

# IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

The last parsha of Sefer Shemos, Pekudei is a summary of all that was achieved from the beginning.

The first verse of the Torah was, "These are the names of the children of Ya'akov that came to Egypt ..." As the rabbis teach, Egypt was a unique exile, one that was meant to fashion us into a nation that could one day stand before G-d and receive His Torah. The whole point of being strangers in lands that were not our own was for the sake of building us into a people that construct a dwelling place for G-d on earth, to reunite the created beings with their Creator. That is precisely how Parashas Pekudei ends, by describing how the Divine Presence "moved into" the Mishkan built by the holy nation of Yisroel.

Though the Mishkan was built with physical materials, more precisely, it was built with attention to detail, specifically to spiritual detail. Egyptian society was an extremely materialistic society, and its goal was to divest the Jewish people of their attachment to G-d. Since sensitivity to truth and its nuances is the basis of a religious perspective, they enslaved the Jewish people with back breaking labor in order to demoralize them and to spiritually desensitize them.

They had been very successful, as the midrash tells us, for, the Jewish people had dropped down to the lowest level of spiritual impurity possible, which represents complete spiritual desensitivity. Therefore, the road to the Mishkan was one that worked 180 degrees in the opposite direction, on the path toward complete spiritual sensitization, and a close relationship with G-d.

[The following was adapted from the book, "Bereishis: A Beginning With No End," from the chapter, "Details and Divine Providence"]

There is beauty in detail. It is our attention to detail that shows how much we care about what we do. For example, when someone walks into a house and notices that even the nooks and crannies have been well-constructed, there is a feeling that the builder cared about what he did. Likewise, unfinished work suggests that the builder was unconcerned about the quality of his work. The way the work is done tells us much about the worker's attitude toward the job.

Similarly, the way we give to others shows how much (or little) we care. When we give to another, an important mode for expressing appreciation, how we give can be more important than what we give.

The yetzer hara does not like detail, at least not the kind that facilitates spiritual growth and fulfills moral responsibility. When it comes to fulfilling a materialistic desire, the yetzer hara may obsess a

person and mire him in the details of how to get what he wants and as much of it as he can. Yet, when it comes to halacha (which is often referred to as a "sea"), the yetzer hara mocks us and chides, "Come on-let's not be fanatic about this!"

Given the role of the yetzer hara in creation, this comes as no surprise. The trick is to not be intimidated by his taunting, or thwarted by his sluggishness, for:

*G-d told Moshe, 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they should take for Me an elevated-offering (t'rumah) ... Shemos 25:1*

The letter mem of t'rumah stands for Torah, which was given in forty days ... [As if to say that] all those who involve themselves in Torah are like those who have brought Me t'rumah, for the Holy One, Blessed is He, only dwells within the four cubits of halacha.-Ba'al HaTurim

Simply put, technical halacha may be less attractive than philosophy, but the study of it and the adherence to it are the building blocks of a relationship with G-d. How we feel about the details of Jewish life, expressed through our study of and fulfillment of mitzvos, reveals how we feel about G-d Himself.

There are very few halachos recorded in detail in the Written Law. For example, there is a mitzvah to eat kosher food, but the Torah says little about what kosher food is. Not eating treif animals is only one aspect of keeping kosher. There is also a mitzvah to wear tefillin, which is mentioned directly in the Torah. The only thing is, the Torah doesn't tell us what tefillin are, or what they look like. The Talmud brings examples of Jews who felt at liberty to interpret the mitzvah of tefillin, since it was not described in the Torah.

All such details of Jewish law are relegated to the Oral Law, which G-d gave to Moshe at Mt. Sinai, to be studied and understood. Without an oral law, mitzvos in the Torah are incomprehensible. Without the Mesorah, mitzvos in the Torah cannot be comprehended correctly.

One of the only mitzvos the Torah does detail, and not just once, but four times, is the construction of the Mishkan. And the question can be asked, why? Is it so crucial for every Jew to know how to build a Mishkan, that G-d was compelled to detail it for all of us? After all, does every Jew study the laws of shechitah (ritual slaughter)? Does every Jew need to know how to construct a pair of tefillin? Why then must every Jew know how to build a Mishkan? The Mishkan could be, and was built by competent individuals and not by the entire nation.

(Obviously the more one knows about Torah, the better, as it leads to greater appreciation for life. There isn't one aspect of Torah that a Jew shouldn't know, providing they have the wherewithal to learn it. But it is possible to eat kosher without knowing how to properly slaughter an animal, and kosher tefillin can be purchased from a competent, G-d-fearing merchant.)

But building the Mishkan is a unique mitzvah. This portable temple was a dwelling place for the Divine Presence and a microcosm of the world. The Torah focused on its construction in detail to make a point: G-d only dwells where there is attention paid to detail. This is something every Jew must know if he or she is going to build a life (which is compared to our own personal Mishkan) within which the Divine Presence can dwell.

At one extreme, this may mean knowing just how high to affix a mezuzah on a doorpost, and at exactly what angle. Or, it may mean knowing the proper procedure for salting meat when making it kosher (something just about everyone used to do at home). At the other extreme, it means knowing all the subtle intricacies of halacha, and how the halachos are affected by changing circumstances.

The sea of Talmud is not a mountain of law by coincidence. It is the basis of most halachic rulings, but more important, it is the embodiment of everything which the Jewish people stand for: concern for detail in serving our Creator.

The Talmud may seem obsessed with detail. That is only because by living with the details of the Oral Law, by studying them, understanding them and expounding on them, we show G-d how much we care about His Torah. We understand its role in bringing us and the world toward fulfillment.

Whether it is to build a Mishkan, to keep kosher or to wear tefillin, it is important to resist the temptation to gloss over halacha. To leave the details and the intricacies of Torah law to the "wise men" who sit and learn Torah day and night is to misunderstand to whom Eliyahu's bais midrash was speaking: This message is for every Jew who wishes to guarantee himself a place in the World-to-Come, and who chooses to make a dwelling place, in his own way, for the Divine Presence.

Have a great Shabbos. It says, "Many are the laws of Shabbos," but remember, don't be intimidated by them; instead, use them to increase your spiritual sensitivity, and this will make your Shabbos a "dwelling place" for spirituality as well.

Pinchas Winston

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