

TORAH - BLUEPRINT FOR LIFE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

There have been many explanations advanced over the years for all of the detail that appears in this week's parsha regarding the construction of the mishkan - the Tabernacle, constructed by the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai. The Torah, that usually is very chary with words, goes to great lengths here to emphasize and describe every detail of its construction, the materials and the process. I think that this is part of the Torah's unending emphasis on the importance of detail, of the small things in life that lead to the makeup of the greater whole. Every builder knows that if the architect or designer leaves out even the smallest detail from the structural plans, disaster can potentially occur. The Torah is our blueprint for life and immortality. It is loaded with details. All of Jewish life and ritual is composed of myriad details. The mishkan/Tabernacle serves only as an example - a physical building constructed with strict attention to great detail - for the even more complicated and delicate spiritual structure that we are to build during our days here on earth. In order to emphasize the necessity for the adherence to detail in constructing our spiritual lives, the Torah was purposely heavy on detail in describing the physical appearance and construction of the mishkan/Tabernacle. This I believe is one of the more important facets of the description of the construction of the mishkan/Tabernacle in this week's parsha.

In addition, the description of the mishkan/Tabernacle outlines for us a labor of love. First, the necessary materials for building the mishkan/Tabernacle were all donated. "From each person whose heart prompts to contribute shall you take My donations for the mishkan." The physical labor and artistic talent involved in building the mishkan and in fashioning its artifacts were also a labor of love - of voluntary work and wholehearted offering of time and abilities. It was a national project in which all Jews willingly and joyfully participated. The same should be said regarding Jewish life, both personally and nationally. Coercion and force, taxation and heavy-handedness are not really the prescription for a better Jewish world. Just as the mishkan was a labor of love and volunteerism, so too must one's construction of a Torah life for one's self adhere to that model. It is not enough to be born Jewish - one must want to be Jewish and to practice Jewish life with enthusiasm and love. The same is certainly true for building national and communal Jewish life, whether here in Israel or in the Diaspora. There was an old advertisement about a famous soft drink in the United States whose theme was "Try it, you'll like it." Well, Judaism and its tenets, values and rituals can adopt that slogan as well. The key to Torah life is the enjoyment and satisfaction that it gives to one who lives in that fashion. The mishkan therefore teaches us the lesson of the inherent gain and worth of love's labor and of the necessary intense desire to be Jewish in the fullest sense of that word.

Shabat shalom.

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