

THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

There is a distinct educational pattern to the order of the parshiyot of the Torah, Yitro, Mishpatim and Trumah. Yitro establishes for us the general outline and parameters of effective moral life. Mishpatim deals with the details, the everyday nitty-gritty of moral living. Trumah deals with the moral alchemy of converting physical objects - gold, silver, bronze, fabrics and precious stones - into holiness, into a mishkan. It is obvious that the task of building a mishkan, figuratively or literally, is a most daunting one. Yet, people have a tendency to approach this task lightly and see it only in purely monetary or construction terms. The Torah warns us against such an attitude by placing the parsha of Trumah only after the parshiyot of Yitro and Mishpatim. Only those who understand the challenges of attempting to live a moral life in everyday society, who understand the grand moral vision of Judaism and are devoted as well to the details of moral performance - only they can come forward and feel themselves equal to the task of constructing a mishkan, an oasis of holy spirituality in a very profane world.

The Psalmist warned us that one must first "turn away from evil" and then one can "do good." Our world today is not interested in "turning away from evil" but is very busy with attempting to "do good." Therefore all of the "mishkan" structures, the ideals and plans of the past twentieth century, collapsed because "doing good" alone cannot maintain a society. The "doing good" must be preceded by "turning away from evil." Only then can the great mishkan truly take shape and have a possibility of permanence and societal influence.

The mishkan of Moshe was a portable one. It traveled with the Jewish people during its sojourn in the Sinai desert and for the first centuries of their attempting to settle in the Land of Israel. Eventually, the Temple in Jerusalem became a permanent successor to the mishkan of Moshe. But the Temple, in all of its forms and revivals, also proved to be only a temporary building as far as Jewish history was concerned. So, the Jewish people gain was forced to rely on a portable mishkan that would accompany them on their long night of exile and persecution. This new mishkan, like the original mishkan that it represented, was built upon the foundations of Torah life as outlined in the parshiyot of Yitro and Mishpatim. Therefore this mishkan survived all of the ravages of time and of the bitter hatred directed against it and the Jews in the centuries of Jewish exile.

Attempting to find the shortcut to the parsha of Trumah is a favorite, even popular, occupation in the Jewish world. But the shortcut leads nowhere, no matter how enticing and smooth the road that it represents. And that has been the bitter lesson of Jewish history over the past two centuries. As we

read Trumah therefore we should remember this lesson of history and Jewish morality. If we are able to build the holy mishkan within ourselves and Jewish society, the Lord has promised that He will dwell in our midst. The building of the mishkan is the ultimate challenge to every Jewish generation and society.

Shabat Shalom.

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