

## **Building a Building without any Bricks**

Virtual Drasha Vayakhel-Pekudei

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We are living through unprecedented circumstances. Schools are closed, Sports are terminated, and even our own sanctuary is off-limits. We try to work as if nothing's changed, we try to connect to our usual social supports, but it's just not the same. One can feel alone, isolated, and even unmotivated. Our connectedness to others gives us strength; it allows us to feel like we're part of a greater whole, that we're accomplishing something more meaningful than anything one individual can accomplish. Attending a minyan brings individually-unattainable merit through the collective. Pooling our resources, we create edifices whose impressive structure is only surpassed by the symbolism of what they represent as an expression of values. We create programs, events, and classes- all through group efforts. These all serve as tangible expressions of our accomplishments together. But what can we build together at a time like this? How can we feel that same collective purpose?

I'd like to share with you an idea that may not bring complete comfort, but which I hope provides a glimpse into the profound impact of our actions, even as individuals.

The verse (39:32) states: "And thus was completed all of the work for the tabernacle... And the Jewish people did all that Gd commanded Moshe, such is what they did". Many commentaries ask- is it true that the people "did" the work of the Tabernacle? Was it not a specific group of artisans, under the direction of Moshe and Betzalel, who actually did the work?

The Sforno explains simply: what they "did" was contribute their monies toward the cause. That was their "doing". But the Or HaChaim goes a step further. He explains that by the Torah describing the culmination of this building project in terms of "the Jewish people", Hashem is sending us a message: Despite the intangible efforts of the nation, the Torah and its fulfillments can only truly be complete with the contributions of each individual's part. On a deeper level, the Or HaChaim asks- 'Can an individual really account for each of his or her 248 limbs and 365 sinews through the fulfillment of the 613 mitzvot?' There are many mitzvot that can only be done by kohanim. Others that can only be done by Levi'im. Others can only be done by men, women, judges, witnesses, slaughterers, scribes, etc. How can we possibly fulfill all 613 for ourselves? It can only be done through the contributions of everyone else. While it's true the Mishkan was physically built through the hands of the select few, its fulfillment was only possible by the contributions of many other individuals.

The Baal HaTurim in our parsha explains that the 100 sockets of silver (38:27) in the Mishkan became the impetus for another halacha (one which we've spoken about in shul): the requirement of saying 100 brachot every day. Some explain that while we no longer have a Beit Hamikdash, these brachot serve in place of those foundational sockets- so much so, that there

are some opinions that claim we will no longer have the requirement to say 100 brachot a day once the Beit HaMikdash is rebuilt.

Interestingly enough, however, the Baal HaTurim writes a different reason in his halachic code, the blueprint for the Shulchan Aruch, the “Arba Turim” (Siman 46). He explains that there was once a time in Jewish history when there were 100 people who died every day because of an ongoing plague. In response, the rabbis instituted that every individual make sure to say 100 brachot each day to bring healing to future casualties.

Putting these ideas together, perhaps we can propose that some buildings are built without bricks. For us, as we live through a time when we, too, face a plague for which we don't entirely know how to combat, we must also somehow build our own edifice, but a spiritual one. Being part of a building project, as the Or HaChaim explains, does not always mean contributing physically to a tangible structure. Instead, like the Jewish people before us, we can build the foundation of our communal structure through our spiritual contributions- and each individual has a role to play. Before we think that we're simply sitting at home, alone and without purpose, we have to know that what we do individually -away from our physical building- will impact how we coalesce later as a physical community. If an individual falters, Chas Veshalom, in his or her contribution, it might hamper the integrity of our building's foundation.

I look forward to the day, Gd-willing soon, when we can rejoin together in our physical building, with a strong and stable foundation made of our individual contributions that we create now. Please join us in our virtual classrooms, in our virtual tehillim groups, and with the other initiatives happening worldwide, to make sure that we're each doing our part.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Katz