

PARASHAS PIKUDEI

A House of Hearts

If we were to count up all the verses in the Torah that describe the construction of the Mishkan in minute detail, beginning with Parashas Terumah and culminating with this week's Torah portion, the number would reach into the hundreds. Why does the Torah pay such extraordinary attention to the construction of a building that existed only in Biblical times and was eventually replaced by the Temple, which was of totally different dimensions? What message does this painstaking description convey to us today?

In order to find the answers we must go back to last week's *parashah*. As their contribution to the construction of the Mishkan, the Nesiim, the tribal princes, offered to wait until the end and provide everything that still remained to be done, a most magnanimous gesture. But was this indeed a good offer?

Let us try to find a parallel in a contemporary setting. A philanthropist comes to a major charitable organization or institute of Torah study and offers to cover the annual deficit for the next ten years. No matter what the shortfall, he will foot the bill. What would the reaction be? Wild celebration! Ecstasy! The philanthropist would be hoisted onto the shoulders of the administrators and fund-raisers, and they would dance through the streets. A grand dinner would be arranged in his honor, and he would be presented with a beautiful plaque.

This was also the offer of the Nesiim, and it would seem that it, too, should have been greeted with appreciation and gratitude. But it was not. The Torah castigates them subtly by omitting a letter from their name (35:27). Our Sages point out that, although their intentions were noble, they should not have postponed their contribution until the very end. But the question remains: Where exactly did they err? What was wrong with offering to guarantee that there would be no deficit?

The commentators explain that the Nesiim's error was in bringing a businesslike attitude to the construction of the Mishkan. From a very practical point of view, their offer was excellent. But Hashem did not ask for contributions to the Mishkan because he needed help making ends meet on the construction project. He wanted the people to contribute their love, their passionate devotion, their enthusiasm, their excitement. He wanted the Mishkan to be constructed of the outpourings of Jewish hearts. The gold and silver of the donations were simply the conduits by

which these sentiments were infused into the structure of the Mishkan. The Nesiim, however, took a cool, pragmatic attitude, and for this lack of passion and irrepressible fervor, the Torah takes them to task.

In this light, we can understand why the Torah meticulously enumerates each minute detail of the construction. Each little nugget of gold, each little piece of embroidery represented another piece of a Jewish heart aflame with devotion to our Creator, and as such, it is infinitely and eternally precious.

A very wealthy man once came to the director of a large charitable institution. "Rabbi," he said, "my father just passed away, and in his memory, I would like to cover your entire budget for the coming year."

The rabbi looked at him for a moment, then shook his head. "I will accept a nice donation from you, but I cannot accept this offer."

"But how can you refuse?" asked the wealthy man, completely taken aback. "Don't you have a responsibility to the poor families who depend on you?"

"Let me explain. Every year, our fund-raisers travel to distant towns and villages, collecting small contributions from hundreds, even thousands of Jewish people. Hashem could undoubtedly provide for our needs more easily, but He surely wants all these good people to share in the mitzvah of giving charity. So you see, I have a responsibility to these people, and I cannot deprive them of this mitzvah."

In our own lives, we are often inspired to get involved with important causes, but we might sometimes feel that what we can contribute, either in time, talent or resources, is simply inadequate. How will the big picture be affected, we ask ourselves, by the few dollars or hours we can contribute? It seems to us like a drop in the ocean. Unfortunately, such feelings may prevent us from participating to the full extent of our capabilities. Let us remember the lesson of the Mishkan - that Hashem does not seek our help, only our hearts. It is not how much we do that is important, but how we do it. If we contribute with love, caring and compassion, then even the smallest contribution assumes tremendous proportions.