

PROJECT OF HOLINESS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The conclusion of the book of Shmot describes the attainment of Israel in having the Divine Presence rest upon the Jewish people through the medium of the Mishkan that it had built in the desert of Sinai. Ramban states that this accomplishment of having the Divine Spirit dwell amongst the people of Israel was equal to that state of being during the period of the Avot, the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel, when the Divine Spirit was resident in their tents and homes.

However, it is one type of accomplishment for an individual family to attain the degree of spirituality that the presence of the Divine Spirit in its home signifies and a far different matter for an entire nation of people, millions in number, to do so as well. This achievement borders on the extraordinary and in fact has rarely again been achieved in Jewish history.

Of course, the revelation and granting of the Torah at Sinai undoubtedly contributed to this spiritual feat though the incident of the Golden Calf indicates to us that even the experience of Divine revelation does not guarantee the maintenance of spiritual heights and Torah behavior.

There must therefore be a deeper personal reason for the ability of Israel at that moment and place to merit the Divine Spirit's presence within its midst on a steady basis.

For it is clear from the Torah that the presence of the Divine Spirit amongst a human society is obviously more dependent on the actions and behavior of that society itself than on the Divine Spirit, so to speak.

I feel that the attainment of the generation of the desert, in spite of its many failures and ultimate doom, to achieve Divine Presence in its midst was due to its sacrifice and willingness to build the Mishkan itself, no matter what the cost and detail. The building fund drive, so to speak, was oversubscribed.

A project of holiness and nobility, that merits across the board support and great generosity from the society that it intends to serve, is the main stepping stone to reach spiritual heights. The concerted willingness of Israel to have the Divine Spirit dwell amongst it itself drove the effort that resulted in that goal being achieved.

The great rebbe of Kotzk is reported to have said that God can be found wherever humans allow Him to enter. Seeking God has always been a Jewish goal. A society that devotes itself to that task with sacrifice and sincerity has that ability, even in weaker generations, to achieve great spiritual and

societal accomplishments. But it requires unity, persistence and a willingness to sacrifice wealth, talent and effort for the cause.

A generation that is bitter, divided, intolerant of others and selfish as regarding its blessings will never be able to build a society worthy of God's presence, so to speak, residing within it.

We are engaged in a struggle to have our present Jewish state and society become more traditional and spiritual, more idealistic and less iconoclastic. If we are able even to glimpse a glimmer of God's presence amongst us, it will be worth all of our efforts and sacrifice in achieving this goal.

Shabat shalom.

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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 www.rabbiwein.com