

From the Abravanel Jacob Solomon

The opening main theme is the private donations of materials for the Mishkan, and its construction. It begins with a request to the Israelites to supply suitable resources from their valuables. But Moshe did not immediately launch into the business of the day. Instead:

Moshe assembled the Congregation of Israel and said... "This is what G-d has commanded. Six days shall you work. On the seventh day, it shall be Shabbat... to G-d." (35:1-2)

From the Torah's putting Shabbat together with the types of work involved in constructing the Mishkan, the Talmud derives that the 39 Mishkan's acts of labor are the ones that are forbidden on Shabbat (Talmud Shabbat 97b).

Most of the second half of the Book of Sh'mot presents the details of the construction of the Mishkan. Abravanel comments that we are required to study it in detail because of its strong presence in the Torah. He quotes the Midrash (Tanchuma, P'kudei 12) that puts forward the idea that the structure and utensils of the Mishkan parallel the entire Creation.

Examples include: "You shall make the curtains... to cover the Mishkan" linking with "Who stretches out the

heavens like a curtain" (T'hilim 104:2). "You shall make the washing basin out of copper... and put water there" (30:18) paralleling "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one area..." (B'reishit 1:9).

Shabbat also appears in the details, and it opens this week's parashiot: "Six days shall you work. On the seventh day it shall be Shabbat... to G-d." The Mishkan's connection with Shabbat thus places it at the spiritual top of the Creation: "G-d blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because then He rested from working..." (B'reishit 2:3).

Thus the Creator spiritually telescoped the Creation into the Mishkan. And in stressing that the Creation is designed for the values that the Torah represents, G-d assured the Israelites: "I shall live among the Israelites, and I will be their G-d" (Sh'mot 29:45). This was later expressed with: "The glory of G-d filled the Mishkan" (40:34).

In addition, it may be suggested that the Mishkan represented the then peak development in positive human behavior. That was in how people treated one another. From unpromising beginnings, there was a steady line of progress.

Sibling rivalry saw Kayin killing Hevel on finding that only Hevel's offering was accepted. Kayin had to spend

the rest of his life as a vagrant and a wanderer.

Sibling rivalry saw Ya'akov and Eisav struggling over the birthright and the blessing. That led to a long separation, much tension, and a distinctly uneasy reconciliation.

Sibling rivalry was behind Yosef's brothers leaving him for dead, and finally selling him into slavery. More progress there: the brothers indeed regretted the sale and were subsequently fully reconciled with one another.

But in sharp contrast to their antecedents, Moshe and Aharon broke through the very core of sibling rivalry. They rose above it by functioning as a joint team to serve others, to set in motion the Exodus of the suffering Israelites from Egypt. "Aharon is going out to meet you. When he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart" (4:14). Moshe held the key position, and Aharon gladly put himself out to assist him in a clearly subordinate role: "He will speak for you to the people; he will be your communicator, and you will be his leader" (4:16).

It was that unity that spread to all the Israelites when they received the Torah. "Israel (in the singular) camped there, opposite the mountain" (19:2). As Rashi explains, all together in complete unity.

It was that unity which was also expressed in the joint effort of all the

Israelites in building the Mishkan. In response, G-d had assured them: "I shall live among the Israelites, and I will be their G-d".

G-d created the world, but Man assists in being a partner in the creation (Rashi to 18:13) in spiritual as well as in physical matters. It is up to our generation to work towards promoting the communal and spiritual harmony that indeed invites G-d to restore His Presence to Zion. 🕍