

COMPLEXITY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's parsha is the longest one of the Torah. It is mainly so because of the description of the identical offerings to the dedication of the Mishkan by the heads of the individual tribes of Israel. What makes this lengthy repetitive section of the parsha so difficult to understand is the fact that each of the twelve leaders of the tribes brought the exact same identical offering to that dedication. In addition, the Torah itself at the end of the parsha lumps all of the offerings together to give us a total count of what was brought as the offerings to the dedication. The question naturally begs itself: Why the individual details about each identical offering when the sum total of the offerings is going to be summed up clearly at the end of the parsha?

This question has perplexed all of the commentators to the Torah throughout the ages. Like many another question regarding the mysteries of detail that are part of the Torah narrative regarding the Mishkan and its artifacts, there are many answers proposed but somehow at the end of the day the question still persists and gnaws at our understanding of Torah. All of the proposed answers naturally possess truth in them but somehow they are not truly satisfying. Perhaps the Torah wished to leave us with the question unanswered so that we can have some appreciation of the mystery of the Mishkan and to teach us that a structure that, so to speak, contains God's presence within it is beyond our rational powers to explain and reduce to human terms.

Rashi points out that the Torah accommodated itself to the wishes of the heads of the tribes, who undoubtedly wanted public recognition for their individual, albeit identical, offerings to the dedication of the Mishkan. Having refrained from participating in the original drive for the raw materials and artisanship required to build the Mishkan, they wanted to make certain that they would not be shut out of its dedication ceremonies.

The Torah counts this as a positive act on the part of the leaders of the tribes and not as a negative honor-seeking device on their part. Oftentimes a false sense of presumed modesty possesses people when it comes to participating in helping worthwhile holy causes. People turn down offers of recognition and honor, which could be of great help to others and to Jewish causes generally, out of a sense of modesty that is really not intrinsic to them and their personalities.

Perhaps this also is one of the lessons of the Torah in relating to us the offerings of the leaders of Israel. The offerings of the leaders constitute a long program for one event. Nevertheless, the Torah offers praise and detail to each and every one of those leaders of the tribes for their generosity and newfound willingness to help the Mishkan and all of Israel.

The pure length and repetitiveness of that section of this week's parsha emphasizes to us the positive spin that the Torah puts upon all such people and events. Human beings are very complex. The Torah reads our hearts and psyches accurately and compassionately. Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at

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