

## "And it came to pass on the day that Moshe had completed setting up the Mishkan." (7:1)

*Chazal* call attention to the first word of this *pasuk* hvhu, "*and it came to pass.*" They say that whenever this word occurs in *Tanach*, it always refers to a *tzarah*, a period of sorrow and grief. They question the element of grief associated with the *Mishkan*. The creation of the *Mishkan* as a place for the *Shechinah* to repose should surely be cause for *simcha*, happiness, and rejoicing. What role do despair and anxiety have during a moment of such exaltation?

*Chazal* present an analogy to a king who had a quarrelsome wife, who would not stop her bickering. The king told her to go make beautiful royal garments for herself. She did his bidding and occupied herself with the planning, fashioning and sewing of the garments. Everything seemed to proceed smoothly. While his wife was occupied with her new found endeavor, the king enjoyed a reprieve from her incessant quarrelling. As soon as the work was completed and the garments were ready to be worn, she presented herself before the king in all her regal attire. Despite his spirit of delight at the beauty of the clothes, the king began to cry. Now that the task was complete, her occupation had come to an end, and the queen would once again resume her bickering and criticism.

While *Klal Yisrael* was occupied with the building of the *Mishkan*, continues the *Midrash*, they had little time to murmur and complain. On the day that the *Mishkan* was set up, however, Moshe was concerned about their leisure time. Perhaps they might now resume their quarrelsome ways. Hence, it was a day of sorrow.

*Horav Moshe Swift z.l.* suggests this *Midrash* presents the accurate portrait of Jewish history. It has been said that the intensity of Jewish persecution has in itself been a major factor in sustaining Jewish survival. If the persecution were to cease, the Jew would disappear! Some have even suggested that the process of emancipation, with its ensuing "enlightenment," might have been the catalyst for the complete extinction of the Jewish people had it been unopposed.

When we were chased and plundered, when our homes were changing daily, we were far too preoccupied with our anxiety to abandon our hopes and aspirations. We were always conscious of our distinctiveness. We davened in cattle cars, we made *Sedorim* in the bunkers, and we kept *Shabbos* under duress in the ghetto. When political equality confronted the Jew, when the opportunity for "and we will be like all the (gentile) nations," presented itself, we disintegrated. Religious indifference became the forerunner of insecurity and self-hate. Without warning, being an observant Jew became a parasitical distinction. As the assimilation continued to flourish, each generation knew less about Jewish culture, each was more devoid of Jewish content. Woe to the day when Jewish anxiety gave way to Jewish complacency.

This pattern, notes *Horav Swift*, has marked the life of the Jew whenever he has come in contact

with the opportunities of western civilization. What happened to the remnants of those Jewish families who came here a century ago to enjoy the enticing freedom offered by this country? Where are their grandchildren? Can they still be counted as Jews? Their ancestors built beautiful sanctuaries, replacing the ones they had left in the old country, only to allow them to become empty mausoleums, monuments to a lost race and culture.

Statistical records would probably prove that we have lost more Jews to emancipation than to oppression. Our *shuls* today are filled with the remnants of those immigrant parents who wrapped themselves in *tallis* and *tefillin*, who remained poor rather than desecrate *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, who starved rather than break the laws of *kashrus*. These people are still occupied in building the *Mishkan*. The only hope for a thriving observant Jewish community is that we increase our efforts on behalf of building sanctuaries, so that we do not fall prey to the spiritual ruin which results from complacency and enfranchisement.