

(Address delivered at Shabbat Evening Service on February 19, 2016. I express my gratitude to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks for ideas contained in the text. As our tradition teaches, we all learn from one another. Thank you. – Rabbi Frank Joseph)

The sequence of the parashot, the weekly Torah readings; Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa, Vayak'hel and Pekudei- is puzzling in many ways. First, it outlines the construction of the tabernacle, the portable house of worship. The Israelites built and carried with them through the desert, in exhaustive and exhausting detail. The narrative takes almost the whole of the last third of THE BOOK OF EXODUS, Why so long? Why such detail? The Tabernacle was after all only a Temporary Home for The DIVINE PRESENCE eventually superseded by the Temple in JERUSALEM.

Besides which, why in the making of the MISHKAN in the book of EXODUS at all?

Its natural place seems to be in THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS, which is overwhelmingly devoted to an account of the service of the MISHKAN and the sacrifices that were offered there. The Book of Exodus, by contrast, could be subtitled, THE BIRTH OF A NATION." It is about the transition of the Israelites from a family to a people and their journey from slavery to freedom.

It rises to a climax with the covenant made BETWEEN G-D AND the people at Mt. Sinai. What has the Tabernacle to do with this? It seems an odd way to end the Book.

The answer is profound. First we need to recall the history of the ISRAELITES until now. It has been a long series of complains. They complained when MOSES first intervention made this situation worse. Then at the Red Sea, they said to MOSES,

“WAS IT BECAUSE THERE WERE NO GRAVES IN EGYPT THAT YOU BROUGHT US TO THE DESERT TO D-E? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO US BY BRINGING US OUT OF EGYPT? DID WE NOT SAY TO YOU IN EGYPT, "LEAVE US ALONE; LET US SERVE THE EGYPTIANS?”

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER FOR US TO SERVE THE EGYPTIANS THAN TO D-E IN THE DESERT!" (EXODUS 14:11-12)

After crossing the Sea they continue to complain, first about the lack of water, then that the water was bitter, then regarding the lack of food, then about the lack of water again. Then within weeks of the Revelation at Sinai - the only time in history G-D APPEARED to an entire nation - they made a Golden Calf. If an unprecedented sequence of miracles cannot bring about a mature response on the part of the people, what will?

It was then THAT G-D SAID, “LET THEM BUILD SOMETHING TOGETHER. This simple command transformed the ISRAELITES. During the whole construction of the TABERNACLE there were no complaints. The people contributed all the necessary. And each contributed according to their ability. Some gold, or silver, or bronze; some brought skins and drapes, others gave of their time, talents and skills.

All gave, either monetarily or of their time, talents and skills. They gave so much that Moses had to order them to stop.

A REMARKABLE PROPOSITION IS BEING FRAMED, AS A CONTEMPORARY SAGE NOTED AND SAID: "IS NOT WHAT G-D DOES FOR US THAT TRANSFORM US. IT IS WHAT WE DO FOR G-D."

So long as every crisis was dealt with by MOSES and MIRACLES, THE ISRAELITES remained in a state of dependency. Their default response was complaint. For the ISRAELITES to grow to adulthood and responsibility they had to undergo a transition, from passive recipients OF G-D/ BLESSINGS TO ACTIVE CREATORS. The ISRAELITES had to become G-D/ PARTNERS "in the work of CREATION" (SHABBAT 10 A).

That is what the sages meant when they said, "CALL THEM NOT YOUR CHILDREN' BUT YOUR BUILDERS." (BERAKHOT 64 A). It is essential that People become builders as they are to grow from childhood to adulthood. JUDAISM IS G-D'S call to responsibility. The building of the Tabernacle was the first great project the ISRAELITES undertook together. The building of the first Sanctuary involved their generosity and their skill. It gave the ISRAELITES a chance to give back TO G-D A LITTLE OF WHAT HE HAD GIVEN THEM. It conferred on them the dignity of labor and creative endeavor. It brought to closure their birth as a nation and it symbolized the challenge of the future.

The society they were summoned to create in the LAND of ISRAEL would be one in which everyone would Play their Part. It was to become "THE HOME WE BUILD TOGETHER".

Moses was an incredible leader. He understood one of the greatest challenges of Leadership is giving the People. You are Leading a chance to give, to contribute, to participate.

That requires self-restraint, TZIMTUT, on the part of the Leader, that is creating the space for others to Lead.

As the saying goes: "IF THE Leadership is good the people say: 'THE Leader did it'. If the Leader is great, they say; "We did it ourselves."

Genesis begins with G-D creating the universe as a home for human beings. Exodus ends with human beings creating the MISHKAN as A HOME for G-D.

Therefore the basic principle of Judaism, that we are called on to become CO-CREATORS WITH G-D, and hence, too, the corollary that "Leaders do not do the work on behalf of the People. They teach People how to do the work themselves."

It is not what G-D DOES FOR US, BUT WHAT WE DO FOR G-D THAT ALLOWS US TO REACH DIGNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY.

Laurie and I are extremely fortunate and BLESSED to be part of our BELOVED CONGREGATION TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL.

It is especially wonderful to be a part of a Temple that the Congregation Built Together.

Everyone on the congregation Played a significant role in building it and everyone without exception each in his or her own way. Each according to his or her own unique interest, talents, and skills; and each, according to his or her resources, plays an essential role in maintaining and ensuring its survival and continuity. It is an extremely powerful enriching spiritual feeling

knowing that together we have created an entity ultimately far bigger than any one of us as an individual, we are all unique. Judaism is not a monolithic religion. It is a monotheistic religion, but not monolithic. There is room for everyone. And we sincerely appreciate and treasure everyone. Although Laurie and I are only physically here several days a month we are perpetually here in spirit.

To our Beloved Congregation Temple Beth Israel and to all the many treasured Individuals who make it the wonderful spiritual home and presence it is, we say "LIVE LONG AND PROSPER!"

SHALOM U'V'RACHMA

PEACE AND BLESSINGS

G-D BLESS US ALL!

SHABBAT SHALOM!!