

WHAT IS THE MISHKAN

Just as the physical mishkan was built, likewise a spiritual mishkan was built from the souls of the Jewish people (Likutey Halachot, Ta'arovot 5).

The *mishkan* ushered in a new spiritual era for the Jewish people. Since God created the Jewish people in order for them to develop a relationship with Him, He desired that His Presence, called the *Shechina*, would rest in their midst. He wanted them to build a place that would bridge the spiritual and the physical. Therefore, in the time of Moses, He commanded them to build the *mishkan*, which housed this special place for the *Shechina*. The *mishkan* was the center of the Jewish encampment in the desert and accompanied them in battle. After they became established in their own land, they sought to fulfill the commandment to build a more permanent structure. This was the holy Temple in Jerusalem. Within the Holy of Holies, in its innermost precincts, the *Shechina* was actually manifest in this world.

The design of the *mishkan* paralleled God's own act of creation. It represented Man's partnership with God in bringing the world toward its final completion and ultimate goal. The *mishkan* itself was a prefabricated structure, which could be taken apart and transported from place to place.

Before the *mishkan* existed, it was possible to bring sacrifices on private altars, where the sacrificial service was performed by firstborn males. After the *mishkan* was constructed, sacrifices could only be offered in one place, and private altars were forbidden. The responsibility of carrying out the work of the sacrifices in the *mishkan* was then transferred from the firstborn males to the *Kohanim*, the priestly descendants of Aaron.

The *mishkan* contained the Ark of the Covenant – a gold-covered box holding the tablets from Sinai, and the original Torah scroll that Moses himself had written, as dictated by God. Attached to the top of the Ark were two golden child-like angelic figures. The space between them was a unique channel for prophecy, utilized by Moses himself. It was also the place through which the *Shefa* flowed into the world.

After the *mishkan* was first erected by Moses in the desert on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, it stood in a total of thirty-two different locations while the Jewish people wandered in the desert. It remained in use for a total of 479 years until King Solomon built the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. At this time, the golden Ark of the Covenant was transferred to the Holy of Holies, and the *mishkan* (its boards, clasps, bars, pillars and bases) was dismantled and hidden in the deep caverns under the Temple Mount, where it remains until this day. 