

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

T'RUMA

In three places, our Parasha connects Melechet HaMishkan with Har Sinai and the receiving of the Torah:

(a) At the end of the first section telling us of the Aron, the Shulchan, and the Menora: "*Look carefully and then make them according to the design you were shown on the mountain*" (25:40).

(b) At the end of the second section detailing the main sanctuary: "*You shall erect the Mishkan according to the detailed way that you were shown on the mountain*" (26:30).

(c) After learning about the details of the main Mizbei'ach positioned outside and facing the sanctuary: "*You shall make the Mizbei'ach out of boards, a hollow structure, as you were shown on the mountain*" (27:8).

A possible explanation gives a message we can learn from the Mishkan.

Our people were not the only ones who built sanctuaries. An outside pagan-observer might be forgiven for thinking that the Mishkan was just another genre of worship. There is plenty of written and archaeological evidence that such structures were common at the time. Their precise designs varied, according to the par-

ticular deities worshipped. Generally common to all such edifices was that they tended to be designed by the wise people of the societies they were purported to serve - in the belief that particular forms of service through them would please the gods, and that they in turn would take care of their followers from their dwellings up on high. These places tended to have images and icons into which the eigel hazahav, the golden calf, would have fit nicely; tangibles that people could identify with, as well as a hierarchy of priests that inter alia decided who had access to what.

Thus the Mishkan would have appeared to be very strange to Am Yisrael at the time. The Mishkan, like the Torah itself, was communicated by Gilui Shechina - Divine Revelation - in this case to Moshe Rabbeinu to pass on to the people. Much of it was quite contrary to what they no doubt knew from their experiences in Egypt. There were no icons, statutes, or images of animals, as in line with the Second Commandment. With one exception - the K'ruvim. "As G-d commanded Moshe" we are told many times in Parashat P'kudei. Any other form of image other than the one that G-d communicated would have been Avoda Zara.

This is the strength of "as you were shown on the mountain". It tells us that the place of worship was

designed by the Creator Himself, not an assembly of wise men or priests. It was not intuitive, but counter-intuitive. The holiest item: the Luchot were kept in a never-to-be opened Aron. Yet the very holiest structure inexplicably had images that seemed to be the very forbidden things in the Ten Commandments. As the Torah instructed Moshe: "according to the design that you were shown on the mountain".

This fits in with what the position of Am Yisrael is all about. As Josephus puts it, placing all sovereignty in the hands of G-d. (Against Apion, 2:165); as the Gemara puts it, KABALAT OL MALCHUT SHAMAYIM, accepting that G-d who communicated the Torah to us knows what's best for us even if it appears counterintuitive and illogical at the time.

Not only would the Aron, Shulchan and Menorah have seemed decidedly odd to Klal Yisrael, but so would have the Mishkan itself. Taken down and wrapped up when on the move and set up again on arrival on the stages of the journey. Yet it did not lose its Kedusha. The novel idea was that it went with the people: the Almighty is with His People wherever they are - another novel aspect of the Mishkan.

And finally, that the Mizbei'ach was to be hollow. Very novel: as though it was to be of minimum substance, and in contrast with similar solid and

beautifully sculptured structures in the shrines of the time.

All this is a key aspect of the Mishkan. G-d communicated its design that in many ways was counter to what they understood was the right way of worship. Strange and highly contradictory. Yet the basis of KABALAT OL MALCHUT SHAMAYIM is that the Almighty knows best even when things are strange, as with other aspects of the Torah. And it is through the regular study of Torah that we get to understand elements that make our way of life comprehensible and spiritually fulfilling in ways that to the outsider appears to be counterintuitive. 