

# THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

All biblical commentators have puzzled for ages over the main topic of this week's parsha - the mishkan/tabernacle and its construction. Why does God need a building, so to speak, to dwell in? Why all of the details in the Torah regarding this essentially temporary building and its artifacts? And why does the Torah, which in so many other instances is so concise and chary about words, devote entire long chapters to the details of the mishkan/tabernacle? Many different theories regarding these difficulties have been proposed.

We all know that it is from the description of the "work" that went into the construction of the mishkan/tabernacle that the definitions of the thirty-nine main categories of "work" on Shabat are derived and therefore the Torah had to go into such detail. Yet the question begs itself as to why the Torah did not state these thirty-nine types of "work" directly when it described the institution of the Shabat to us.

The masters of kabala read into the descriptions of the mishkan/tabernacle great hidden secrets and explanations of our universe and its untold mysteries and wonders. They even saw in this detailed description a revelation of the "real" world of Heaven and what that spiritual realm looks like. But the Torah, though containing seventy different faces - and with mysticism certainly one of those faces, it primarily possesses a simple, declarative aspect to it. And it is that face that is most difficult to understand and to deal with regarding the mishkan/tabernacle.

I have never found any easy answers to the above questions. They are apparently part of the mysteries of Torah itself, part of the holiness that is beyond our rational understanding and appreciation. But, certainly, there are lessons - important life lessons that can be learned from the Torah's emphasis on the description of the mishkan/tabernacle.

One lesson in life is that the devil is in the details. Everyone agrees that to build a holy sanctuary is a noble and necessary task for humans to undertake. But, the details of how to go about doing it and what it is supposed to look like when built are always fraught with disagreement and sometimes even disillusion. The Torah, therefore, gave us a specific outline as to how it should be built and how it should appear. The Torah, through its mitzvot and values, does the same for our daily physical and spiritual lives - our very existence.

A second lesson is that humans build the house of God, so to speak, and not God Himself. God may not need the mishkan/tabernacle but humans do need such a place in a tangible, real form. Our

earthly nature demands such a physical presence. This is especially true regarding Judaism, which allows for no physical representation of God in any way. Our construction of the mishkan/tabernacle is our way of attempting, so to speak, to reach God and connect with the ineffable and eternal. In dealing with the mishkan/tabernacle, we are really dealing with our own immortality and innate connection to the Creator.

Shabat shalom.

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