

OzTORAH

NINE RABBIS

This section of the Torah is a big bore to some people.

“All those petty details!” they say, “all those knots and knobs, all those nuts and bolts, all those mini-measurements – where’s the spirituality, where’s the ethics, where’s the inspiration?”

I have heard it said that there is a section in the Torah for every professional, for doctors, lawyers, farmers and so on, and (in our sidra) it’s the turn of the architects.

What an interesting idea, but it’s quite wrong. The Torah is speaking to everyone, and this week’s portion is not just for architects.

What it is telling ordinary people is that big things can’t exist without a basis of little things.

Without tiny screws in the right places, the magnificent roof of a luxury mansion could come crashing down.

Imagine a car whose engine lacked the right small parts, correctly inserted in their correct places. Would anyone want the risk or responsibility of driving a car like that?

Now turn your gaze to ethical matters. How can there ever be broad peace in the greater international arena if there is no peace between ordinary human beings?

Look at your bank account and picture a financial statement which recognises only the thousands and omits anything smaller.

The Jewish concept of the minyan is a paradigm of the importance of details. Nine rabbis don’t make a minyan, nor do nine tycoons. It doesn’t matter how low down an individual is on the social (or intellectual or any other) scale; the tenth man - however ordinary - is still the one who makes the minyan.

The prophet Zechariah says (4:10), *Mi vaz l’yom k’tanot* – “Who has despised the day of small things?”

Rabbi Apple served for 32 years as the chief minister of the Great Synagogue, Sydney - Australia's oldest and most prestigious congregation. He was Australia's highest profile rabbi and held many public roles. Retired, he now lives in Jerusalem. He blogs at www.oztorah.com