



ART IN THE WILDERNESS

Though many people think that this week's long double sidra is exceedingly boring, Pinchas Peli finds its description of the building of the Mishkan in the Midbar a fascinating chapter in the history of art and artistry.

The skills of Betzalel and Oholiav - both of whom come from impressive lineage - are exceptional. The way they translate the Divine command into an edifice equipped with furnishings is nothing less than genius.

Despite the leadership status of Moshe, the building and furnishing of the sanctuary show Betzalel and Oholiav in their element. Though the task they undertook came from Above, they brought their own creative abilities into areas in which Moshe had no expertise, so, for example, they constructed the Ark before the building itself.

Their spiritual soul knew that the Torah was a higher priority than the walls and drapes, and they knew what had to come first.

THE LEVITE ACCOUNTS

Our second sidra, P'kudei, begins, "These are the accounts of the sanctuary... the work of the Levites by the hand of Itamar the son of Aaron the Kohen Gadol" (Sh'mot 35:21-23).

We wonder why the Torah does not stick to the subject of accounting and introduces an apparently irrelevancy.

Abravanel asks this question in his commentary. He answers that Itamar was an expert in assessing costs and accounts and he led a team of Levites in working out and summing up the effort and expenses involved in constructing the Mishkan.

They realised that there might be ways of siphoning off some of the valuables donated to the project and the method of checking and reporting the figures had to be totally true and honest. **OZ**