

# THE TENT OF NOT GIVING

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

Why is it that there is never enough time on Erev Shabbos (Friday)? More so, the length or shortness of Friday does not make any difference; when it comes time for candle lighting all work must stop. Whether or not the chicken is ready or the soup hot, the kneidelach (matzah balls) too hard and the desert a perceived disaster, the suits and dresses still at the cleaners and you have no cash for the housekeeper, you forgot to wish your parents good-Shabbos and you forgot that guests were coming for lunch, too bad! The time has run out and what is - is, and what is not - will not be.

The Friday experience is not new. Last week's Parsha began with the divine injunction of Shabbos. "Labor for six days but the Seventh day is holy. Anyone who labors on the Seventh day will die." Rashi 35:2 referenced the Mechilta that states, "G-d commanded the Jews not to labor on Shabbos before commanding them to build the Mishkan to teach that the construction of the Mishkan did not take precedence over the restrictions of Shabbos." That means that while in the desert the Jews were already being told to stop working on Friday early enough to get home in time for Shabbos.

Every student of Halacha and Talmud knows that the 39 prohibited Melachos - labors are derived from an analysis of the Mishkan's construction. Anything that was required for the construction of the Mishkan was by definition forbidden to do on the Shabbos. We can assume that the connection between the building of the Mishkan and not doing so on Shabbos has greater meaning than identifying the basic 39 prohibited acts of labor. Let's take a closer look at the relationship between Shabbos and the Mishkan.

The Jews sinned with the Golden Calf and G-d withdrew behind the veil of nature. Moshe descended from Mt. Sinai on the first Yom Kippur bearing the second set of Luchos (Tablets) and was set apart from all others by the radiance of his countenance. Like G-d, he too symbolically withdrew from the people and hid behind his veil. The Mishkan was presented to the nation as a sign of G-d's love and a sign of the irrevocable changes imposed by the sin of the Golden Calf. True, G-d still dwelled in their midst but He was closeted behind the beams and tapestries of the Tabernacle.

When Moshe stood before the nation on the 11th day of Tishrei (the day after returning with the second Tablets) the trepidation was palatable. Yes, Moshe had returned with a new set of Luchos, but what would be the nation's relationship with G-d? Looking back to Parshas Ki Sisa the Torah recorded Moshe's ascent carrying the blank Luchos that he had personally hewed from stone. Upon reaching Sinai's summit, G-d descended upon the mountain in a cloud cover and stood with Moshe. Moshe immediately called out to G-d evoking the formula for Divine mercy and forgiveness. Moshe

then prostrated himself upon the mountaintop and made his request. (34:8) "If I have found favor in Your eyes... let G-d go among us..." This was Moshe's one and only request. He summed up the nation's shame, regret, and fear of retribution in the words, "...let G-d go among us..."

Forty days later G-d dispatched Moshe with the second Luchos and His message of forgiveness and love; yet, the people did not know what that really meant for their relationship with G-d. When the next day they heard Moshe's command, "Make for Me a Mishkan and I will dwell in your midst," the nation understood that regardless of the irrevocable changes in their relationship with G-d, G-d would still be among them. Their relief in knowing that G-d was giving them a second chance galvanized them into immediate and frenzied action. As the Parsha records, "Moshe commanded... No one is to bring any more donations for the construction of the Mishkan!" (36:6) However, the verse adds a statement about the attitude of the people to Moshe's command to stop the flow of donations, "And the people were restrained from bringing" It is clear that the Torah is describing the reluctance of the nation to listen to Moshe's instruction! Had it not been for Moshe's directive, the flow of precious metals, materials, and talent would have continued unabated!

The desire of the nation to participate in the construction of the Mishkan was born out of desperation and fear coupled with an intense desire to regain G-d's love. For them it was like a spouse tottering on the brink of divorce scared that his or her "betrayal" had caused irrevocable damage to the marriage. Not knowing what the outcome of the deliberations would be, the perpetrator of the betrayal fearfully waits to find out his or her spouse's decision. Will there be forgiveness or not? Imagine the relief when the "hurt" spouse grants forgiveness! The relief and the determination to be righteous should be palatable!

We would not be surprised if the forgiven spouse launched a frenzied campaign to regain his or her spouse's trust. We would expect concerted concern for all things big and small, attention to details and nuance of instruction, and a real attempt at romance and courting. Flowers would be brought, gifts beautifully wrapped, and cards carefully worded and presented. It might even reach a point where the "forgiving spouse," would say, "Enough! No more flowers, gifts, and cards! Give me some space!"

So it was with the Jews. Desperately afraid of losing their relationship with G-d, the command to build the Mishkan was their reprieve. They could not do or give enough; yet, Moshe told them to stop! The order to stop giving demanded a degree of self-control and obedience that had been proved lacking at the time of the Golden Calf. It demanded that they impose control over desire, logic over emotion. Had they only done so when they thought Moshe was late in returning the sin of the Golden Calf would have never happened. Their inability at that time to keep their emotions and needs in check brought them to the brink of disaster.

It was similar to the original sin of Adam and Chava. They did not just eat from the forbidden fruit; they were enticed to do so by the serpent. The serpent convinced Chava that excess in the pursuit

of G-d's truth was a virtue and a sign of love. It was therefore a real possibility that the nation's desperation to regain G-d's favor would motivate them to ignore Moshe's instructions. (The deaths of Nadav and Avihu) The fact that they listened and stopped donating to the construction of the Mishkan indicated that their Teshuvah (repentance) was real and not just momentary.

The same was true with regards to Shabbos and the Mishkan. Their desperation and determination to build the Mishkan could not take precedence over listening to G-d's wishes. Therefore, every Friday the builders and craftsman of the Mishkan had to control their enthusiasm, desperation, determination, and devotional frenzy, and listen to the word of G-d.

The same is true every Friday. Many people will transgress the Shabbos from the mistaken belief that excess in serving G-d is desired by G-d. They will go past the final time for cooking and cleaning because they wish to show greater respect for Shabbos by making sure that everything is in order. Warm food on Shabbos day is possible if one knows the proper way for warming food on Shabbos; however, the desire to enhance Shabbos with warm food does not allow for Halacha (Jewish law) to be compromised, regardless of who's coming for dinner!

I would like to suggest that G-d's imposition of control on the construction of the Mishkan was one reason why He did not allow it to be assembled until Rosh Chodesh Nissan (the first day of the month of Nissan). Although it was completed almost three months earlier on the 25th day of Kislev, it was not assembled until Nissan. Imagine the frustration of the people! Such desperation and hope had been infused in the donation of the materials and dedication of the talent; yet, they would not realize their objective until G-d would say so and Moshe himself would assemble it! It forced each participant in the construction to accept that their contribution of time, materials, and talent were not for personal aggrandizement, pleasure, or accomplishment; instead, it was solely as an expression of individual and national subjugation to G-d's will and intent. In doing so, the people infused the Mishkan with the greatest and most basic purpose and sanctity - that of serving G-d.

May the coming months of Adar and Nissan herald the long awaited redemption with the coming of Mashiach and the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash!

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