

פרשיות ויקהל-פקודי

OVERVIEW

Once again the Torah emphasizes the sanctity of the Sabbath by heading our Sidrah with the prohibition of kindling a fire on the Sabbath day and the commandment of total Sabbath observance.

Israel is called upon to take part in the great work of constructing the sanctuary. Volunteers and specialists, artisans and craftsmen come forward to offer their assistance. Two men, Bezalel and Ahaliab are chosen to guide and coordinate the people's efforts. G-d will imbue them with wisdom and expertise, essential qualities to insure the success of the work.

There follows another detailed account of the construction augmented by the listing of the amounts of gold, silver, copper and the other materials needed for the work. After the successful completion Moshe inspects and approves the result and he blesses the nation.

On the first day of the first month the sacred tent is inaugurated. Aharon's sons promptly assume their priestly duties. A thick cloud covers the tent and the glory of G-d fills the Tabernacle. From now on it will accompany the people in all stages of their extensive wanderings.

The second book of Moses ends with the image of a nation at peace.

COMMENTARY

Work forbidden on the Sabbath

It is certainly significant that the Torah singles out the category of lighting fire on the Sabbath from among all other prohibitions. Clearly it serves as an example marked by the aspects that are characteristic for the thirty-nine types of construction work as specified by the oral tradition. These aspects must be fully evaluated in order to understand why certain types of work are treated differently by the law.

Kindling fire is a creative human activity that serves a certain purpose. It creates a new entity that did not exist before. In contrast, the purely physical effort (such as transporting a heavy object from the cellar to the roof) does not constitute a creative activity and therefore does not belong in the category of kindling fire. This also holds true for a destructive activity (such as lighting fire for the purpose of destroying an object, a. o.). In this way, the prohibition of performing any of the thirty-nine basic work activities on the Sabbath acknowledges the mastery of the Creator to whom the Jew quasi returns his human productive will. According to tradition, the construction of the sanctuary incorporated every one of the thirty-nine basic work categories which explains the frequent reference to the Sabbath in connection with the sanctuary.

The Contributions

It is curious that the contribution of the tribal princes (35:27) is mentioned after those of the people at large. One could have expected a reverse order to indicate that the

leaders would encourage and inspire the people to follow their example. According to the Midrash, they did not think that the people were ready to cover the enormous expenses incurred by the construction of the sanctuary. They hoped that one would have to appeal to them to raise the necessary funds. Actually, the people's enthusiasm and willingness to contribute was so great that Moshe was forced to announce that no further contributions were needed. For this reason the text mentions the princes at the very end of the impressive list of voluntary contributions, without consideration for the dignity and honor of their rank.

The construction

Generally the Torah makes do with as few words as possible (often seemingly creating gaps that are being filled by the oral teaching). However, at the construction of the temple the text insists on repeating all the details that were already enumerated at the planning stage. This is surely done to emphasize the loyalty and discipline with which the people responded to the

instructions. For the temptation must have been great to give free rein to artistic initiative and imagination. By adding a detailed account of the collection of contributions the Torah highlights the honesty and sincerity with which the financial proceedings were handled.

The Talmud interprets this through the following comment: "Difficult and vital is the task of administering the people's resources. Great is their reward if they fulfill their task with the same loyalty and honesty as shown by those who were charged with the most important sacred work that was ever entrusted to man".

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This issue marks the end of the yearly cycle that we started בעזה"י and completes the last year ויקרא פר' and completes the publication of this Torah Commentary. Our intention is בלי נדו to now compile these דברי תורה in book format.

תם ונשלם שבה לקל בורא עולם
