

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Pekudei

In this week's Parsha, the Torah describes the completion and erection of the the Tabernacle. G-d commanded the Jewish People to built a sanctuary so that he could have a physical presence in this world. As the verse states "They shall make a Sanctuary for me so that I can dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8) Obviously, G-d has no physical presence, however G-d wanted there to be a place in this world where His presence was felt more. He wanted there to be a place that was set aside purely for His service and that could be used to sanctify His Name. For this reason there were many miracles that occurred in the Tabernacle, and later, in the Temple. In fact, the Mishnah, in Ethics of the Fathers 5:7, records ten miracles that happened every day in the Temple. Furthermore, G-d instructed that this building be built in a way that all could see its beauty. The commentaries even point out specific details of the Tabernacle that prove that its physical appearance was of the utmost importance. There are many Midrashim which describe in greater detail the splendor and glory of the Tabernacle and Temple.

The Menorah of gold, was a spectacular work of art, with intricate designs and detail. The majestic Table was covered in decadent showbread, and there were two Altars, designed for the priest to use to bring sacrifices. The priests, too, added to the magnificent display. The pure white garments of the priests, and the royal attire of the High priest, were made from only the finest and most expensive cloths, and were bedecked with gold and precious stones. Holidays were a special time in the Temple, and the awesome sight of the priests doing the services was surely a sight to behold. The Levites accompanied the service with song, creating an atmosphere of beauty and magnificence.

If one were to describe the Tabernacle in one word, one might focus on the remarkable sights, which surely brought much honor to G-d's Name. However, a close analysis of the verses in this week's Parsha tell us that this is not so. Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Shapiro (1917–2006) points out that the Tabernacle is



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referred to as the Mishkan Ha'aidus, The Tabernacle of Testimony. Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra, the great Spanish writer of the eleventh century, explains that the reason for this name is that the Tabernacle housed the Holy Ark which contained the Tablets of Testimony. This, Rabbi Shapiro explains, seems to imply that the main purpose of the Tabernacle was to house the Tablets that served as a Testimony of G-d's relationship with the Jewish people.. Although all the rich sights added to the image of the Tabernacle and helped sanctify G-d's Name, the main purpose of the Tabernacle was to provide a place for G-d's presence to rest, in the form of the Clouds of Glory. The actual resting place of the Clouds of Glory was above the Holy Ark. It was from there that G-d spoke to Moses. The purpose of having G-d's Clouds of Glory there was to teach the Oral Torah to the Jewish people. It was for this reason that G-d chose to rest His presence there. He wanted to show the Jewish people that He does not pick the most spectacular place to rest His presence, even if all that glory was only created for His honor. Rather, G-d chooses to rest His presence in a place of Torah study. The Ba'al Ha-Turim, Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher (1270-1340) adds that the two Cherubim above the ark resemble two study partners who are amidst a Torah conversation.

What a great lesson in how to sanctify G-d's holy name. Judaism is filled with beautiful images and heart-warming scenes. The image of a Shabbat meal with good food and cheerful song, shared with family and friends, is something that anyone can appreciate. There is nothing more enjoyable than watching joyous dancing on Simchat Torah. The sight of a window filled with Menorahs with laughing children playing dreidel in the background can be breathtaking. However this is not the essence of what Judaism is about. Physical actions and beauty are important, but they are not enough to cause G-d to settle somewhere. It is only through complete devotion to Torah study and performance of the mitzvot, that G-d will find a resting place among the Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom!

