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You Are a Mini Tabernacle

This week's Torah portion outlines the intricate details of the Tabernacle and its assembly. The Tabernacle was a holy place in this world where God's Presence would reside. But what does this have to do with my life when there is no Tabernacle today?

Lesson:

Our Sages tell us that we are all microcosms of the Tabernacle. Just as in the Tabernacle, where each little intricacy, every minutia, every little

detail was accounted for to optimize the Tabernacle's holiness – God is orchestrating every detail of our lives to bring out our holiness as well. Every detail, interaction, circumstance, relationship, occurrence, in our life is perfectly crafted just for us to help bring about our highest, holiest potential so we can truly shine.

Our parsha also tells us that the dedication of the Tabernacle lasted seven days, in which Moses erected and dismantled the Tabernacle every day until the eighth day. Here too the Tabernacle is analogous to all of our lives. Every time Moses underwent the process of dismantling and rebuilding, he invested in us the strength and encouragement to rebuild ourselves at different stages of our lives. We all have times in our lives where we feel down and dejected but Moses infused within us the strength to get back up – to rebuild, to keep trying.

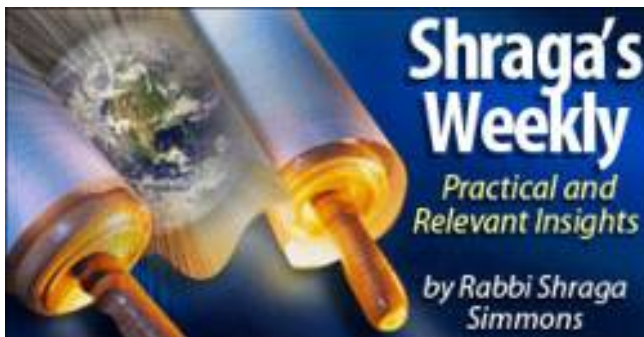
God knows that we are human and fallible. But God asked us, human beings, to create, build, and construct a place for God. The glory of God rested in the work of Man; the Tabernacle - what we, humans, built is shining bright with God's radiance. We have the power to build and rebuild ourselves as well, no matter how far we think we've fallen. Each time we get back up, we shine a little brighter with God's glory.

How was it that Moshe was able to undergo such a gargantuan task of assembling the Tabernacle? Seeing how heavy it was, he asked God, "How can anyone erect it?"

A famous Torah commentary, Rashi, comments that God told him just to make the attempt, and

the Tabernacle would stand on its own; this is reflected in the passive tense of “the Tabernacle was erected”. Herein lies the secret: we must only desire to create a space for God - to see His miracles and Hand in every intricate detail and at every stage of our lives – and want to grow and develop to fulfill our highest, holiest potential and thus we will succeed in creating an optimal space for God and truly be like the Tabernacle.

Exercise: Think of yourself as a Tabernacle, a place where God’s Presence wants to be. What actions can you take today that would invite God into your space a little more?



In the Eyes of God and Man

Previous parshas described building the Tabernacle in the desert, including the donation of materials and the actual construction. This week, Moses presents a precise accounting of how each donation was utilized. For example, since one silver half-shekel had been collected from each of the 603,550 men (totaling 301,775 shekels), Moses reports constructing 100 pillar sockets (at 3,000 shekels apiece), with the remaining 1,775 shekels going toward silver bands, hooks and caps. In much the same manner, Moses lists his

allocation of gold, copper, wood, fabrics, animal skins and precious gems – confirming that every penny went to the Tabernacle – not into his own Swiss bank account.

Yet since Moses was known for his utmost integrity and had a reputation beyond reproach, why did he deem it necessary to make a detailed public accounting? Nowhere do we see God requesting this information. Yet Moses does so voluntarily. Why?

The answer offers insight into the two-way street of integrity: Not only do others have the responsibility to judge me favorably, but at the same time it is my responsibility to avoid creating a situation where others may draw the wrong conclusion.

All too often we hear someone say, "I don't care what anybody thinks – I know I'm doing the right thing." The Torah approach, however, is that while we certainly strive to do what's right in the eyes of God, neither may we give the wrong impression to our fellow man.

The Talmud (Shekalim 3:2) states that when the treasurer would withdraw funds from the Temple coffers, he was not permitted to wear any garment that might possibly conceal money – e.g. pockets, cuffs or even shoes. These precautions were taken not because of apprehension that money would actually be stolen, but rather lest people come to think it was! As King Solomon says:

*"You shall find favor and understanding in the eyes of God **and mankind.**" (Proverbs 3:4)*

Sapphire Quarry

In the case of Moses, there was a particular need for full disclosure. After Moses smashed the tablets at the Golden Calf, God forgave the Jewish people and commanded Moses to chisel out a second set of tablets. The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 32:2) says that God placed a sapphire quarry right in Moses' tent, thereby making him a very wealthy man.

Immediately thereafter, construction began on the Tabernacle, and Moses was entrusted with approximately one ton of gold and silver. The potential for abuse was so great, that even though there was never any accusation of misdeed, Moses still wanted to remove the slightest suspicion that he'd become wealthy from misappropriated Tabernacle funds.

Moses' concern was further compounded by his position of public prominence. He knew that all eyes were upon him. So while this sensitivity is incumbent upon each of us, it is all the more so upon our leaders.

Avoiding Misunderstandings

This has particular implications for observant Jews. Imagine an observant Jew going into McDonalds to make a phone call. A passer-by might mistakenly draw one of the following conclusions:

1. That McDonalds is really kosher and it's OK to eat there, or
2. That this Jew (who purports to keep kosher) is sneaking around doing something he shouldn't, or

3. Even though McDonalds is not kosher, but if others are lax in observance, then somehow it's okay for me, too.

We don't live in an isolated, compartmentalized world. Rather, we are a community and a nation – and that puts each of us in the position to inspire others and lift the baseline of acceptable behavior. Like it or not, we are all role models for each other. And one person's actions – even those misconstrued – can generate either good or bad PR for God and the Jewish people.

The joke is told of a rabbi who is bothered by the fact that he's never been able to eat pork. So he flies to a remote tropical island and checks into a hotel. He immediately gets himself a table at the finest restaurant and orders the most expensive pork dish on the menu. As he's eagerly waiting for it to be served, he is shocked to hear his name called from across the restaurant. He looks up to see 10 of his loyal congregants approaching. Just his luck, they'd chosen the same time to visit the same remote location!

At that moment, the waiter comes out with a huge silver tray carrying a whole roasted pig with an apple in its mouth. The rabbi looks up sheepishly at his congregants and says, "Wow – you order an apple in this place and look how it's served!"

Putting It Into Practice

This concept has endless applications in everyday life.

Imagine you've just purchased a magazine at the newsstand, and now you're going into the supermarket. If you walk out of the supermarket with a magazine in your hand, you're setting

yourself up for unpleasant accusations. So based on what we've said, take one of the following precautions:

1. Get a bag from the newsstand and keep the magazine in the bag with the receipt.
2. As you pass through the checkout line, announce loudly that you've purchased the magazine elsewhere.
3. Stick the magazine in your car before even entering the supermarket. In this way, no one might misconstrue.

This Shabbat, let's take inspiration from Moses and think about steps to enhance our integrity.



The Tabernacle and Us

There are many levels on which we can perceive the construction of the Tabernacle. In a sense, we are all sanctuaries in microcosm, for within each of us there is a spark of God. Therefore, we must study every aspect of the construction of the Tabernacle so that we may realize our spiritual potential.

It is written, "And Moses erected the Tabernacle."¹ Our Sages teach that the dedication of the Tabernacle lasted seven days, during which

time, Moses *erected and dismantled* the Tabernacle every day. It was only on the eighth day that he allowed it to stand. At first glance, the reason for this may be difficult to understand, but therein is to be found a life-transforming teaching. Every time Moses went through the process of erecting and dismantling, he invested us with the strength to *rebuild ourselves: to learn from our failures and reinvent ourselves* so that we might reach our spiritual potential. *Moshe Rabbeinu* imparted to us a most powerful lesson: *Failures* can be converted into *growth* and *weaknesses* can be transformed into *strengths*, and that's what life's challenges are all about.

Further study of the building of the Tabernacle calls our attention to the fact that every time an activity was carried out for the Tabernacle, it is followed by the phrase, "As Hashem commanded Moses."² If we truly desire to live as Jews, we must commit ourselves to do that which God *commanded Moses*. Our Torah is a perfect instruction manual which addresses every detail of our lives, and if we follow it, we will be insulated from the corrosive influences of our society and culture. It's very much like finding an oasis in a hostile desert or discovering an island in a turbulent sea. Building a Tabernacle within ourselves assures our Jewish survival and fulfillment.

WE NEED NEVER FEAR

We live in a menacing and uncertain world, a world which our Sages foretold and described as *Ikvesa D'Meshicha* – the Footsteps of Messiah (the period preceding the Messianic period). Our Sages predicted that during this time, all our

cherished icons would fail us and our world would crumble before our very eyes. Nationally and internationally, we will be plagued by political and economic chaos. Internally, our families will become fragmented and, in place of serenity and love, turbulence and factionalism will prevail. But if we build a sanctuary within ourselves, we will be insulated from these plagues.

Thus, the concluding passage of the *parashah* teaches us that "the cloud of God would be on the Tabernacle by day and fire would be on it by night..."³ This teaching reminds us that if we make our lives into sanctuaries, the cloud of God will always protect us by day, and the fire of God – the light of Torah – will illuminate our darkness ... so we need never fear.

NEVER TAKE ANYTHING FOR GRANTED

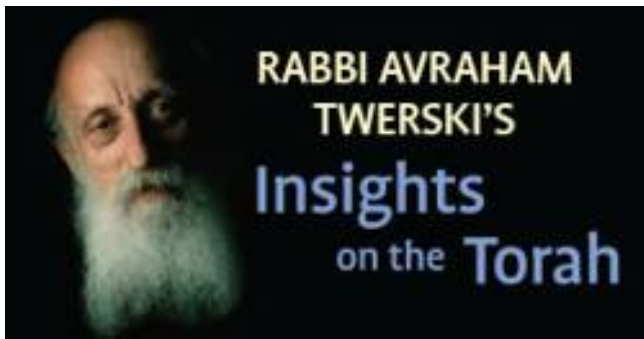
It is written that when the Jewish people completed their work, Moses *blessed* the nation.⁴ Here again, we witness the eternity of Moses' words, for the blessing that he proclaimed is familiar to us from *Psalms* 90:17 – a prayer that we say every night before we go to sleep, a prayer that is forever on our lips: "*Vi'hi noam* – May the pleasantness of the Lord our God be upon us...." We also learn from Moses' blessing that we must express *hakaras hatov* (appreciation), for a blessing is also an expression of gratitude.

We might ask, however, that since the Jewish people were only fulfilling God's commandments, carrying out their responsibilities, why was it necessary to thank them? Here, again, is a teaching to guide us for all time. We are not to

take anything for granted. Every deed, every act must be acknowledged with thanks and blessing. So, for example, when the Kohen completes his blessing of the congregation, we say to him, "*Yasher Koach* – Thank you," although that is his responsibility and he is required to do it. Saying thank you enables us to develop a greater appreciation for life and to acknowledge the fact that we are *indebted* and *must give back to the world*.

This awareness is critical in our entitlement-oriented culture, in which we have come to believe that everything is coming to us. Our Torah's emphasis on indebtedness sensitizes us to our responsibility to give back. Indeed, the words *modim* and *l'hodos*, both meaning *thanks* in Hebrew, have a double meaning. They also connote "admission," for *thanks* is an *admission*, an acknowledgment of our dependence on the kindness of others. For many, it is difficult to concede their vulnerability. They convince themselves that they are "self-made" and not beholden to anyone. Such an attitude is self-destructive. It inhibits meaningful relationships, destroys marriages, and bars people from coming close to God.

1. Ex. 40:18.
2. Ibid. 39:1 et al.
3. Ibid. 40:38
4. Ibid. 39:43.



It's Up To You

*Bezalel made the Ark of acacia wood
#(37:1)*

Rashi says that because Bezalel dedicated himself to the work of the Ark more than others, it bears his name: the Ark that Bezalel made.

In Exodus 25:10, the Torah says, “They shall make an Ark of acacia wood.” The Midrash notes that for all the other appurtenances of the Sanctuary, God said to Moses, “You shall make,” but in the case of the Ark, He said, “They shall make.” The Midrash explains this exception; God said to Moses, “Let everyone participate in the fashioning of the Ark, so that all will have the merit of Torah” (Shemos Rabbah 34:3). There seems to be a bit of a conflict here. God instructed that everyone should share in the construction of the Ark, yet it appears as though Bezalel did it almost single-handedly.

Rabbi Boruch Sorotzkin says that the message herein is that when Torah is involved, one should not assume that others will do their part, but rather act as if one were the only person who could carry out the responsibility. Although all the Israelites were obligated to share in the Ark,

Bezalel approached it as if he were the only one available to fashion it.

There is the well-known story of the shul that asked all its members to donate a cup of wine. Each member reasoned that everyone else would donate wine, so he could get away with putting in a cup of water. When they came to fetch wine from the barrel, it was all pure water! That is what may happen when one relies on others to do the task. Every person may rationalize that others will do it.

Rabbi Sorotzkin's observation is relevant to all commandments as well as to Torah. When there is something to be done, do not rely on others, even if they share the responsibility. Act as if you were the only person available and capable of doing the task.

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