

**Vayahel**                      **And He Assembled Shabbat Shekalim Beautiful Beyond Description**

**Torah:**                      Exodus 35:1-38:20

**Haftarah:**                I Kings 7:13-26; 40-50 (Ex. 30:11-16; 2 K. 11:17-12:17)

**Brit Chadashah:**      Heb. 9:1-11

Reading: Mike E. p. 41 and Ps. 61. Jewish Hero: Samuel. Carrier: Margaret

This Torah portion begins with a reminder that keeping the Sabbath is a holy thing, where no work is to be initiated. What follows is a description of the voluntary offerings, where all the materials needed for the priestly clothing and the construction of the tabernacle are outlined. It is also mentioned that talented people voluntarily came forward to offer their skills to help with putting the tabernacle and the priestly clothes together.

The task required a great deal of skill, but a lot of artistic licence was given so that the symbolism was an expression of the people's creativity, as well as their commitment to the realities they were representing.

Two people are mentioned who gave leadership to this work which took place over the space of nearly a year: Bezalel and Oholiab. They were gifted both with wisdom and the ability to teach so that the work was really a community effort to express the people's understanding of the wonder of what they were doing.

The people gave too much towards what was needed for the work and this abundance is something which is a prayer I offer for our community – both that we would have this ability to give and also that it would be over and above what we need to function and meet the needs of our synagogue. I have never been one to plead for the practical needs of our community, because it has always been my prayer that we would all be gifted with more than we would ever need to function. A lot of that which was provided, came from that which the people had received from their Egyptian neighbours and the people learned that they would always have more than enough to complete the work of the L-rd. Have we learned the same lesson? Is our enough serving the L-rd?

The work of the tabernacle in all of its parts came together to form an "echad" which designates a plural singularity and which term was first used to describe the unique singularity of the oneness of G-d. He has always been who He will always be and nothing will ever change the wonder of the reality of who He is – three in one, no more and no less. Do you understand what the symbolism of the Bible is trying to teach?

One of the materials used in constructing the tent of meeting is misunderstood by most commentators because they no longer allow the term: "tachash" to mean what the word indicates. We should never add or subtract from the usual meaning of words in the Bible.

The tent of meeting had three coverings and the rain covering was made of the skin of an animal called a "tachash" and many translators were stumped by the meaning of the word. It is translated as badger skins, or dolphin skins or even as fine leather. The Hebrew indicates an antelope and the rabbis went so far as to say it was a magical animal with a rainbow skin that became extinct because so much of its hide was used to build a rain covering for the tabernacle. People always seem to want to believe in the ridiculous.

It was the skin of a wild, kosher animal that the people encountered in the wilderness, nothing more and certainly nothing less. It was neither magical, nor multicoloured, because all the materials used in putting together the ark and the tabernacle indicated a spiritual reality where the simple materials they had, took on a special meaning because of the symbolism involved. There is nothing mystical about any of the materials and the meaning of tachash does not indicate anything other than what was readily available for the people. It was the skin of an unspecified wild antelope.

Whatever we set aside for the service of the L-rd becomes special, not because of what it is, but because of the service we are dedicating it to. This is one of the wonderful mysteries of the tithe, where ten percent of a little is the same as ten percent of a lot.

The people gave a lot of gold, silver and precious stones for the construction of the ark and the tabernacle because they understood that the work of the L-RD was the most important use they could put their resources towards. With all that they had and with all that they had acquired, they understood that the abiding presence of the L-RD was worth more than the sum total of all they would ever possess. Have you discovered the same truth in your life? Is the presence of the L-rd your greatest treasure?

What kind of picture of the wonder of G-d have you built into your life? The people had to respect the dimensions of the symbolism they were representing because the L-rd wanted them to understand what kind of G-d it was they were going to serve. There was to be none of the vulgar sensuality of the pagan gods and all the symbolism used in worshipping the G-d of Israel spoke of His wonderful beauty. This was both described as marvellous and yet also remained indescribable, beyond the ability of any symbolism to fully represent. How much of the mystery of G-d have you built into your life?

He was to be both accessible and yet totally separate and this mystery was best depicted by the two cherubim who turned their faces towards the presence and yet covered this reality with their wings, so that the eyes of the worshippers would not be damaged. All of the elements of the tabernacle and the ark were fully described to the people so that none of it would be mysterious and yet the fullness of the wonder of the presence of G-d was beyond the ability of any symbol to adequately describe. It still is.

The tent and the ark were to be built with a beauty that the people had never encountered in all their years in pagan Egypt and yet there was none of the paganism that the symbols of Egypt were full of. All that the people had which was precious and beautiful went into the building of the ark and the priestly clothes because they were to understand that G-d always has been beautiful beyond description.

And the most wonderful part of all of this was that He was willing to dwell in their midst. Do you understand that He is still willing to dwell in our midst today? Is His presence the most wonderful part of all you are and of all you have? What kind of G-d is it that you serve? Is His beauty the focus of how you serve Him?

**Sermon: This Has Always Been His Agenda.**

***Passage:’ Do not believe that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say unto you that as long as the heavens and the earth shall not pass away, there will not disappear from the Law, even one letter or the stroke of a letter until all has come to pass. The one who removes even the least of these commandments, and who teaches men to do so shall be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven. The one who observes them and who teaches men to observe them, shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven. For I say unto you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall never enter into the kingdom of Heaven.” (Matt. 5:17-20)***