

The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

P'KUDEI-HACHODESH 5785

A warm mazal tov to my children, Bracha & Chaim Sendic, upon the dual Bar Mitzvas of their twin sons, Yerucham Yehuda and Shmuel Nosson. Mazal tov greetings to all the extended families.

In the Torah, the building of the Mishkan is presented as a seamless flow of command, collection, and finally, construction. However, the Midrash takes us behind the scenes, as it were, and recounts the "politics" behind the events, disclosing that it was anything but smooth. For example, Chazal (Sh'mot Rabba 51:6) tell us, shockingly, that there were those who suspected Moshe of pocketing funds and insolently demanded that he make an accounting for every item and expense. Moshe concedes to their demands and humbly presents a detailed account of every "dollar" collected for the grandiose "building campaign."

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, P'kudei 415) also tells us that Moshe incredibly forgot what he did with some of the silver, and the rumors began circulating until HaShem reminded him that he used them for hooks on the pillars in the Mishkan, and only then were the people placated.

There was yet another obstacle in the

process. There were times, the Midrash tells us, when Moshe struggled with understanding Gd's directions and HaShem had to show him a detailed vision of what He wanted (Sh'mot Rabba 52:4). When the command issued forth to fashion the Menorah, Moshe was at a loss to understand how to construct it and depended exclusively upon HaShem for instruction and implementation. And then there was the fact that the Sanctuary was completed much earlier than expected and had to remain idle for three months until Rosh Chodesh Nissan (52:2). And more: When the time came for the actual assembly of the Mishkan, the people again ran into a glitch: Apparently, no one proved able to lift up the walls. Even collectively, it was impossible. Only in the end, just Moshe, with HaShem's help, miraculously lifted the beams (Tanchuma, P'kudei 11).

When we reflect upon these and other such Midrashic facts about the Mishkan's construction, we wonder: Why were all of these stories completely ignored in the Biblical text itself? There are a few tantalizing hints, but overall, the story presented in the Torah is one of a holistic, pure, and ideal experience. No glitches, no politics, no accusations, no problems; a perfectly smooth ride. How do we reconcile the Biblical and Oral Traditions of the narrative? Was the

Torah trying to brush over these disturbing truths, to repress uncomfortable facts, to ignore the real story and portray everything as idyllic and harmonious when in fact, there were many problems and frustrations along the way?

The answer is crucial, for it captures a fundamental Jewish outlook on life. The Torah, of course, is not trying to hide anything, and that explains why the Sages felt comfortable exposing all of the details. Rather, the Torah is telling us that when one develops a proper perspective regarding his or her life, the problems do not always deserve to be mentioned. Not because they don't exist, but because they don't define the story of our lives, and therefore we can choose not to make them part of the narrative.

In the construction of the Sanctuary and later, the Beit HaMikdash, something awesomely cataclysmic and earth-shattering is occurring. The infinite fuses with the finite; the impossible becomes possible, Man meets Gd and Gd meets Man. Out of cosmological emptiness and infinite Divinity, Gd "squeezes" his omnipotence and omnipresence into a Mishkan of a few square cubits, into a building of stone, into the heart of mortal man.

This, then, is the story; this is what happened. The bumps on the road,

true as they may be, do not constitute the real story, not because they didn't happen, but because they are not, in essence, what the actual message is. These sidebar accounts, interesting in their own right, should not, cannot obscure or even dampen the majestic power and beauty of the "main event" itself.

Let us put it differently. The Torah is teaching us how to live - and life is tough. The really important things are even tougher. Raising and supporting a family requires strength and courage. Building a good marriage is often challenging and difficult. To develop a relationship with Gd may be frustrating and lonely. Many things will not work out as we hoped they would. We face adversity, grief, and loss. There are inevitably times of pain and heartbreak. There are quarrels and squabbles, moments of anger and setbacks. We must confront depression, illness, mental challenges, financial stress, and spiritual confusion.

But we have the choice not to make all of these the story of our lives. Sure, raising children is challenging, but when you gaze into the loving and trusting eyes of your child - that is the story, that is the miracle of existence, not the challenges leading toward that moment. When you connect to your spouse in a truly meaningful way, in a moment of real camaraderie and respect - that is the

story, that is the miracle of love playing itself out in your life. A bad day at work, hours of frustration in running your business, all melt away before the power of something so much greater, so much more real - your growth as a human being and your ability to help others with your money and your experience. That is the story!

We must look at our lives and ask: "What is the real story happening here?" Is my life a story of hardship and struggle, or am I part of something bigger, something incredible? The real story is that I am building a home for Gd; I am constructing a fragment of Heaven on Earth; I am building a Jewish family, a loving marriage; I am helping people; I have the privilege of studying Torah, of spreading Torah, of doing a mitzva, of inspiring others to light up the world. This is my story; this is my life. The other parts are, of course, also true and deserve to be acknowledged as such, much as the Midrash recounts for us the other side of the story with respect to the Mishkan and Mikdash.

In a word, I must deal with every challenge and I must attempt to repair it, but I cannot allow it to become THE story. When I wake up in the morning, I know that I have fifty things to do today, most of them are not fun; some are difficult and frustrating. But that is not the story.

The real story is captured in the words a Jew says the moment he or she opens his/her eyes: MODEH ANI L'FANECHA... SHEHECHEZARTA BI NISHMATI... I am alive; G-d gave me back my soul for another day. I can now talk to HaShem face to face, learn Torah, pray, share my heart and love with another human being, give charity, do mitzvot and chesed, and become an ambassador for love, light and hope. I can embrace an aching soul, and touch a bleeding heart. Now that's a life, that's the story!

Yes, I've got my bills to pay, I have to deal with headaches, I need to be at the bank, I have to fix my garage, I need to call my son's principal, I have to pick up the cleaners, I need to go to the dentist, and I need to repay the loan, and I was just called to do jury duty. But do not let that become the story of your life. Stay focused on the real story - that at every moment you can construct a home for Gd in your corner of the world and bring redemption one step closer.

Indeed, each of us has the choice to define and reframe the story of our lives. 🙌