

'TAPPING' INTO THE MISHKAN

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

In Parshas Terumah, Hashem commands Moshe to build a Mishkan (Tabernacle), and begins providing him with the necessary data and instructions. After asking Bnei Yisrael to contribute towards the construction, detailed directions are given as to how to construct the Aron (Holy Ark), Shulchan (Table), and Menorah. After this, Moshe begins to give instructions regarding the construction of the Mishkan proper.

In Parshas Pekudei, we read (Shemos 38:22):

"And Betzalel, son of Uri, son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah [chief architect of the Mishkan], did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe [regarding the construction of the Mishkan]."

Rashi (ibid.) comments that Betzalel did "everything Hashem commanded Moshe," even intuiting some instructions that Hashem had commanded Moshe, but that Moshe had not conveyed to Betzalel. Moshe had taught Betzalel the order of construction as it is found in our parsha - first the Ark, and then the Mishkan. Betzalel, however, argued: "Moshe Rabbeinu, the way of the world is that one first builds a house, and afterwards furnishes it! You're telling me to build the furnishings first? Where will I put them?" Moshe told Betzalel that he was indeed correct. This was how he had been instructed by Hashem; he had reversed the order.

So why did Moshe reverse the order? Was it simply an oversight?

The story is told of the sheik of an oil-rich desert kingdom whose wealthy country was missing but one crucial necessity - water. The sheik decided he would travel to America, a land where there were solutions for people who didn't even know they had problems. Certainly there he would find the answer to his country's water shortage.

The sheik spent some time studying American culture, and was eventually convinced that he had come up with the perfect solution to his country's problem. He went around to every plumbing-supply store he could find, grabbing up every imaginable kind of faucet - stainless-steel, copper, modern and antique. Needless to say, the sheik's subjects were less than enthralled with his "foolproof" solution.

Imagine, says the Maggid of Dubno, a person using every last penny he had in order to buy himself an exquisite leather wallet. The wallet, of course, will in the end be of little use, as he has left himself nothing to carry in it. One who exhausts his entire savings in order to purchase the most powerful

computer money can buy, leaving no funds with which to buy software, finds himself with a dream-machine showpiece sitting on his desk, serving no practical purpose. (No, I'm not going to touch the issue of software piracy, for now.)

Moshe Rabbeinu was not giving Betzalel building instructions. He did not speak to him as an architect to his contractor. Moshe spoke conceptually, stressing what was the essence of the Mishkan. The Aron (Holy Ark) was the Mishkan's centerpiece. It contained the holy Torah, and the Luchos (Tablets of the Ten Commandments). Moshe was stressing to Betzalel that although architectural protocol might dictate that the building precede its furnishings, Betzalel should bear in mind that in this case, the furnishings - i.e. the Aron HaKodesh - were the center around which the Mishkan's construction should revolve. Without the Aron and its holy contents, the Mishkan would be rendered an empty edifice, a "dry faucet" devoid of the living waters of the Torah. [Rabbi Uziel Milevsky zt"l]

Upon careful examination, one may find that the "story of the sheik" at times plays itself out in our own lives. Case in point: Two beautiful Yamim Tovim are rapidly approaching - Purim and Pesach. Each of them, in their different ways, require tremendous preparation: Purim has its seudos (festive meals) and mishloach manos. Pesach requires no introduction.

Imagine a person arriving at your door on Purim, hands outstretched, with nothing in them. He apologizes profusely - it seems he spent so much time learning about and preparing himself spiritually for Purim, that he was left with no time to actually take care of arranging his mishloach manos. An unlikely scenario? Well, how about if the beautiful mishloach manos arrived at your door - with no one delivering them! Have you ever spent every last drop of your energy and patience putting those finishing touches on "the perfect mishloach manos" - only to have nothing left with which to actually enjoy Purim? How much more are we "there" than the "ghost mishloach manos?"

How familiar is the torture of a Pesach seder at which our energies were dedicated to keeping our eyes open, instead of sippur yetzias Mitzrayim (telling the story of the Exodus)? Can there not be a medium ground, in which the mitzvos can still be performed with great hiddur (physical beauty), yet without forgetting that we too are part of the mitzvah!

In practice, we must do as Betzalel, first taking care of that which needs to be taken care of in order to fulfill the mitzvos properly. Yet we must be ever mindful of Moshe's warning - to give the Aron its place ahead of the building - so that we are not left with beautiful palaces whose taps runneth empty.

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