

The Value of the Tabernacle

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

"These are the reckonings of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony, which was reckoned at Moses's bidding. The labor of the Levites was under the authority of Issamar, son of Aaron the Kohen. Betzalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, did everything that HaShem commanded Moses." (1) The Portion begins with a brief description of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the people who were involved in its construction and service. The Seforno writes that the Torah is teaching us a significant point with this introduction. The Mishkan and its accessories were never destroyed, captured or desecrated. In contrast, both the Temples were subject to desecration and destruction. The Seforno explains that the first two verses in the Portion are giving four reasons behind the elevated nature of the Mishkan. The first is in the words; "the Tabernacle of Testimony". This, the Seforno explains refers to the two Tablets that Moshe received on Mount Sinai.(2) These are indicative of the incredible spirituality that dwelt in the Tabernacle. The verse continues; "which was reckoned at Moshe's bidding." Since Moses arranged the building of the Mishkan, it benefitted from his personal majesty. The third aspect contributing to the holiness of the Mishkan was that, "the labor of the Levites was under the authority of Itamar". Itamar was also a man of great stature. And finally, the second verse informs us that Betzalel, also a great man, with great lineage, built the Mishkan. The Seforno then contrasts this with the people involved in the building of the Temples. The first Temple was arranged by the righteous King Solomon, however, the workers were non-Jews from Tsur. Since the Temple was not built by righteous people, it was subject to corrosion and therefore needed to be maintained, unlike the Tabernacle. Moreover, because of its lower level of holiness it did ultimately fall into the hands of our enemies and was destroyed. The second Temple was of an even lower level of holiness; the Tablets were not there, and it was arranged by Cyrus, the Persian King. Accordingly, it too fell foul of our enemies and was destroyed.

Three verses later, the Torah tells us the total value of all the jewelry that was given for the building of the Tabernacle. The Seforno on this verse, continuing in his theme from the earlier verses, notes that the total material value of the Tabernacle was far less than that of both Temples, both of which were incredibly beautiful and expensive buildings. And yet, unlike the Temples, the humble Tabernacle continually had the Divine Presence within it. The Seforno concludes that this teaches us that the holiness of a building is not defined by its material value and beauty, rather by the spiritual level of the people who were involved in its construction.(3) In a similar vein, the explanation of the Seforno teaches us that the Torah outlook attributes true value towards physical objects or buildings in a very different way to that of the secular outlook. In the secular world, the external beauty or material value of the item define its 'value'. In contrast, the Torah pays little heed to the external qualities rather the internal spirituality that was invested into the item determines its true value. Thus, the Tabernacle may have been far less physically impressive than the two Temples but its true value was far greater because of the intentions of the people who made it. This concept is demonstrated by an interesting incident with regard to the Tabernacle that is described in Terumah and Vayakhel. God instructs Moses to tell the people to bring the raw materials necessary in order to build the Mishkan. "This is the portion that you shall take from them: gold, silver, and copper; and turquoise, purple and scarlet wool; linen and goat hair; red-dyed ram skins; tachash skins, acacia wood; oil for illumination, spices for the anointment oil and the aromatic incense; shoham stones and stones for the settings, for the Ephod and Breastplate." (4) The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh points out that the order of the materials mentioned is difficult to understand; the shoham stones and the 'stones of the settings' are the most valuable of all the items in the list, therefore logically they should have been mentioned first. He offers an answer based on the Gemara that informs us how the people attained the shoham stones. The Gemara says that a great miracle occurred and shoham stones came down along with the manna.(5) The Nesi'im (Princes) then donated these precious stones to the Mishkan. One may think that the supernatural manner in which the stones came down would only add to their inherent material value. However, the Ohr HaChaim writes the exact opposite; since the stones came without any effort or financial loss, they are placed at the end of the list of items donated to the Mishkan .

BITS of INFO

Synopsis of Current Events Gleaned From Various News Sources
Submitted and Edited by Sherine Levine

□ Former Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner will go to trial over accusation she covered up the alleged involvement of senior Iranian officials in the 1994 bombing of a Buenos Aires Jewish center. Eleven other former government officials also will be tried on charges involving the cover-up and abuse of power. The attack on the center killed 85 and left hundreds wounded. Iran has denied any involvement. The prosecutor charged with investigating Iran's alleged role in the bombing, Alberto Nisman, was found shot to death in his apartment in January 2015, the day before he was scheduled to present his allegations to the Argentine Congress. His shooting has been ruled a homicide after initially being called a suicide. [info@jppupdates.com]

□ Chicago lawmaker, Rep. Danny Davis, called Rev. Louis Farrakhan "an outstanding human being" during an interview in which he praised the Nation of Islam leader, known for making anti-Semitic remarks. This prompted criticism from an ADL spokesman who provided him with quotes of Farrakhan attacking Jews collected over many years. Despite the documentation of Farrakhan's record, Davis said in a follow-up interview, "I have known Farrakhan for years and years and every once in a while some writer or somebody will try to think of something to say about him. But my world is so much bigger than any of that." The ADL representative said, "It's unfortunate that the congressman can't muster up the courage to denounce Farrakhan's blatant anti-Semitism and instead chose to praise him." *The Forward* reported that J-Street, which describes itself as a pro-Israel organization, is endorsing Davis for re-election, despite his praise of Farrakhan. [The Israel Project]

□ A group of residents wore yellow patches to protest the proliferation of Hasidic school buses on the streets of Outremont, a borough of Montreal. The group, led by Ginette Chartre, showed up at a March 5 borough council meeting with the rectangular patches pinned to their clothing. Despite being explained why the badges were offensive, she said they are not backing down. When told the patches are reminiscent of those that Jews were forced to wear during the Holocaust, she insinuated that those who object are disingenuous. "The Jews are always bringing up their painful past," she told the Canadian Press. "They do it to muzzle us." A legal counsel for B'nai Brith Canada said the protesters "either have no knowledge of history, or they surely realize what a horrendous way it is to express an opinion." The school buses, which pick up and drop off Hasidic children at their homes, rather than at designated stops, have been a matter of contention between the Hasidic community and some residents who object to the congestion, noise and pollution the president in 2000. He was the first Jewish vice-presidential candidate on a major party ticket. [Jewish Breaking News]

RECIPE

Now that Purim is over it's time to think about preparing for Pesach. Cooking meat or chicken low and slow will result in tender, juicy, fall off the bone meat. This is an easy and delicious recipe that can be a delicious addition to your seder or any yom tov meal. Please remember to send your favorite recipes to leahlieb@aol.com.

Caramelized Onion Chicken (Joy of Cooking.Com/Shifra Klein)

Ingredients:

Chicken cut into four or eight pieces

4 Spanish onions

2/3 cup of honey

3 sprigs of thyme

Preheat oven to 350 ° F.

Cut onion in thin slices and place in large baking pan. Place thyme sprigs over onions.

Clean chickens by running under cold water, trimming fat with kitchen scissors, and drying with a paper towel.

Place chicken in baking pan. Drizzle honey on top of chicken. Cover tightly with foil and bake for 2½ hours at 350 ° F.