

Today's Torah portion continues the instructions for the building of the tabernacle and the preparing of the clothing for the high priest. The process had been interrupted by the shameful episode of the golden calf and could only be started up again once the covenant with G-d has been re-established and two new tablets of the Law had been provided by G-d.

Our portion begins with a reminder of the Sabbath as the cornerstone of biblical spirituality. If we do not honour G-d with our time and make Him the centre around which our week and our lives revolve, then all that we do for Him is devoid of meaning. He does not want to be just an important feature of our lives, He wants to be our life and He wants to give us life.

Even though the temporary tent of meeting has been moved out of the camp because of the people's folly, the L-rd wants to remind His people that walking with Him is all about resting in Him, which is the point of the Sabbath. The people are just recovering from their idolatrous side track and are being reminded that just as the creator rested on the seventh day, in order to be complete in Him; we also need to learn to make rest our primary connection with our King.

The punishment for violating the stipulations of the Creator is death because unless He is truly and functionally lord of all, He cannot be truly lord and give us life. The people are still stinging both from the upheaval of the golden calf and from the removal of the tent from the camp and before Moses continues to give instructions about the tabernacle and the priestly garments, he pauses and reminds the people of their need for total devotion to the L-rd, beginning with the Sabbath rest as free people and no longer as former slaves.

He launches into an appeal for materials, both for the ark and the various parts and furniture of the tabernacle and for special materials with which to sew the priestly garments. Most of the treasure which went into making both the clothing and the sanctuary came from the precious objects which the Egyptians had surrendered to the House of Israel as a kind of repayment for the long years of slavery to which they had been subjected.

The long, detailed list of all the materials testifies to the new status of the House of Jacob. They are no longer slaves, struggling to survive under the relentless oppression of their cruel masters. They are a free people with all the resources they need to build the L-rd a suitable dwelling place in their midst. All that G-d does in the lives of His people has a double objective. He first wants to deliver them from slavery and then He wants to establish permanent intimacy with His servants who voluntarily serve Him.

In the building of the ark, we see an enduring paradox when it comes to how we are to serve the L-rd. He wants people to give who have a willing heart and who are not being forced or guilted into giving what they would not give if they did not feel they had to. In all of our service G-d requires that we be willing and that no one is forcing us to serve Him or to give of our tithes and offerings to Him.

It does not mean that tithing and giving are optional features of our service to Him which we can opt out of if we do not feel like it. It means that the only kind of service which He finds acceptable is that which comes from a willing heart and not from guilt or obligation. You are required to be willing, both when you give of your tithes and offerings and when you give of

your time and your talents for His service.

He gifts people with all the special talents we need to serve Him fully and freely and it is my continual prayer that B'nai Chayim will always be known as a giving community that is both willing and generous to the point that, like those who were working on the tabernacle and on the priestly garments, we would come to a point where we have to say: you are bringing to much, stop already, we have more than enough and haven't got any room left for all the offerings you are trying to bring. We may not be there yet, but I believe our hearts are pulling us in this direction.

Some final remarks and then we can hear a good word from Rabbi Josh. While there is a lot of detail given about the proportions of the ark and all the furniture of the tabernacle, how it was fashioned, and what the finished product actually looked like was one of the best examples of folk art in the history of our planet. Moses was concerned about the proportions and the function of all the ritual elements, so that the symbolism remained crystal clear.

The people had to always remember that they were serving a holy, separate G-d, who was going to take up residence in their midst and teach them how to be a holy, resting people. Exactly what the finished product looked like was up to the creative genius of Betsaleel and Oholiab and the other talented craftsmen. So in a very real sense Moses did not care what it looked like in terms of adhering to a certain architectural style, as much as he cared that the finished product fulfilled the purpose for which it was created.

How about you? What does your service look like? We are called to creatively fill in the blanks and give shape to our devotion, no matter what it looks like – as long as it reflects our commitment to the King, both in the holiness we willingly practice as we serve Him and in the holiness we recognize and respect when it comes to how we view the L-rd.

Finally, I am amazed and more than a little daunted (freaked out) when it comes to imagining what the final product looked like, both when it comes to the tabernacle and later to the temple, but when all was said and done, every part of the tabernacle came together to form a cohesive unit, called an echad. Echad in Hebrew means a composite unity and it is the word we use in describing the oneness of our L-rd and Saviour. It can both mean oneness and wholeness and has a double message. We are called by the heavenly oneness to serve Him with wholeness, both as we rest in Him and as we serve Him.

Both the prophetic portion and the New Testament portion reflect the materials which went into the temple and the tabernacle and there is one final detail to allude to as we bring the Torah portion of our serve to a close. In the lead up to Passover there are five or six special Shabbats and today is Shabbat Shekalim and this is how it worked for Israel.

The people were to pay an annual temple tax of one shekel for the upkeep of the tabernacle and eventually for the upkeep of the temple. Over the years, both the tabernacle and the temple would need repair as the wear and tear of the people's devotion took its toll over the ritual equipment Moses was formulating for them. The L-rd never wants our service and our devotion to become shabby or worn out. We need to build constant renewal into how we walk with the L-rd and how we serve the L-rd.

In Israel today, the orthodox Jews are each giving a golden shekel towards the construction of

the future, third temple and this is not the intention of the stipulation. It was for renewal and repair and not for construction. Our bodies are the only temple which the L-rd will acknowledge and even if the temple were to be rebuilt, it would not be the place where G-d's holy presence manifested itself as it did in days of old. Instead of being manifest in a particular building, since the day of Pentecost, His presence comes upon believers, Jew and Gentile and the intent of Shabbat Shekalim is fulfilled two ways.

First we need to constantly renew our worship and the way we serve the L-rd. Secondly we need to own our community and make sure that the practical needs of our various ministries do not wear out and become shabby. Our regular tithes and offerings insure that the work of the shul is conducted decently and in order, with much generosity and willingness of heart.

All that we have physically which we use in the performance of all and any of the practical aspects of our ministry as a community will eventually wear out and need to be replaced. I am glad that we are committed as a community to regular maintenance of all that we do and all that we have and that this comes from the willing, talented hands of people who have learned to rest in the L-rd and who want to walk in practical holiness with our amazing King.

May we always be a community fashioned by the creativity which the L-rd brings into our midst and may we always be willing servants of our wonderful Saviour as we maintain the amazing paradox to which we are called. It is required that we be willing, because we are no longer slaves and we have been set free for service as we walk with our King and come together regularly for worship and ministry as a redeemed community, to the Jew first and also to the gentile.