*, it is a good sign." The Besht saw in this a mandate of

how to approach Shabbos, how to prepare ourselves for the high-impact *kedushah* that will follow. We are to nullify everything within our personal universe, akin to a dead person handing back all he has to his Maker.) *Avodah* at this point simply means taking all our activity out of the arena of personal desires and interests and moving it to the domain of the Divine.

On Shabbos day, our *tefilah* perfectly expresses the theme of the next level of *avodah*: "*Yismach Moshe b'matnas chelko*." The *avodah* of the daytime period of Shabbos is elevating affect - learning to find joy and *simchah* in our service of Hashem.

The holiness of Shabbos peaks at the time of the third *seudah*, corresponding to the *Kodesh HaKodoshim*. It is the time of the most perfect union, the most intimate association between *Knesses Yisrael* and his bride. Here, we give ourselves to Hashem perfectly and entirely, holding back nothing at all.

The Torah lavishes meticulous detail on the description of the *Mishkan's* specifications. Within those details are Torah secrets about the very structure of the universe. It is important to realize that all of that majesty is available to us, especially in the form of a properly-lived Shabbos experience.

¹ Based on Nesivos Shalom pgs. 194-195

² Tehilim 65:5

³ Yalkut Shimoni, Shemini #524

⁴ The Rebbe does not specify how. Perhaps it is through the elevation of our food and sustenance (which the table and its *lechem hapanim* symbolize). Elevating the most pedestrian parts of existence is certainly related to *kedushah* and *taharah*.

⁵ Kesubos 103B