

Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei, Rabbi James Proops

As we conclude *Sefer Shemot*, the *parasha* details the final completion and erection of the *Mishkan* and its contents. The Torah explains the precise location where the *Shulchan* will stand, where the *Aron* was to be placed and the place where the *Menorah* will be fixed. The *parasha* is replete with the exact details of the order in which everything was assembled, as well as how the materials were brought together. Interestingly we find a variety of verbs used for the various activities involved in this process. We have “ויתן - and he gave”, “וישן - and he placed”, “ויבא - and he brought”, “ויפרש - and he spread out” and “ויסך - and he screened”. Dayan Moshe Swift zt”l points out that we can find in these expressions a great lesson for *Bnei Yisrael* as they were soon to embark on the final phase of their journey, entering their own land, setting up Jewish homes and living Jewish lives. The message is simple and clear. Every person has a role to play and a job to do. There can be no ‘silent partners’ when it comes to the Jewish community and the Jewish People. Depending on who we are, our talents and capabilities, our place in the community and the means we have at our disposal, we must take our place in society. ויתן - those who can give must continue to give, ויקח - those who have to take must take, ויעש - those who can work must work.

The items in the *Mishkan* can also be seen to express a similar idea. Everything has its place in Jewish life. There was the *Shulchan*, the table with the *Lechem HaPanim* (showbreads) on it, signifying our physical needs and the physical aspects of our religion. There was the *Menorah* which spread light throughout, representing the needs for inspiration and faith. Finally we see the *Aron* in which contained the Torah itself, emphasising the need for learning and observance. In order to live a complete Jewish life we all need to ensure that we each have these areas accounted for in our lives.

There is a story told of a group of tourists crossing a lake when suddenly a storm came and threatened to capsize the boat. As they faced increasing danger the biggest and strongest of the passengers declared in a state of fear that all should join him in prayer. The captain of the boat responded “Oh no. Let the smaller men lead the prayers while you take an oar and help get the boat moving!”. Of course we are not belittling the larger man’s ability to pray nor the smaller man’s ability to

help row, but the message of the story is clear and it is the same message of the *parasha*. There are so many ways in which we can be of service to the community and the wider society. Each one of us has a responsibility to recognize and develop his or her God given potential to the full and use it for the good. Each one of us must occupy their rightful place and play a useful and constructive part in Jewish life so that, just as with the *Mishkan*, the *Shechina* (the Divine presence), will rest upon us all.

Shabbat Shalom