BUILDING EFFORT NECESSARY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Book of Shemot concludes with the basic lesson in Jewish life - accountability. The Torah spends a great deal of space to record what amounts of materials and money actually went into the construction of the mishkan. Moshe himself had to present an accounting for all of the work that was done and the expenditures entailed in the mammoth undertaking of the mishkan. The Torah teaches us that there can be no loose ends in Jewish life - not in public projects nor in personal affairs. The rule of the Torah is adam mooad lolam - humans are always responsible and accountable for their actions and behavior. At the end of everything, an accounting will certainly be demanded of us. And that is why everything we do in life, no matter how slight and unimportant it may appear to be at the moment, is ultimately important and vital. For we will have to account for those words, actions and behavior.

The Torah concludes the Book of Shemot by recording how the Divine Pre sence, so to speak, was seen and felt within the encampment of Israel in the desert. Ramban teaches us that thus the conclusion of the Book of Shemot describes the restoration of Israel to the status of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of Israel, in whose homes the Godly Presence was recognized s being present. The Divine is only experienced where there is a sense of accountability and responsibility. For accountability and responsibility are constant and permanent attitudes. They are not a once in a while spiritual high, a moment of seeming ecstasy for the soul. Those moments in life are rare, fleeting and usually illusory. But the tough daily grind of being a responsible, loyal person is the true way to experiencing spirituality in its normal, natural and most desirable state.

That is the reason, I believe, why the Jewish people were bidden to construct the mishkan in the desert through their own efforts and labor. The mishkan had many miraculous and supernatural events in its construction. The menorah, briach hatichon and other artifacts were impossible of human efforts of construction alone. So, why wasn't the whole mishkan itself just deposited on earth from heaven directly? Why did Bezalel and Aholiov and the rest of the Jewish artisans have to labor so diligently to create what in the end would be a miraculous structure anyway? The answer lies in the sense of responsibility and accountability that human effort brings to any endeavor. Man cannot accomplish anything alone. But God demands that we apply our efforts and dedication to the task. And we are held accountable for those efforts and costs. If we discharge them correctly and morally then a mishkan can be achieved through our efforts, talents and time. If we feel that we are not accountable and that our efforts are unnecessary, or even worse, unimportant, then the entire experience of the building of the mishkan is wasted. And that is a tragic and sad thing. Therefore,

chazak, chazak, vnitchazek, let us strengthen ourselves in our sense of Godly service and responsibility to rebuild the mishkan once again in our lives and times.

Shabat Shalom.

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