

The Mishkan and Our Mesorah By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

As we are reading for these weeks about the mitzvos regarding the building of the *Mishkan* as well as its actual construction, we notice that there is an emphasis on how everything was to be done in a very specific way. There were very detailed instructions for the measurements of the boards, curtains as well as all of the vessels of the *Mishkan*. We find that Hashem tells Moshe twice to follow the specific images that he was shown at the mountain. The first time was with the Menorah [Shemos 25:40] and the second time was with the boards of the *Mishkan* [Shemos 26:30], and the instructions on how to put them together.

Why specifically these two items required more adherences to an image shown to Moshe at the mountain? Perhaps we can understand this in the following way. For all of the Torah we need the mesorah, our oral tradition, to guide us in the proper way of serving Hashem. However these two Mitzvos can serve as specific guides for many other areas of our communal life and observance. The boards of the *Mishkan* can symbolize the shul since the Mishkan was our place for korbonos and for all types of community gatherings. The Menorah is the symbol of spreading the Torah. These two areas are very delicate and especially need guidance from our Mesorah and our Torah leadership in how to implement them. Many of us may have great ideas for how to beautify our shuls and the way we daven. However, the Torah warns us that we are not to copy any of the things that idolaters do in their worship. [Devarim 12:30-32] Even if the intention may truly be Leshaim Shamayim, we have to be aware that anything that has its roots in idolatry is to be despised no matter how nice it may seem. We must stick with our established mesorah in the way we build shuls and the way we daven. Even though certain additions had been made to our davening as well as other innovations have been implemented over the centuries such as the introductions of choirs in Germany in the nineteenth century, we still must be very careful to see that we

do it with the guidance of our gedolim who make sure that the pure mesorah for how we daven is maintained.

Jewish education is another area that must be left as much as possible in its original manner. It is true that modern times have created new needs to be addressed and new ways had to be devised to deal with them. For example, we now address issues of autism and other learning disabilities which were not dealt with previously. We use visual aids and other tools to help children who have trouble learning the conventional way. These certainly are important areas of education that must be addressed to see that ALL of our precious children are taught our Torah and mesorah. Nevertheless, it has to be done at the guidance of our gedolim. The transmission of our Torah and mesorah to the next generation is too precious to be left to modern scientific methods. Our tried and proven methods have worked for three thousand years and we dare not allow modern day educators come along and quickly change what had been established for centuries. A famous incident in my yeshivah, Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim illustrates this point. A group of rebbeim in the early grades suggested to the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, that instead of starting the learning of gemara for boys with the second chapter of Tractate *Baba Metzia* which deals with finding lost objects, the boys should start with a chapter in berachos about davening or something else that most boys are already familiar with. Rav Moshe felt that even though they had a point, nevertheless, we should not change our educational practice that has been done for generations. Moreover, by the boys starting their learning of gemara with the subject of finding lost objects, they become sensitized to the concept that our Torah teaches not only how to behave in schule but also on the street and everywhere else. Indeed, in these important areas we must follow our mesorah. It is our mesorah that gives us the guidance of how we are to conduct ourselves and we have to follow the chachamim of every generation to direct us on how pass it on to the next generation.