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Personal Sanctuary

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Imagine that a team of expert architects puts together a master plan for a building. You, as the general contractor, decide to leave out some of the details, as they seem superfluous to you. What you don't realize is that not all of the construction plans are here for structural purposes. Rather, the homeowner was trying to replicate his ancestral home, and, to that end, wanted to incorporate all these details in his home.

In this week's parsha, we find myriad details in the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and its utensils. One may think that all these details are for structural purposes. For example, when the Torah calls for fifty hooks to connect the curtains of the Mishkan, one may decide that forty-nine hooks would also do the trick. The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin; 1816-1893) points out that the details of the Mishkan have an entirely different purpose. As the Midrash Tanchuma in Parshas Pekudei explains, the Mishkan is a microcosm of the world. Just as Hashem is present in the created world, so, too, His presence would rest amongst the Jews through the Mishkan.

An additional source for this idea is brought in the name of the Vilna Gaon (Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer of Vilna; 1720-1797). The universe that was brought into existence by G-d, says the Vilna Gaon, required thirty-nine forms of labor, and it was these very same forms of labor that were used to build the Mishkan.

The Netziv goes on to explain that Hashem commanded the Jewish People (Terumah 25:8), "And they shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them." The Jewish People, explains the Netziv, were commanded to build a Mishkan whose parts and details would parallel every aspect of the entire universe, thereby strengthening Hashem's presence amongst the Jewish People.

Perhaps we can explain that the construction of the Mishkan teaches the Jewish People, for all time, the correct path to serving Hashem and strengthening His presence in our world. This is accomplished by showing how every aspect of the world can be used to serve Hashem. The service of Hashem isn't confined to the synagogue or study hall; rather, it permeates every aspect of our existence. In the Mishkan, every facet of creation was represented in the service of Hashem. In our daily lives, as well, we should strive to incorporate Hashem in each and every aspect, be it our business dealings, family life, or recreation. The Nefesh Hachaim (Sha'ar 1, Ch. 4) explains that man has the entirety of Creation incorporated within himself. It turns out that when a person fills his life with G-dliness, he is building a personal Mishkan, as he brings the Divine into every aspect of existence.

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