

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
Vol. 8 #19, February 19, 2021; Terumah 5781; Zachor

**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.**

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**Basil and Marlene Herzstein, their daughters Natanya, Yael and Mia, Grandchildren Haviv and Matar, and Basil's sister Susan Herzstein lovingly sponsor the Devrei Torah for this Shabbat in memory of Basil and Susan's father, Fred Herzstein, Peretz ben Avraham, whose Yahrzeit is this Shabbat, 8 Adar.**

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From the drama of Aseret Dibrot two weeks ago and 53 mitzvot from (Jewish) law school in Mishpatim, the Torah takes us to the final five portions of Sefer Shemot – four of which consist of detailed instructions for building a Mishkan (space for God's presence to rest among B'Nai Yisrael) and then covering how the Jews lovingly built the Mishkan following these instructions exactly. I have discussed the Mishkan in my messages the past few years. For a change, I decided to reprint one of these messages (see below) and devote my space to some reflections on Purim, the holiday that always comes around Terumah and Tetzevah during a non-leap year.

The death threat to the Jews in Persia at the time of Esther and Mordechai was the first major crisis after the destruction of the first Temple and Babylonian exile (3338). Jewish prophesy had essentially ended by this time. Malachi, the last Jewish prophet, was active around 3340, approximately the same time as the Babylonian exile. Queen Esther confronted Haman in 3604, approximately 65 years later. With no active prophets, and with God no longer protecting the Jews with obvious miracles, the Jews under Haman's death threat had to wonder whether God would still protect the Jews, even in the absence of prophesy and obvious signs. The Megillah reflects the reality of the period, with God operating behind a mask, with no direct communication with any Jews.

For the dates in the above paragraph, see: [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/3915966/jewish/Timeline-of-Jewish-History.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3915966/jewish/Timeline-of-Jewish-History.htm)

Tetzevah, which we always read close to Purim during a non-leap year (next Shabbat), reflects this theme of God's hidden face. Although the entire parsha consists of God speaking directly to Moshe, his name does not appear in the parsha. Moreover, much of the discussion in the parsha involves the special clothes that the Kohen Gadol must wear when performing his duties. While clothes identify the Kohen Gadol in Tetzevah, we use special clothes and masks for Purim as a disguise to hide our identities – reflecting God hiding His face from our view.

As expected, Rabbi David Fohrman finds some amazing features in the Megillah. For example, Rabbi Fohrman shows that much of the language in the Megillah follows the same specific words in Sefer Bereshis. This pattern indicates that we are to learn about Purim from Gan Eden, and about Gan Eden from the Megillah. In the earlier story, Adam and Chava Rishon have only one rule – not to eat the fruit of God's special tree. One who eats from that tree gains knowledge enabling him to determine what is good and what is evil. However, in God's world, of which Gan Eden was part, only God could legitimately designate what was good and what was evil. In the Megillah, Esther starts asking the king to save her if he loves her. When he does and has his staff kill Haman, they do so on the gallows that Haman built to kill Mordechai. The word for the gallows in the Megillah is "eitz," which means "tree" – the same word as for God's special tree in Gan Eden. However, killing Haman does not solve the problem for the Jews, because the king reveals that the law in Persia is

that one may never revoke an edict of the king. Esther must then go back to the king and convince him to let Mordechai issue a second edict, permitting the Jews to defend themselves and fight back when attacked. Esther's argument to the king is that if he loves her, then he must do what is morally right and issue a counter edict to protect her people, the Jews whom Haman said were vermin to be killed. The king is a hidden reference to God, the only person permitted to set the rules for what is good and what is evil in God's world. The king accepts Esther's love and moral argument – he permits Mordechai to issue a counter decree to save the Jews. Rabbi Fohrman's analysis here explains how the Megillah and Esther's intervention redeem human error in Gan Eden (at least in part.)

The Purim story has further ramifications that Rabbi Fohrman uncovers. Esther's language parallels that of Yehuda in arguing to the viceroy of Egypt to let him substitute for Benyamin, victim of the ruse of the viceroy's hidden divining cup and therefore his designated slave. Yehuda, son of Leah (Yaakov's "hated" wife), saves Benyamin, a son of Rachel (Yaakov's beloved wife). In the Megillah, Esther, from the tribe of Benyamin, saves the Jews who had been exiled to Babylon and Persia. The vast bulk of these Jews were from Yehuda, descendants of Leah. By saving the Jews, Esther is primarily saving Jews from the other side of the family – repaying Yehuda for his kindness hundreds of years earlier. Esther therefore helps repair some of the bad feelings between the Leah and Rachel sides of the Jewish family.

The Megillah is an incredibly funny story, full of satire and hidden meanings. In my E-mail and on PotomacTorah.org, I have attached Devrei Torah by Rabbis Yitz Etshalom and Menachem Leibtag that discuss the history behind the satire and the significance of God's hidden face in the Megillah. I also heartily recommend the wealth of material by Rabbi Fohrman in *The Queen You Thought that You Knew* and extensive lectures available at alephbeta.org.

Many of us are still on lockdown because of high risk from coronavirus, the disease that reached our area right around Purim last year. Our last time socializing was at a Purim Seudah last year. We finally had our first dose of vaccine Wednesday of this week. Hopefully we shall have our second dose at least two weeks before Pesach and then be safe to return to shul (still with masks, social distancing, and careful hand washing). May it be safe for us all to resume our normal lives within the next few months.

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Not to ignore Terumah, here is my message on the Parsha from last year:

The presentation of the Mishkan chapters in the Torah focuses heavily on details, something perhaps of most interest to an architect. To me, focusing on the reason for the Mishkan and the parallels between the Mishkan and other sections of the Torah make the material far more interesting.

In Terumah, God tells Moshe to accept donations from the people to build a container of wood and to cover it inside and outside with gold. Once completed, the container would be a resting place for the tablets of testimony (testifying to the ten statements on Har Sinai). Once the people dedicated the Mishkan, containing that container, God would bring His presence to dwell above the container, among B'Nai Yisrael.

The presentation of the remaining Parshot in Sefer Shemot raises numerous questions. For example, how does the Mishkan relate to other parts of the Torah? When did God present these instructions to Moshe? For example, Ramban, nearly always reads the Torah as being chronological, unless he finds compelling information to the contrary. Ramban states that God gave Moshe the instructions in Terumah (and Tetzevah) before Egel Zahav, the sin of the golden calf. Rashi, however, argues convincingly that God ordered Moshe to build a Mishkan to atone for and because of the sin of Egel Zahav. Rabbi Menachem Leibtag carefully explains this dispute between Ramban and Rashi in the Devar Torah attached by E-mail.

Rabbi David Fohrman compares the Aron in the Mishkan to another container in the Torah made of wood and covered with some other material on the top and bottom. This other structure is Noah's Ark, a wooden container covered top and bottom with pitch (a tar-like substance that is virtually the opposite of gold). Rabbi Fohrman demonstrates through an analysis of language and function that the Aron and the Ark mirror each other in many ways. The key is that both the Ark and the Aron form separations between the human world and God's world (a world in which humans could not survive). The Aron is where God's presence would reside, hovering in a cloud over the kaporet (covering). Noah's ark preserved humanity (Noah's family and animals) while the flood unraveled creation until nothing existed except a vast, dark water world with winds and waves crashing all over. After 40 days and nights of this chaos, God recreated the world anew in an order that paralleled the initial creation. During the period of the flood, however, Noah's ark protected those inside the ark

from dying by being exposed to what the Torah describes as similar to God's world, the world before His initial week of creating a world fit for humans.

Like Noah, Moshe spent 40 days and nights on in God's space, on Har Sinai. The Torah presents instructions on constructing a Mishkan, which would enable the people to approach close to God's presence, in degrees that parallel the three physical separations of various Jews during the Har Sinai experience. Most Jews could only enter the outer section of the Mishkan. The Kohanim could enter a second section closer to the Aron, although only the Kohen Gadol could survive entering the holiest portion, by the Aron, and then only on Yom Kippur (after extensive preparations).

Rabbi Fohrman's analysis seems to me consistent with Ramban's interpretation that the purpose of the Mishkan was to enable the people to remember and relive the Har Sinai experience. As Jews sinned, they needed to relive the Har Sinai experience to enable them to return to a level of purity (physical and spiritual) worthy of living near God's presence. Following this interpretation, there still would have been a purpose in constructing the Mishkan even in the absence of Egel Zahav. According to Rabbi Leibtag, Rashi agrees with Ramban that B'Nai Yisrael needed a structure to remind the people of the Har Sinai experience (and a place from which God would present additional mitzvot). Rashi's interpretation, however, implies that in the absence of Egel Zahav, the people would have reached the promised land very soon and been able to build a permanent Mikdash (sanctuary) in Israel.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, always found a way to make the Torah exciting, a trait that came through especially in legal sections of the Torah where the topics could seem very foreign to Americans in a modern world. The Mishkan section of the Torah certainly requires a reader's guide for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Hopefully some of the excitement of the sort that Rabbi Cahan brought to his Torah discussions comes through with a few of the insights that I summarized. Read the complete postings by Rabbi Fohrman and the others attached by E-mail to find more material of interest to Jews who are not architects.

Shabbat Shalom; Purim Samaich,

Hannah & Alan

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**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Menachem Mendel ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.**

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Hannah & Alan

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## Drasha: Terumah: Crowned Comestibles

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

There is a common denominator among three prominent vessels that are conspicuously placed in the Mishkan. The Aron Kodesh that contains the Holy Luchos known as The Ten Commandments; the Mizbeach HaZahav, the Golden Altar of Incense; and the shulchan all have one aspect in common. They each are adorned with a "zair zahav" a gold crown that surrounds each vessel. The Jews are first told to make an Ark. "You shall cover it with pure gold, from within, and from without shall you cover it, and you shall make on it a gold crown all around" (Exodus: 25:11).

When they are told to build a golden altar for the incense offering, they are also commanded to make a crown around it. In reference to that altar, the Torah commands: "You shall cover it with pure gold, its roof and its walls all around, and its horns, and you shall make for it a gold crown, all around (Exodus 30:3). But when they are commanded to make the shulchan, the table that holds the lechem hapanim, the showbread, the order to make a crown takes on a different meaning. The Torah calls it more than a crown; it is called a guard.

"You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits its length, a cubit its width, and a cubit and a half its height. You shall cover it with pure gold, and you shall make for it a gold crown all around." The Torah reiterates the command to make a crown, but this time it uses a word that personifies the function of the crown "umisgarto saviv."

"You shall make for it a border of a handbreadth all around, and you shall make a gold crown to guard it all around" (Exodus 25:25). The crown is more than an ornament for the shulchan; it is a border that embodies the Table.

Why is the crown designated for the shulchan different than the crown that adorns both the ark and the altar? Why does the shulchan need a crown to serve as border, a guard, a misgeres, more than the other vessels?

**Reb Dovid of Lelov, a student of the Seer of Lublin, once came to Zelin to visit his friend Rabbi Dovid of Zelin. Hearing that the rabbi of Lelov was visiting him, the Zeliner Rebbe beseeched his wife to bake something special. Alas, the poverty of the couple was dire, and the poor Rebbitzin only had some flour and oil, which she made into biscuits.**

**Upon his first bite, the Rebbe exclaimed in earnest, "These cakes are truly exceptional!"**

**Knowing the source, the Rebbitzin dismissed the compliments of the bland and meager cakes as an appreciation of the effort. Weeks later, the Rebbitzin of Lelov met the Rebbitzin of Zelin. "You must tell me how you made those biscuits that you served my husband. I have never heard him get excited about food before, yet he did not stop praising the biscuits he ate in your home!"**

**The Zelin Rebbitzin answered meekly. "There was no recipe. When I heard that the Tzadik of Lelov was coming I realized that I had nothing to serve. Hashem knows that had I the means I would have made him a feast. But, alas, I could not. So I asked him to bestow His great goodness and the flavor of Gan Eden in the biscuits!" "Your prayers were answered," said the Rebbitzin of Lelov. "He said that they had the taste of Gan Eden!"**

The Torah tells us that the Ark, which represents the Torah, should have a crown. When one learns Torah, he creates a crown that surrounds the Ark. The Altar, which represents service of Hashem, has a crown, too. Those who serve Hashem properly merit a crown. It is the crown of avodah.

But when it comes to the table, when it comes to the world of bread and butter, the mundane matters of life, the crown serves a different purpose. The crown of majesty turns a table into a Holy Shulchan! It guards it, surrounds it and ensconces it with an aura of spirituality that converts a simple, mundane meal into a holy feast. That crown is more than an adornment. The Torah calls it a misgeres, a guard, which turns our food from the ordinary into morsels flavored and seasoned by the Almighty.

Rabbi Shaul Kagan, of blessed memory, Rosh Kollel of Pittsburgh, disliked hearing Jews say, "I am going to a party." "Yidden don't party!" he used to exclaim. "They gather, they rejoice, and they celebrate in the boundaries of the crown of the Almighty. A royal table should not only be set. It should be crowned!"

Good Shabbos!

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## Why is the Temple Not a Golden Calf?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

What's the difference between the making of the egel ha'zahav (golden calf) and the building of the mishkan (the Tabernacle)?

When it comes to the building of the Temple, our Rabbis teach that God is not primarily to be found on the mountaintop, where Avraham encountered God. Nor is God primarily to be found in the field, where Yitzchak encountered God. God is rather to be found in a house, like Yaakov said, "This is the house of God."

What is the significance of a "house of God"? Why is a house better than a field or a mountaintop? On the one hand, having a house means that God can be connected to more intensely in a particular place. If God is everywhere, then God is equally nowhere. Having a house of God allows many, but certainly not all, of us to connect more intensely.

More importantly, a house is something that we have to build. A house doesn't just exist in nature. It is created through human endeavor, skill and creativity. We have to invest our energy, our effort, and our neshama into constructing and creating something. And if that work is devoted towards a holy task, then the work itself becomes holy and sanctified. Nothing we value in this world do we get for free. "You shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee." (Ps. 128:2).

We value what we invest in, that which we create, that which we build. Har Sinai itself, once God departed from it, had no remaining sanctity even though it was the site of the greatest theophany ever in human history. In stark contrast, the Temple Mount, where the Beit ha-Mikdash was built, retained its sanctity even after the Temple was destroyed. Why? Because the Temple was something that was built, something we invested our hearts, lives, and passion into. And the sanctity that is created from that work and effort has a staying power. It persists and remains powerful forever.

The focus on the Tabernacle as house also points to the difference between the mishkan and the egel. A house is not an idol. An idol is also some created, something that people throw their energies into. But it is a solid thing, a thing in its own right.

A house, in contrast, is not significant because of its walls. The walls are important because they create a space. It is the space that we value. The space affords nurturing and intimacy, it gives a family a place to live; it is a place for parents to love, children to be raised, and – before COVID – a place for guests to be invited and entertained.

A house is a space, and with a space, true encounter can occur.

An idol, as we have said, is the opposite of space. It is physical. There is nothing that has opened up to allow another to enter. And a physical thing, when used not to make space for God, but to represent God, is not only a false image, it ultimately, with all the work that we put into it, becomes a reflection or projection of ourselves onto the idol, of a making of God in our image.

Where there is openness it is God Godself, and not our projection of God, who can enter. For after all the building that we have done, we stop and pull back. We exhibit tzimzum. We contract ourselves so we don't fill up the house, but so that others can come in. "And God's presence filled the Tabernacle" (Ex. 40:35). And once this happens, once we are able to relate to God as God is, and not as we would like God to be, then true encounter occurs.

This is true about our interpersonal relationships as well. Do we invest in those relationships to see ourselves reflected back in others, or do we invest in order to pull back and to see the other for who he or she is? To truly encounter him or her, not just our image of who they might be?

This can be a challenge in the time of COVID. We're around our family members – stuck in one house – all the time. So much so that the home might be becoming less of a space and more something solid. We are bumping into one another, or just brushing by, but not truly encountering as we once did. It is on us to do the work of finding ways to pull back and create a bayit, a holy house, a house which creates a space so that others may truly enter.

Shabbat Shalom!

<https://library.yctorah.org/2021/02/why-is-the-temple-not-a-golden-calf/>

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### **Teruma: The Teacher**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine\* © 2021 Teach 613

Every Torah student knows it. The Torah is not written in order. Although some people think that since the Torah starts with creation, everything will follow in chronological order, it simply is not true. The Torah is a book of lessons; it is taught by the master teacher, G-d Himself. Each lesson is handpicked to be taught in the order appropriate for the students, that is us.

This week's Parsha is a prime example. After the story of Sinai and the giving of the Law, the Torah relates the story of donations to the Mishkan (Sanctuary). Actually, in terms of history, the story of the golden calf happened first (during the 40 days that Moshe was receiving the Law). Why does the Torah describe the Mishkan first, out of its historical order?

There is a tradition that the first example which the Torah describes on any topic is meant to be the paradigm example of that topic. Thus, the Torah describes the Mishkan campaign and the generous donations that were made towards it, as the first example of a communal fundraising campaign. During the collection for the golden calf the Jews were also quite generous. But that was a generosity that took them away from goodness and trusting in Hashem. Therefore, the Torah first describes the collection towards the Mishkan. Only after the student understands what a proper, moral, campaign looks like, will the Torah (in Parshas Ki Sisa) tell us the story of the golden calf.

Similarly, I have heard, that when the FBI wants to teach its agents how to identify a counterfeit bill, they do not first teach the myriad of examples of how a counterfeit bill might look. Instead, they teach the unique features of a legitimate bill. They study it, examine it, touch it, and savor it. Once they know what real currency looks like they are ready to appreciate that the counterfeit bill does not match up.

Likewise, we are all teachers. The way we conduct ourselves, the perspectives we share with relatives, neighbors, and colleagues, all influence the way we view things. This is especially true in parenting. In fact, one of the features of good parenting is to share stories, examples, and good role models, that personify stability and good character. After all, the world is a confusing place. As children grow older, they will encounter many aberrations, which differ greatly from the proper behavior that we would like them to consider the norm. By telling heroic stories about great people, and heroic stories about "ordinary" people, we give them a reference point by which to judge the world. In this way they can recognize right from wrong.

When tragedy strikes, (may G-d protect,) one of the greatest therapeutic gifts we can give is to affirm, "This is not normal. This is not what is expected to happen." In doing so we enable people to maintain serenity and a reference point of sanity. I have often felt that this is one of the great benefits of observing Tishah B'Av as a national day of mourning. It reminds us that the paradigm case of "life" is not as we know it. The ultimate goal- in the times of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash- is a world without malnutrition, violence, and propaganda.

As we prepare for the upcoming holiday of Purim, we realize that it will be much different than the Purim celebrations of the past. Instead of festive masks, we "mask up," to protect each other. Instead of the traditional closeness, we will admire and wish each other well from a bit of distance.

Yet, we have a reference point. We have experienced Purim before, and know that this distance is not normal.

Purim is a time when we recount Haman's fanciful words, "The Jewish people are disjointed." In response, the Rabbis of the time legislated that we do numerous things to ensure unity. We give thoughtful gifts to the poor, gifts to friends and neighbors, and we invite others to partake of the festive meal with us.

This year we must make sure to practice the theme of unity, even as we are physically distant. By reaching out to those who need a good word, by helping those in need and those who just need a boost, we can meet the calling of the times.

This world can be a confusing place for both children and adults. Over time, it seems, anything can happen. But the Torah style is to be paradigm oriented. We teach lessons in order, and lay the groundwork for healthy relationships, healthy behavior, and healthy perspectives. We like to teach what the "authentic \$20 bill looks like," as we yearn for a more normal Purim, and for the times of blessing associated with the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash.

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## **Real and Fake Religion: Thoughts for Parashat Terumah**

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

A story is told of a man who stopped attending his usual synagogue and was now frequenting another minyan. One day he happened to meet the rabbi of his previous synagogue, and the rabbi asked him where he was praying these days. The man answered: "I am praying at a small minyan led by Rabbi Cohen."

The rabbi was stunned. "Why would you want to pray there with that rabbi. I am a much better orator, I am more famous, I have a much larger following."

The man replied: "Yes, but in my new synagogue the rabbi has taught me to read minds."

The rabbi was surprised. "Alright, then, read my mind."

The man said: "You are thinking of the verse in Psalms, 'I have set the Lord before me at all times.'"

"You are wrong," said the rabbi, "I was not thinking about that verse at all."

The man replied: "Yes, I knew that, and that's why I've moved to the other synagogue. The rabbi there is always thinking of this verse."

Indeed, an authentically religious person is always thinking of this verse, either directly or in the back of his mind. Such an individual lives in the presence of God, conducts himself with modesty and propriety. The Rabbi Cohen of the story was genuine; he was a spiritual person seeking to live a godly life.

The other rabbi in the story was "successful." He had a large congregation and external signs of prestige. But he lacked the essential ingredient of being authentically religious: he did not have the Lord before him at all times. He was busy trying to make himself popular, get his name into the newspapers, rub elbows with celebrities. Even when he prayed, his mind was not on God, but on how he could advance himself in the world.

This week's parashah begins with God's commandment to Moshe: "speak unto the children of Israel that they take for Me an offering—veyikhu li terumah. Rashi comments that the word li implies li lishmi—that the offering must be given with pure intentions for the sake of God. One might think that donating to the construction of the Mishkan sanctuary was in itself a sign of piety. Rashi's comment reminds us: it is possible to show external piety while lacking true piety. It is possible to appear to be religious, but not conduct oneself with a religious heart and mind.

A kabbalistic teaching has it that we come closer to God through the power of giving--giving love, charity, kindness. A truly religious person is characterized by an overwhelming desire to share with others, to act selflessly with purity of heart. This is the essence of real religion.

On the other hand, we become more distant from God through the power of taking--trying to amass as much as possible for ourselves--more material goods, more honor, more egotistical satisfaction. We cannot exist without the power of taking, since we must fulfill our basic material needs. But when we exert this power excessively, we drift further and further from God. This is a sign of fake religion.

We all know individuals who are characterized by the power of giving. These are loving people who can be trusted, who are generous, compassionate and loyal. When we meet such individuals, we can sense the image of God in them. They genuinely want to help, to share, to be of service, to contribute. They are humble, and ask for nothing in return for their kindness.

We all also know individuals who are selfish and self-serving. They may act friendly and smile broadly, but we sense that their friendship is as counterfeit as their smile. They may pretend to be loyal and giving--but they are simply interested in advancing themselves. They try to take credit for work performed by others. They are seldom there when work has to be done, but are always there for photo-ops. They ingratiate themselves with those in power, and calculate how they can take the most for themselves while giving the least of themselves. They pass themselves off as generous and kind, but they are only putting on an act. Their real goal is to take, not to give. Such people may fool some of the people some of the time, and even most of the people most of the time: but they never fool God.

In His command to the Israelites to contribute to the Mishkan, God specifies that He only wants contributions from those with generous hearts. He doesn't want contributions from those who are stingy; or who give in order to advance their own reputations and honor; or who give reluctantly or grudgingly. The Israelites were to build a sanctuary to the Lord--but it had to be constructed with "the power of giving", with selflessness and generosity of spirit. The house of God must be built with the finest, most idealistic human qualities.

The aspiration of a truly religious person must be to develop the power of giving; to be genuine, honest and kind. If we are to make our contributions to God's sanctuary--and to society--we must do so with purity of heart, selflessness and humility. We must aspire to real religion.

\* Angel for Shabbat; Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, <https://www.jewishideas.org/real-and-fake-religion-thoughts-parashat-terumah> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

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## Ruminations on Rambam

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

The Jewish Press newspaper has a feature in which questions are posed to a group of rabbis. I am one of the respondents.

A recent question (February 12, 2021) struck me as particularly strange: "Should a frum Jew believe the sun goes around earth if the Rambam says it does?" My immediate reaction: how could anyone today, including a frum Jew, think that the sun goes around the earth? Science has advanced prodigiously since the 12th century, and Rambam himself taught that "a person should never cast reason behind, for the eyes are set in front, not in back." Rambam relied on the best science of his time. And there can be no doubt at all that he would call on us to rely on the best science available in our time. He would be highly embarrassed by those who, basing themselves on Rambam's own writings, posit that the sun revolves around the earth, rejecting the advanced science of today.

I concluded my response with these words: "One of the great dangers for religion—and for human progress in general—is for people to cling to discredited theories and outdated knowledge. Those who cast reason behind thereby cast truth behind. And truth is the seal of the Almighty."

What I took to be so obvious was apparently not so obvious to the other rabbinic respondents. One of them wrote that “it makes more sense to side with Rambam than it does with Copernicus.” Another respondent asserted that Rambam was not giving a lesson in physics but “was explaining the world according to the Torah.” And the final respondent thought it was “likely” that Rambam would agree with the findings of modern astronomy—likely, but apparently not certain.

How disappointing to realize that there are “frum” people today who feel comfortable denying modern astronomy based on words of a medieval sage. How sad for Rambam’s reputation!

Rambam was one of the greatest luminaries in Jewish history. A pre-eminent halakhist, philosopher and medical doctor, he was also a brilliant and clear writer. Yet, in spite of his voluminous writings, he still remains misunderstood and misrepresented.

So while I was lamenting the column in the Jewish Press, I was simultaneously pleased to be reading a new book by Menachem Kellner and David Gillis, “Maimonides the Universalist: The Ethical Horizons of the Mishneh Torah,” (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, London, 2020). Both of these authors have written important works exploring the genuine teachings of Rambam based on a careful reading of Rambam’s own words in his various writings.

This new book offers an important approach to understanding Rambam’s Mishneh Torah—and the Rambam’s general religious worldview as well. By studying the concluding sections of each of the 14 books of the Mishneh Torah, the authors have demonstrated an ethical framework for this halakhic work. Rambam was not only concerned with presenting the laws; he was concerned with inculcating the ethical/spiritual foundations of the laws.

In his Guide of the Perplexed (3:51), Rambam pointed out that all of the Torah’s commandments exist “with a view to communicating a correct opinion, or to putting an end to an unhealthy opinion, or to communicating a rule of justice, or to warding off an injustice, or to endowing men with a noble moral quality, or to warning them against an evil moral quality. Thus all are bound up with three things: opinions, moral qualities, and political civic actions.” In the Mishneh Torah, Rambam applied this insight when presenting the halakhot.

In offering his ethical insights, Rambam does so in what Kellner and Gillis describe as a universalistic manner. Rambam often points to Abraham as a model human being...and Abraham discovered and served God long before the Torah was given. Abraham was not “Jewish;” he was a human being who longed to transmit proper beliefs and behaviors to society. At the precise midpoint of the Mishneh Torah, Rambam teaches “that each and every single human being can be as sanctified as the Holy of Holies” (p. 143). Jews and non-Jews can achieve true piety and spiritual perfection. Being “sanctified” does not depend on genetics but on one’s personal strivings.

In closing his chapter on the “Laws of Slaves,” Rambam notes that the halakha permits working a non-Jewish slave “with rigor.” But he goes on to offer an impassioned call for sensitive and considerate treatment of such slaves. “Out of halakhah and aggadah, Maimonides constructs a halakhah that moves smoothly but pointedly from seeing the non-Jewish slave as an alien who can be treated as an inferior to seeing him as an equal fellow human being. The upshot is a statement of thoroughgoing universalism, as Maimonides builds towards the establishment of a truly Abrahamic society at the very end of the Mishneh Torah” (p.266).

The Torah offers Jews a distinctive way to understand and serve the Almighty. But Jews do not have a monopoly on God. All human beings, created in God’s image, have access to the Almighty...just as Abraham himself had access long before the time of Moses. Kellner and Gillis note: “The point of the Mishneh Torah as a whole is the creation of a society which gives its members the greatest chance of achieving their perfection as human beings. In this way, the end of the Mishneh Torah comes round to its beginning: just as the beginning of the work deals with matters that relate to all human beings, so do the last chapters” (p. 308).

The authors have produced a remarkable book that allows us to see Rambam not merely as a codifier of laws, but as a promoter of an ethical, universalistic humanitarianism. They have shown the ethical component in Rambam’s ending sections of each of the books of the Mishneh Torah. These ending sections “adjust the tendency of each individual book, generally in a universalist direction, and compose a balanced and integrated picture of halakhah, oriented towards universal conceptions of individual and social perfection. They guide the reader towards an understanding of all the ceremonial commandments as intellectually and morally purposive, and of the social commandments as infused with the divine, creating a sense of reciprocity between intellectual virtue and moral virtue” (p. 319).

Kellner and Gillis have written an impressive book that enables readers to enter more deeply into Rambam's religious worldview. At a time when Rambam is subject to so much misrepresentation and misunderstanding, it is heartening to read a book that seeks to present Rambam's teachings in a clear, genuine and convincing manner. Bravo and thank you to the authors.

\* <https://www.jewishideas.org/article/ruminations-rambam>

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## **Parshas Terumah**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\*

Rabbi Singer's Dvar Torah was too late for my deadline this week. Watch for his messages most weeks.

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

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## **Terumah: Celebrating the Jewish Body: The 6 Mitzvot of the Purim Season!**

by Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

We stand now at the precipice of Purim. A time where we increase our joy. A time when we celebrate our victory over our genocidal enemies. A time when we remember that we wore masks before it was cool.

What is the theme of Purim? The celebration of our bodies.

On Channukah, the Greeks struck us with religious persecution, so we counteract that with the menorah light. But on Purim, Haman threatened our bodies. It didn't matter if we you kept Shabbat or not, how old you were, or how spiritually connected you were. If you were Jewish, Haman decreed your death. Rabbi Elijah from Vilna proves from the words in the Megillah that Haman even wanted to burn the bodies of the Jews he would murder into ash!

So on Purim we fulfill mitzvot that celebrate the holiness of the Jewish body whether through strengthening ourselves or through providing for our fellow's bodily needs. Here's a list of 6 of them. Remember that these mitzvot are not a zero-sum game. If something prevents you from doing one or a couple of them that does not mean you can't do others.

### **1) Matanot Laevyonim: Gifts to the Poor**

The Megillah calls on all of us (Esther 9:22) to provide for the bodily needs of those who have more difficulty getting food. Not only does it increase their joy but it increases ours as there is no greater happiness than to "enliven a lowly spirit or suffering heart" (Maimonides quoting Isaiah 57:15)

*How to fulfill: Give gifts of money or food to two different poor Jews to be distributed on Purim. There are organizations you can find online that do this or you can donate through your shul..*

### **2) Mishloach Manos: Gifts to our Friends (Esther 9: 19,22)**

Part of celebrating means including the people we know and love in our party. Who doesn't love giving our friends something they will enjoy? Not only that but Purim is also an opportunity to give gifts to people we may not know as well. We might discover a new person outside of our usual social zone. Personally, I've tried to do that every year and it's always led to good results. One person was so happy I thought of them that they gave me a basket of European kosher snacks.

*How to fulfill: Give 2 types of food (challah and wine, apple and dates, Laffy Taffies and cookies, etc.) to at least one Jewish person. You don't have to give it to them in person. You may leave it on their doorstep and let them know it's from you.*

### 3) Purim Meal

On the most body-focused of holidays of course we're having a meal! Whether you eat something fancy or something minimal, as long as you focus your heart on thanking God for the miracle, you're doing something beautiful.

*How to fulfill: Have at least an olive's worth of bread on Purim and have in mind that it's in honor of Purim. Also, sip a little more wine than you would normally drink if feasible. Because Purim is on a Friday and we don't want to have a big meal so close to our Shabbat meal, have the Purim meal before midday. Think bagel for breakfast!*

### 4) Reading/Hearing the Megillah Night and Day

The quintessential Purim mitzvah is telling the story of Purim. Rabbi Joseph Soloveichik considered the reading of the Megillah to be the Purim version of Hallel or giving praise to God. (Even though God's name is not in the megillah.)

*How to fulfill: Once during Purim night and once during Purim day, hear the megillah read from a scribe-written parchment. Because of the circumstances of this year, it's fine to hear it through Zoom. Many shuls will have opportunities to hear the megillah both night and day whether virtually or live with masks and social distancing.*

### 5) Reading/Hearing Parshat Zachor (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

In this parsha we read and remember about Haman's ancestors who attacked the Jews at Mount Sinai for no other reason than they hated Jews. They showed this by attacking the people who were physically weakest first. Like Haman, they wanted to destroy our bodies regardless of character or spiritual level. At this time of year we remember the battle we have in every generation to fight this evil that seeks to wipe us off the map (as is in the official charter of certain groups even nowadays)

*How to fulfill: For those that can't come to shul, some shuls will be reading it on Zoom right before Kabbalat Shabbat this Friday. It's always good to read the verses on your own if none of the options work for you.*

### 6) Giving a Half Shekel

The month of Adar used to be the month where they raised all the funds for the Temple. As we all know, temples cannot survive without the proper finances so a successful Adar meant that the Temple was taken care of for another year! To commemorate the half-shekel given, a custom developed that Jews give 3 coins worth half of their local currency to charity on the fast of Esther or on Purim.

*How to fulfill: Take 3 half dollars and give them to charity. Because half dollars aren't so common nowadays, shuls typically have a set of 3 half dollars that everyone uses. On the fast of Esther Thursday Feb. 25th, and Purim Friday Feb. 26th, many shuls have a container with 3 half dollars on the table in its front lobby. You may enter the building, put at least \$1.50 in the container, lift up the coins and put them back in. All money will be given to charity.*

Shabbat Shalom and a Happy Purim to you!

\* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL. We joined KI when our son Evan lived in Birmingham while attending the University of Alabama Medical School.

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### Rav Kook Torah Purim: Go Gather All The Jews

During these days of Purim, in this difficult time, we are besieged by many troubles from without, sufferings that afflict the entire Jewish people.

But our greatest pain comes from our troubles within. We lack unity, shalom bayit in the House of Israel. Let us recall the days and events recorded in the Scroll of Esther, written with prophetic inspiration. For God's spirit transcends the

passage of time and transient ideologies. Esther's eternal words — “Go gather all of the Jews” — must rejuvenate us and elevate us from our lowly state.

### **Is Unity Possible?**

One may ask: Is it really possible nowadays to gather all of the Jews together? Is it possible to unite all of the different factions and parties? How will the bones, scattered across the vast valley of exile — both material and spiritual — once again form that entity known as Klal Yisrael, and set forth its demands for renewal and redemption?

The answer is that there is a place where this dispersion, both physical and spiritual, cannot rule over us. But you object: We see with our own eyes the terrible internal strife. Jews rise up against Jews, brothers turn against each other like wolves and snakes. How can we say, “Go gather all of the Jews”?

Whoever thinks that Haman erred when he said, “There is one nation scattered and divided” (Esther 3:8), is mistaken. Indeed, the Jewish people is scattered and divided. But, nevertheless, it is one nation. You may wonder how a nation may be simultaneously united and divided. The world is full of wonders. This nation, whose very survival throughout history is replete with wonders and miracles, demonstrates by its very existence that it is, in its essence, one nation, despite its dispersion and disunity.

True, the afflictions of exile have divided us. But “the Eternal One of Israel will not lie.” The exile and all of its horrors must come to an end. The wind has begun to blow from the four corners of the earth, from the troubles surrounding us, and from the spiritual revelation which stirs us to return and be rebuilt in our homeland. Now we are nearing the realization that there is a cure for the malady of our dispersion and division. In the final analysis, we are, and will always be, a united nation. Israel shall once again rise to the eternal words, “Go gather all of the Jews.”

### **Our Hidden Spirit**

Yet the difficult barrier obstructing the path of redemption remains: the divisive discord that consumes us. The answer is that a person has two aspects. Medical procedures utilize the body's inner resources of vitality and health. This inner spirit is so hidden that even the patient is unaware of its existence.

Spiritual maladies and their physical manifestations only infect our lower aspect, the side which we see. But our hidden, unknown side always bursts with energy. It is brimming with life and strength. This hidden repository of health has the power to heal the outer self, which can mislead us into thinking that we are sick and feeble, when in fact we possess a healthy soul, full of life and vigor.

That which is true for the individual applies to a much greater degree to the entire collective. Klal Yisrael in particular is truly one nation: “And who is like Your people, Israel, one nation in the land?” (I Sam. 15:19) We must admit our error in identifying ourselves, the essence of Israel, with the nation's superficial appearance, with its outer, baser side. This self-image makes us cringe and tremble. We judge ourselves solely on the basis of our dispersion and inner strife.

The Hamans of every generation strike at us with their venom and hatred. Especially in this period of transition, they perceive our weak side, for it is visible and recognizable. But precisely through these tribulations we will come to the realization that we possess a previously unknown, collective soul — a great national spirit whose existence we had forgotten. It abounds with vitality; it has the strength to renew our lives as of old, and repel all of the Amalekites who wish to assault our weak and feeble.

This hidden Judaism, unknown even to ourselves, this great soul of a great nation, bearing both the suffering and the light of the world within it, will become known to us during these portentous times. The blessing of “Go gather all of the Jews” will emerge from its hidden place inside the nation's soul. Every Purim we must appreciate the great inner repository of our blessedness and our essential trait of unity, which will vanquish our divided side.

From a state of being unable to “distinguish between cursed Haman and blessed Mordechai” we will attain a higher awareness: the ability to uncover the hidden traits of Israel within us. Fellow Jews will recognize one another and join hands. And a mighty voice will be heard, “Let us rise up and ascend to Zion, to the house of our God” (Jer. 31:5).

(Adapted from Ma'amarei HaRe'iyah, pp. 155-157, and Celebration of the Soul by R. Pesach Jaffe, pp. 126-129..)

## The Gift of Giving (Terumah 5776)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

It was the first Israelite house of worship, the first home Jews made for God. But the very idea is fraught with paradox, even contradiction. How can you build a house for God? He is bigger than anything we can imagine, let alone build. King Solomon made this point when he inaugurated another house of God, the First Temple: "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much less this house I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). So did Isaiah in the name of God himself: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What house can you build for me? Where will my resting place be? (Is. 66:1).

Not only does it seem impossible to build a home for God. It should be unnecessary. The God of everywhere can be accessed anywhere, as readily in the deepest pit as on the highest mountain, in a city slum as in a palace lined with marble and gold.

The answer, and it is fundamental, is that God does not live in buildings. He lives in builders. He lives not in structures of stone but in the human heart. What the Jewish sages and mystics pointed was that in our parsha God says, "Let them build me a sanctuary that I may dwell in them" (Ex. 25:8), not "that I may dwell in it."

Why then did God command the people to make a sanctuary at all? The answer given by most commentators, and hinted at by the Torah itself, is that God gave the command specifically after the sin of the golden calf.

The people made the calf after Moses had been on the mountain for forty days to receive the Torah. So long as Moses was in their midst, the people knew that he communicated with God, and God with him, and therefore God was accessible, close. But when he was absent for nearly six weeks, they panicked. Who else could bridge the gap between the people and God? How could they hear God's instructions? Through what intermediary could they make contact with the divine presence?

That is why God said to Moses, "Let them build me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." The key word here is the verb sh-kh-n, to dwell. Never before had it been used in connection with God. It eventually became a keyword of Judaism itself. From it came the word Mishkan meaning a sanctuary, and Shekhinah, the divine presence.

Central to its meaning is the idea of closeness. Shakhnen in Hebrew means a neighbour, the person who lives next door. What the Israelites needed and what God gave them was a way of feeling as close to God as to our next-door neighbour.

That is what the patriarchs and matriarchs had. God spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah intimately, like a friend. He told Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child. He explained to Rebecca why she was suffering such acute pain in pregnancy. He appeared to Jacob at key moments in his life telling him not to be afraid.

That is not what the Israelites had experienced until now. They had seen God bringing plagues on the Egyptians. They had seen Him divide the sea. They had seen Him send manna from heaven and water from a rock. They had heard His commanding voice at Mount Sinai and found it almost unbearable. They said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." God had appeared to them as an overwhelming presence, an irresistible force, a light so bright that to look at it makes you blind, a voice so strong it makes you go deaf.

So for God to be accessible, not just to the pioneers of faith – the patriarchs and matriarchs – but to every member of a large nation, was a challenge, as it were, for God Himself. He had to do what the Jewish mystics called tzimtzum, "contract" Himself, screen His light, soften His voice, hide His glory within a thick cloud, and allow the infinite to take on the dimensions of the finite.

But that, as it were, was the easy part. The difficult part had nothing to do with God and everything to do with us. How do we come to sense the presence of God? It isn't difficult to do so standing at the foot of Mount Everest or seeing the Grand

Canyon. You do not have to be very religious or even religious at all, to feel awe in the presence of the sublime. The psychologist Abraham Maslow, whom we encountered a few weeks ago in these pages, spoke about “peak experiences”, and saw them as the essence of the spiritual encounter.

But how do you feel the presence of God in the midst of everyday life? Not from the top of Mount Sinai but from the plain beneath? Not when it is surrounded by thunder and lightning as it was at the great revelation, but when it is just a day among days?

That is the life-transforming secret of the name of the parsha, Terumah. It means “a contribution”. God said to Moses: “Tell the Israelites to take for me a contribution. You are to receive the contribution for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give” (25:2). The best way of encountering God is to give.

The very act of giving flows from, or leads to, the understanding that what we give is part of what we were given. It is a way of giving thanks, an act of gratitude. That is the difference in the human mind between the presence of God and the absence of God.

If God is present, it means that what we have is His. He created the universe. He made us. He gave us life. He breathed into us the very air we breathe. All around us is the majesty, the plenitude, of God’s generosity: the light of the sun, the gold of the stone, the green of the leaves, the song of the birds. This is what we feel reading the great creation psalms we read every day in the morning service. The world is God’s art gallery and His masterpieces are everywhere.

When life is a given, you acknowledge this by giving back.

But if life is not a given because there is no Giver, if the universe came into existence only because of a random fluctuation in the quantum field, if there is nothing in the universe that knows we exist, if there is nothing to the human body but a string of letters in the genetic code and to the human mind but electrical impulses in the brain, if our moral convictions are self-serving means of self-preservation and our spiritual aspirations mere delusions, then it is difficult to feel gratitude for the gift of life. There is no gift if there is no giver. There is only a series of meaningless accidents, and it is difficult to feel gratitude for an accident.

The Torah therefore tells us something simple and practical. Give, and you will come to see life as a gift. You don’t need to be able to prove God exists. All you need is to be thankful that you exist – and the rest will follow.

That is how God came to be close to the Israelites through the building of the sanctuary. It wasn’t the quality of the wood and metals and drapes. It wasn’t the glitter of jewels on the breastplate of the High Priest. It wasn’t the beauty of the architecture or the smell of the sacrifices. It was the fact that it was built out of the gifts of “everyone whose heart prompts them to give” (Ex. 25:2). Where people give voluntarily to one another and to holy causes, that is where the divine presence rests.

Hence the special word that gives its name to this week’s parsha: Terumah. I’ve translated it as “a contribution” but it actually has a subtly different meaning for which there is no simple English equivalent. It means “something you lift up” by dedicating it to a sacred cause. You lift it up, then it lifts you up. The best way of scaling the spiritual heights is simply to give in gratitude for the fact that you have been given.

God doesn’t live in a house of stone. He lives in the hearts of those who give.

\* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. Emphasis added. See <https://rabbisacks.org/the-gift-of-giving-terumah-5776/>

**Why Was the Holy Temple on a Mountain?  
And one man's dedication to growth, even on his last day**  
By Levi Avtzon \* © Chabad 2021

Dear Rabbi,

It occurred to me that we often talk about the symbolism of the mountaintop setting of the Giving of the Torah, as well as the life lessons gleaned from that locale. I don't recall, however, learning about the symbolism behind the fact that the two Temples—and the third one to be built by Moshiach, please, G d, soon—were built on a mountain in Jerusalem, the Temple Mount. Is there a meaning and a lesson to this?

Answer:

Great question. Let us explore the fact that the Temple was built on a mountain, and then we can unpack its lessons. If we look at the verses in the Torah that command us to build a Temple, we find no references to the idea that it should be constructed on a mountain. Rather, it is alluded to almost parenthetically in the Book of Deuteronomy.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the Mishkan (Tabernacle), which was the precursor to the Temple in Jerusalem and was set up in the desert by Moses, was built on a flat surface! Had there been any commandment or hint for it to be built on high ground, you could bet that Moses and the Israelites would have done so gladly.

So if there was no Divine request for a Temple on a mountain, and the Tabernacle wasn't erected on a peak, then did the site of the Temples just happen to be at an elevation?

A foundational principle in Judaism is that there are no coincidences in life, especially in something as significant as the Earthly Abode for the Divine. If the Temples stood on a mountaintop, then there is a deep lesson for all of us.

Holiness demands growth. The opposite of growth isn't descent; it's stagnation. We must move upward constantly. Yesterday's success was the actualization of yesterday's potential. Today demands fresh ideas, new vistas and novel approaches to the opportunities and challenges that G d puts before us today.

One can suggest that the Mishkan in the desert was the beginning of the journey and was therefore on flatlands. Growth demands that the next step be higher. Hence, the Temples in Jerusalem were placed on a mountain to symbolize that even the holiest of places can grow and elevate itself.

To further this metaphor: Not only was the Temple erected on high ground, the Temple itself had many levels. As one went deeper into the Temple compound, one found themselves climbing more and more stairs, ascending level after level. Thus, we must constantly grow. Even once we've entered the realm of holiness, we must grow higher and higher!<sup>2</sup>

On a personal note: My father, who passed away a few short weeks ago, epitomized this ideal. He was constantly reinventing himself. He never allowed the successes of yesterday to blind him to the calling of today. He directed a publishing house (sometimes printing a new book each month), all while raising 12 children. And if that wasn't enough, he decided about 20 years ago that he had a knack for matchmaking and went on to make hundreds of matches.

Here is a beautiful story that exemplifies this trait. Just under two years ago, my father suffered total kidney failure, and his life was in the balance. One of my siblings questioned the doctors about my father's chances of survival. The doctors were noncommittal. They couldn't offer any promises or even hopeful news. My father immediately picked up from the faces around him that his chances were slim.

What did he do?

My father always had manuscripts on him that needed to be edited. He had a policy, which he based on a memo from the Lubavitcher Rebbe to him, that every single book that was released by his publishing house had to be fully proofread by him. He would take full responsibility for anything published.

Lying in the hospital bed, facing his own mortality, my father started editing.

When he was asked why he didn't just take the time to rest, my father responded, "This was the task given to me by my teacher, the Rebbe. This is my life's mission. If I have a few moments left in this world, I want to use them to do what I was sent here to do. If I go up, I want to go up doing my calling." 3

My father did recover somewhat and lived for almost two years after that incident. But even during the many challenges and trials he faced until his untimely passing, he never stopped his work. On his last day of life, he managed to purify himself in the mikvah (a Chassidic custom that he was fervently committed to, and which due to his weakness demanded lots of stamina), pray with a minyan, proofread his upcoming books, and make some calls and send emails regarding setting up potential matches. He even bought a gift for my mother's birthday, which was the following day.

He never stopped growing, up until his very last minute. He continuously ascended the stairs of his Temple.

Dedicated in loving memory of my dear father, Rabbi Yonah (ben R' Meir) Avtzon, whose shloshim was observed on Friday, 3 Adar I.

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. "If a matter eludes you in judgment ... then you shall rise and go up to the place the Lord, your God, chooses," reads Deuteronomy 17:8. Rashi quotes Talmud, Sanhedrin 86, that this teaches that the Temple would be placed on high ground.
2. Based on the Rebbe's teachings brought in Yain Malchut (a collection of the Rebbe's teachings on Maimonides' Mishneh Torah), Book of Avodah, ch. 15.
3. Not exact quote, but very close and in the spirit of his words.

\* Senior rabbi, Linksfield Senderwood Hebrew Congregation, Johannesburg, South Africa. © Chabad 2021.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5008211/jewish/Divinity-Is-in-the-Details.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5008211/jewish/Divinity-Is-in-the-Details.htm)

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## Terumah: The Tabernacle: Infusing Divinity

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

The seventh portion of the Book of Exodus opens with God's command for the Jewish people to contribute (Terumah in Hebrew) toward the construction of this Tabernacle.

**All the implements of the Tabernacle in the work of it shall be made of copper all the stakes and all the stakes for the Courtyard shall be made of copper. (Exodus 27:19)**

All the stakes of the Courtyard must be made of copper: The stakes were hammered into the earth, indicating that the holiness of the Tabernacle actually penetrated the ground. By building the Tabernacle in the desert, and by "building" our personal, inner Tabernacles, we infuse Divinity even into those places that appear to be, like the ground, inanimate and lifeless.

— from Daily Wisdom #1

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
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#### Covenant and Conversation

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l**

#### The Home We Build Together

The sequence of parashot that begins with Terumah, and continues Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa, Vayakhel and Pekudei, is puzzling in many ways. First, it outlines the construction of the Tabernacle (Mishkan), the portable House of Worship the Israelites built and carried with them through the desert, in exhaustive and exhausting detail. The narrative takes almost the whole of the last third of the book of Exodus. Why so long? Why such detail? The Tabernacle was, after all, only a temporary home for the Divine Presence, eventually superseded by the Temple in Jerusalem.

Besides which, why is the making of the Mishkan in the book of Exodus at all? Its natural place seems to be in the book of Vayikra, which is overwhelmingly devoted to an account of the service of the Mishkan and the sacrifices that were offered there. The book of Exodus, by contrast, could be subtitled, "the birth of a nation". It is about the transition of the Israelites from a family to a people and their journey from slavery to freedom. It rises to a climax with the covenant made between God and the people at Mount Sinai. What has the Tabernacle to do with this? It seems an odd way to end the book.

The answer, it seems to me, is profound. First, recall the history of the Israelites until now. It has been a long series of complaints. They complained when the first intervention by Moses made their situation worse. Then, at the Red Sea, they said to Moses: "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'?" It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (Ex. 14:11-12).

After crossing the sea they continued to complain, first about the lack of water, then that the water was bitter, then at the lack of food, then again about the lack of water. Then, within weeks of the revelation at Sinai – the only time in history God appeared to an entire nation – they made a Golden Calf. If an unprecedented sequence of miracles cannot bring about a mature response on the part of the people, what will?

It is then that God said: Let them build something together. This simple command transformed the Israelites. During the whole construction of the Tabernacle there were no complaints. The entire people contributed – some gold, silver, or bronze, some brought

skins and drapes, others gave their time and skill. They gave so much that Moses had to order them to stop. A remarkable proposition is being framed here: It is not what God does for us that transforms us. It is what we do for God.

So long as every crisis was dealt with by Moses and miracles, the Israelites remained in a state of dependency. Their default response was to complain. In order for them to reach adulthood and responsibility, there had to be a transition from passive recipients of God's blessings to active creators. The people had to become God's "partners in the work of creation" (Shabbat 10a). That, I believe, is what the Sages meant when they said, "Call them not 'your children' but 'your builders'" (Brachot 64a). People have to become builders if they are to grow from childhood to adulthood.

Judaism is God's call to responsibility. He does not want us to rely on miracles. He does not want us to be dependent on others. He wants us to become His partners, recognising that what we have, we have from Him, but what we make of what we have is up to us, our choices and our effort. This is not an easy balance to achieve. It is easy to live a life of dependency. It is equally easy in the opposite direction to slip into the mistake of saying "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me" (Deut. 8:17). The Jewish view of the human condition is that everything we achieve is due to our own efforts, but equally and essentially the result of God's blessing.

The building of the Tabernacle was the first great project the Israelites undertook together. It involved their generosity and skill. It gave them the chance to give back to God a little of what He had given them. It conferred on them the dignity of labour and creative endeavour. It brought to closure their birth as a nation and it symbolised the challenge of the future. The society they were summoned to create in the land of Israel would be one in which everyone would play their part. It was to become – in the phrase I have used as the title of one of my books – "the home we build together." [1]

From this we see that one of the greatest challenges of leadership is to give people the chance to give, to contribute, to participate. That requires self-restraint, tzimtzum, on the part of the leader, creating the space for others to lead. As the saying goes: A leader is best when people barely need to acknowledge him. When his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: 'we did it ourselves.' [2]

This brings us to the fundamental distinction in politics between State and Society. The state

represents what is done for us by the machinery of government, through the instrumentality of laws, courts, taxation and public spending. Society is what we do for one another through communities, voluntary associations, charities and welfare organisations. Judaism, I believe, has a marked preference for society rather than state, precisely because it recognises – and this is the central theme of the book of Exodus – that it is what we do for others, not what others or God does for us, that transforms us. The Jewish formula, I believe, is: small state, big society.

The person who had the deepest insight into the nature of democratic society was Alexis de Tocqueville. Visiting America in the 1830s, he saw that its strength lay in what he called the "art of association", the tendency of Americans to come together in communities and voluntary groups to help one another, rather than leaving the task to a centralised government. Were it ever to be otherwise, were individuals to depend wholly on the state, then democratic freedom would be at risk.

In one of the most haunting passages of his masterwork, *Democracy in America*, he says that democracies are at risk of a completely new form of oppression for which there is no precedent in the past. It will happen, he says, when people exist solely in and for themselves, leaving the pursuit of the common good to the government. This would then be what life would be like:

Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks, on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual childhood: it is well content that the people should rejoice, provided they think of nothing but rejoicing. For their happiness such a government willingly labours, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness; it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances: what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living? [3]

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Tocqueville wrote these words almost 200 years ago, and there is a risk that this is happening to some European societies today: all state, no society; all government, little or no community.<sup>[4]</sup> Tocqueville was not a religious writer. He makes no reference to the Hebrew Bible. But the fear he has is precisely what the book of Exodus documents. When a central power – even when this is God Himself – does everything on behalf of the people, they remain in a state of arrested development. They complain instead of acting. They give way easily to despair. When the leader, in this case Moses, is missing, they do foolish things, none more so than making a Golden Calf.

There is only one solution: to make the people co-architects of their own destiny, to get them to build something together, to shape them into a team and show them that they are not helpless, that they are responsible and capable of collaborative action. Genesis begins with God creating the universe as a home for human beings. Exodus ends with human beings creating the Mishkan, as a ‘home’ for God.

Hence the basic principle of Judaism, that we are called on to become co-creators with God. And hence, too, the corollary: that leaders do not do the work on behalf of the people. They teach people how to do the work themselves.

It is not what God does for us but what we do for God that allows us to reach dignity and responsibility.

[1] Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2009).

[2] Attributed to Lao-Tsu.

[3] Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, abridged and with an introduction by Thomas Bender (The Modern Library, New York, 1981), 584.

[4] This is not to imply that there is no role for governments; that all should be left to voluntary associations. Far from it. There are things – from the rule of law to the defence of the realm to the enforcement of ethical standards and the creation of an equitable distribution of the goods necessary for a dignified existence – that only governments can achieve. The issue is balance.

### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

“They shall make an ark of acacia trees. Overlay it with pure gold— outside and inside—and you shall make upon it a gold crown all around. Cast for it four gold rings and place them on its four corners, two rings on one side and two rings on the other. Into these rings you must insert the [two] poles of acacia trees which you are to overlay with gold, and with which you are to carry the ark. The staves shall remain in the rings of the ark; they may not be removed from it. You shall place into the ark the Testimonial Tablets which I will give you” (Ex. 25:10-16)

The first of the Sanctuary’s accoutrements is the Ark of the Covenant, into which the Tablets of the Ten Commandments are to be deposited. These Tablets are the written record of the Revelation at Sinai, under whose rubric God

transmitted the 613 Commandments of the Torah.

Herein lay the Constitution of this newly formed nation, the message by which a holy nation was to be fashioned and the mission with which blessing was to be brought to all the families on earth. Hence, the production of this ark must contain many symbolic and instructive teachings; its very architecture is therefore divinely commanded.

The wood of the sacred ark came from acacia trees (*atzei shittim*), a rare type of tree which grows even in a desert wilderness; it is therefore an early forerunner of the freshness and vitality of the cedars of Lebanon which, in the days of our redemptive Messiah, will spread its force throughout Israel and transform arid deserts into fountains of water: “I will open up streams on the bare hills and fountains amid the valleys; I will turn the desert into ponds, the arid land into springs of water. I will plant cedars in the desert, acacia and myrtle and the oil tree... that people may see and know, consider and comprehend, that the Lord’s hand has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it” (Isa. 41:18-20).

The fact that the Sacred Ark, receptacle for the Torah, the Tablets of Testimony, was fashioned from the acacia tree emphasizes the fact that the Revelation was given to Israel not in the Land of Israel, not from Mount Moriah, but rather from the open-spaced no-man’s land of the Sinai desert wilderness. This, our Sages teach us, is because “had the Torah been given in the Land of Israel, the Israelites could have demanded it only for themselves, arguing that the nations of the world have no share in it; now, anyone who wishes to accept it, may come and accept it” (Mekhilta de R. Yishmael, BaHodesh 1, Lauterbach ed. p. 198).

Moreover, many botanists and researchers claim that the miraculous “burning bush” seen by Moses at the very beginning of his ministry was actually a semi-parasitic plant which covers acacia trees, the *Loranthus acaciae*, whose fire-red blossoms seemed to Moses to be a fiery flame which was burning, but which did not consume the tree it surrounded (Tree and Shrub in our Biblical Heritage, Nogah Hareuveni, p. 39).

The message and mission of the wood from the acacia tree is indubitably clear; God entrusted us, inflamed us, with His “fiery law of love” (*esh dat*) to become a holy nation of priest-teachers to humanity, to transform the wilderness wasteland of a corrupt world into a blooming Garden of Eden of fruits and flowers, piety and productivity, during the Time of Redemption.

The rest of the symbolism of our Sacred Ark is easy to interpret. The wooden ark was placed within a larger, outer box made of pure gold, and it itself enclosed a smaller, inner box of pure gold so that the wooden ark which

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enclosed the Tablet of Testimony was formed from the outside as well as from the inside with pure gold. Gold symbolizes eternity—it never decays; it is critical that the golden preciousness of God’s Torah must be expressed to the outside in human words and deeds and must emanate from an inner purity of heart, soul and mind.

The essential, central ark was made of wood, as we have seen, because a tree, unlike sterile gold, grows, develops branches, and often gives forth new fruit. Two staves, likewise made of wood, were inserted into gold rings on the sides of the ark, so that the ark—the Torah — would move, progress and travel along with the People of Israel.

Ours must be a living Torah. Our Torah must be found wherever human beings happen to be. Remember that in the Messianic Age the Gentiles will accept at least the ethical laws of our Torah (Micah 4). Our eternal Torah must respond with commanding vision to every new era, to every fresh possibility. Our Torah must apply eternal truths to changing conditions, maintaining deep roots which dig deeply into the depths of ancient nutrients but equipped with the necessary wings to fly into hitherto uncharted heights; it must bring us close to the One who revealed His Will in the wilderness and endowed us with the wisdom and wherewithal to perfect his world. Herein lies the secret of the cherubs, in human form with wings poised heavenwards, ultimate guardians of an eternal people with an eternal Torah. “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell in their midst,” in My Sanctuary, which must transform the world into a house of communion and communication with Me for all the nations of the world.

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#### **The Person in the Parsha** **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

##### **Charity**

Scholars have long disagreed about what distinguishes human beings from the rest of the animal world. Some have argued that it is man’s intelligence and use of language that distinguishes him; hence the term *Homo Sapiens*. Others have maintained that it is the fact that he uses tools that makes man distinct from other living creatures; hence, the term *Homo Faber*. There have even been those who have put forward the opinion that man alone of all the rest of the animal species engages in play; hence, the term *Homo Ludens*.

This disagreement is the basis for my personal practice of stimulating debate by asking groups with whom I interact the question, “What distinguishes the Jewish people? What makes us unique and different from other human groups?”

Here too, a number of opinions abound. There are those who will instinctively respond, “We are the people of the Book.” By this many mean that we are the people who follow the ultimate book, the Bible. Others simply mean

that we are a bookish people, tending to be intellectually oriented, and certainly read a lot more than most other cultures.

Another response that I have heard when I pose the question about what makes the Jewish people distinct, is that we alone among other faith communities think of ourselves as a family, as a mishpacha. I always find this response especially gratifying, because it recognizes a feature of our people of which we can all be proud.

There is another answer which I sometimes encounter, and that is that the Jewish people are a giving people, that it is our generosity that distinguishes us from others, that charity or tzedakah is our highest value. This point of view is emphatically expressed, with a degree of irony, in a passage in the Tractate Shekalim of the Jerusalem Talmud which reads:

“Rabbi Abba ben Acha said: One can never fully understand the character of this nation. When they are asked to contribute to the Golden Calf, they give. When they are asked to contribute to the Holy Tabernacle, they give.”

This can be seen as an indication of indiscriminate giving, and the Talmud emphasizes that it reflects a deeper tendency to be responsive to all appeals for help, often without paying sufficient attention to the merits of the cause.

The first indication of the charitable instincts of our people is to be found in this week’s Torah portion, Parshat Terumah (Exodus 25:1-27:19). In the very first verses of this parsha, the Almighty instructs Moses to gather gifts from the people in order to construct the sanctuary in which He is to dwell. He goes so far as to itemize the materials which will be necessary. The list begins with gold and silver and extends to spices and incense and precious gems.

The people respond willingly and generously, and establish a precedent of charitable giving for all future Jewish generations. Indeed, the Talmud in the passage just referenced, insists that the gifts of gold donated to the Holy Tabernacle were intended to atone for the gifts of gold which were molten into what became the Golden Calf.

This year, and in most calendar years, the Torah portion of Terumah is read about a week prior to the holiday of Purim. This holiday too is all about giving. The very celebration of this joyous day consists, as we will read in the book of Esther, of “sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor.” (Esther 9:22)

There is an interesting contrast, however, between the practice of giving on the holiday of Purim and the proper strategy for giving during the rest of the year. On Purim we must not prioritize our gifts. We give to “whomever

extends his hand.” We are permitted to be indiscriminate in our giving, without judging as to who is more needy and who is less so.

But when it comes to the distribution of charity during the rest of the year we are instructed to be far more careful about our practices of giving. It might indeed be our ethnic tendency, as the passage in the Jerusalem Talmud above suggests, to give to idolatrous causes as freely as we give to sacred ones. But we must realize that that tendency is typically based on impulse, on the emotions of the moment, whereas proper charitable giving requires planning and intelligent thought.

These days there are numerous causes which beg for our resources. I hasten to add that few, if any, of them are “idolatrous.” Quite the contrary, most of them are legitimate and even important. But charitable giving, according to our rabbis, requires triage; that is, careful determination of which causes have priority. The rabbis even have set down rules for how to make that determination.

The importance of realizing that not all charitable causes are of equal merit is well illustrated by a homiletic insight which I found in a book written by my respected colleague, Rabbi Daniel Feldman. The book is entitled Divine Footsteps: Chesed and the Jewish Soul. I quote:

“The Vilna Gaon...homiletically understood the verse, ‘thou shall not...close your hand against your destitute brother’ (Deuteronomy 15:7), as an instruction about the evaluative responsibility contained within the tzedakah imperative. When our hand is closed in a fist, all fingers appear to be the same size. However, when the hand is open, it becomes clear that the fingers are all of different length...Appropriate giving will always require a judgment call...”

We are often moved by appeals which tug at our heartstrings and which prompt us to what some have called “emotional giving.” But all of us, no matter how wealthy we are as individuals, and no matter how strong are our finances as organizations, have limited resources. We must attempt, although we can never be absolutely certain that our judgments are correct, to discern the priorities of the moment, and to distinguish between urgent overriding needs and causes which, despite their great merit, must be lower down on our list of priorities, and indeed which may, because of the paucity of our resources, have to be eliminated from that list entirely.

These are difficult decisions, no doubt, but necessary ones. Proper charity must be given with an open hand and with an open heart. But it must also be given with an open mind.

## Likutei Divrei Torah

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

### Unlocking the Mystery of the Keruvim That Were Locked in Embrace

Among the various physical components of the Mishkan, there were two Keruvim on top of the Aron (Ark) with child-like faces. One of the Keruvim was male in form and the other was female in form. In the Gemara in Yoma 54, Reish Lakish says that when the Romans came in to destroy the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple), they saw the Keruvim embracing one another. The Gemara in fact says that the Romans mocked the Jews for this. They thought the Jews were perverted. “Here in their Holy Temple, they have a statue of a man and a woman embracing!”

The Ramban and Ritva in Tractate Yoma ask a question: The Gemara [Bava Basra 99a] relates that a miraculous phenomenon occurred with the Keruvim in the Bais HaMikdash. During a time when Bnei Yisrael were fulfilling the Will of the Omnipresent, the Keruvim embraced one another; however, during times when Bnei Yisrael were not fulfilling the Will of the Omnipresent, the Keruvim faced away from each other. The aforementioned Rishonim ask a strong question: The Romans came in to destroy the Beis HaMikdash during terrible years for the Jewish people. Jews were not keeping “the Will of the Omnipresent.” They were not doing what they were supposed to be doing.

These Rishonim therefore ask: How was it that the Romans came in and found that the male-female Keruvim were locked in an embrace? There is no greater “time when Bnei Yisrael were not fulfilling the Will of the Omnipresent” than this moment!

They cite an answer in the name of the Ri Migash (Rav Yosef ibn Migash): A miracle was performed at that moment, to cause embarrassment to the Jewish people.

Another answer is said over in the name of several of the great Chassidic leaders, including the Bnei Yissacher [Rav Tzvi Elimelech Spira of Munkatch] and the Ohev Yisrael [Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apt]. It is a very interesting answer. I will cite the teaching of a Chazal they quote, and then I will try to put this answer into understandable terms.

This is an example of Chayav adam lifkod es ishto kodem she’yeitzei l’derekh (A husband is duty-bound to “visit” his wife before setting out on a journey).

The reason the Keruvim were in this embrace at this time was because this was—as it were—a “goodbye embrace.” Yes, it was a time when the Jews were not fulfilling the Will of the Almighty. But now, the Ribono shel Olam was going to leave us for what has become 2,000 years. When you are about to leave someone that you love, you kiss them goodbye. Therefore, in spite of the fact that it was a

time where “they did not do G-d’s Will,” nevertheless, they embraced for that final moment. This was that good-bye kiss which the historical moment demanded. Despite the fact that the Jews had reached this very low level, nevertheless—“A husband is duty-bound to “visit” his wife before setting out on a journey.”

I saw a third answer to this question in a sefer called *Shabbos u’Moadim*, which has somewhat of a different take on this situation. The Medrash [Vayikra Rabbah, Parshas Emor] cites a situation where one sees a Jew who is being brought to his death—being stoned. A voice calls out: “Why is this happening to you?” The response: “It is because I circumcised my son.” (I am paying for my life for fulfilling the mitzvah at a time when there was a governmental decree against circumcision.) A voice calls out (to another person): “Why are you being burnt at the stake?” The response: “It is because I observed the Sabbath.” Again, “Why are you going out to be beheaded?” “It is because I ate matzah.” “Why are you being beaten by the whip?” It is because I made a Succah; I took a Lulav, I put on Tefillin, or I wore Techeilles. It is because I fulfilled the Will of Father in Heaven.”

Through the centuries and through the millennia, the Jews have had this capacity that even if it cost them their lives, they still felt it necessary to cling to the Almighty and to His mitzvos. They still felt connected to Him. I once heard something which is so mind-boggling to me that it is hard to say over: The Chossid Yavetz (he was part of the expulsions from Spain and Portugal in the late fifteenth century) on Pirkei Avos writes that there was a woman who lost virtually her entire family. She had only one son remaining. She hired a ship to take her and her son away from Portugal. The shipmen took her to an island, killed her son, and left her abandoned there. The woman was heard praying, “Almighty, You are trying to push me away, but I won’t give up my love for You.”

It is mind-boggling that no matter what has happened to Jews, they still felt this connection to the Ribono shel Olam. If you remember from Succos, the alphabetic Hoshanna of “Om ani chomah” contains for the phrases beginning with the letters hay, vov, zayin, ches, the following expressions: “Ha’Harugah alecha” (murdered for Your sake); V’nechsheves k’tzon tivcha (and regarded like a sheep for slaughter); Zeruya bein mach’iseha (scattered among her provocateurs) but nevertheless—in spite of all of the above—Chavukah u’devukah Bach (she hugs and cleaves to You).

Rav Meir Shapiro says that this is the interpretation (albeit not the simple “pshat”) of the pasuk “Has a people ever heard the voice of G-d speaking from the midst of the fire as you have heard, and survived?” [Devorim

4:33]. Rav Meir Shapiro interprets the pasuk as expressing amazement that Klal Yisrael has heard G-d speak to them from the fires of persecution and oppression by their enemies, and have yet kept their devotion to Him.

This, he says, is what happened over here with the Keruvim. Yes, the Ribono shel Olam was kicking us out. Nevertheless, He was kissing us goodbye. The Keruvim, who were locked in their final embrace, symbolized this.

#### **Mah Inyan WSJ Aitzel Parshas Terumah?**

I would like to share an observation from an atypical source. It is from an article in the January 28, 2011 issue of the Wall Street Journal. What does the Wall Street Journal have to do with Parshas Terumah? I do not read the WSJ on a regular basis, but there is a Rebbe in Lakewood—Rav Asher Dicker—who called me up and said, “This is an article that you can use.”

The name of the article is, “The Fate of The Kilo Weighs Heavily on the Minds of the Metrologists.”

In a vault beneath the 17th century pavilion on the outskirts of Paris sits a platinum cylinder known as “Le Grande K.” From 1889 until 2019, the Le Grande K was the international prototype for the kilogram, the standard against which all other kilos are measured.

The article explained that this was “the kilogram.” We need to know the exact value of a kilogram, and there is a vault in Paris that has a platinum cylinder that weighs exactly one kilo. Le Grande K was so well protected, that there were three people in the world with the three different keys to the vault. The vault could only be opened with all three people present. It was “the kilo.” However, there was a crisis. Over the years, scientists noticed a problem. The “Grande K” was losing weight. Weigh-ins at the International Bureau of Weights and Measures showed that the bar had shed approximately 50 micrograms, which is the equivalent of one grain of sand.

To you and me, it does not make a great deal of difference that the “Grande K” is off by one grain of sand. However, this was a crisis in the scientific community. “It is a scandal that we have this kilogram hanging around and changing its mass and therefore changing the mass of everything else in the universe,” Bill Phillips, a Nobel Prize winning physicist, exclaimed at a scientific summit in London this week. “No one knows for sure what went wrong with ‘Le Grande K’ but some theorize it lost weight from being cleaned.”

What does this have to do with Parshas Teruma?

My friends, the Torah says about the Aron HaKodesh (Ark of the Testimony) in the Beis HaMikdash, “You shall place in the Ark the ‘Testimony’ that I shall give to you.” [Shemos

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

25:16] The Luchos (Tablets of the Covenant) and the Master Sefer Torah were in the Aron. When did they use that Sefer Torah? The answer is, “Never!” When did they see that Sefer Torah? “Never!” Who went into the Kodesh Kadashim (Holy of Holies)? Only the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). He did not open up the Aron and look at the Sefer Torah.

If someone has a Sefer Torah that no one is going to learn out of and no one is even going to see, then what purpose does that Sefer Torah have? The answer is, le’hadil, it is like “Le Grande K.” If there will ever be a person that will get a notion – I want to change the Sefer Torah – I want to take something out – I want to add something, who is going to know? I will start small – my neighborhood, then the city, then the country, and then the world. I will change the world!

The answer is – No! There is a Sefer Torah by which all other Sifrei Torah are measured. Therefore, you can never falsify the Sefer Torah because there is a master copy that is in the Aron HaKodesh that was from the Ribono shel Olam, Himself.

This is the interpretation of the Medrash: “When Moshe found out that he was going to die that very day – what did he do? Rav Yannai said he wrote 13 copies of the Sefer Torah – twelve copies he distributed to the twelve Tribes, and one copy he placed in the Aron HaKodesh. Why? Lest anyone think that he can change anything in the Sefer Torah – he needs to know that it will be validated against the Sefer Torah that Moshe himself wrote. Every Tribe will be able to look at the alleged text of the falsified Torah and say “No. This is wrong! That is not what the Sefer Torah says.” This is why we need a Sefer Torah in the Aron.

This insight was said over by Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, zt”l, [1881-1966] in the eulogy he gave for the Brisker Rav, zt”l [R. Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik, 1886-1959]. The Brisker Rav was, l’hadil, “Le Grande K.” When he represented Da’as Torah, he was not going to let anything be changed that was against Torah. If it was, he stood up and he fought for it. Everyone feared him, because he would not stand for any nonsense.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin said the Brisker Rav was the master copy of the Sefer Torah to his generation, the Sefer Torah in the Aron, by which to measure all things. If anybody got some bright idea about changing things, he would know that he would have to answer to the Brisker Rav.

This is what every generation needs. Every generation needs someone who people recognize will stand up for what is right and will not let anything false pass him by. When Rav Weinberg, zichrono l’Vracha, was niftar, Rav Heinemann eulogized him and called him (rightly so) “Gavra d’mistafeena me-nay” (the

individual who I feared). He was the person in town from whom one had trepidation. One understood that if he was going to try to change anything, Rav Weinberg was going to let him have it, in no uncertain terms. He was fearless and peerless, and he did not take any garbage.

Every generation needs that and every town needs that. They need the “Gavra d’mistafeena me-nay” they need that “Sefer Torah in the Aron.” We do not even need to use it. We do not even need to see it. Maybe it is never looked at in a person’s lifetime. However, we know it is there, and because of that, the Torah can never be falsified.

### Dvar Torah

#### Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

**Our kindness is directly linked to the sanctity of Hashem!** What is the connection between our generosity and the name of Hashem? Parshat Terumah commences with the mitzvah of ‘V’yikchu li Terumah’ – ‘take for yourselves a contribution that is for me,’ says Hashem. Of course, the implication here is that when we give we receive, and therefore ‘V’yikchu’, you are ‘taking’ – but why does Hashem say for himself?

Rashi says ‘Li’ means ‘Lishmi’, taking a lesson from the Tanchuma. Rashi is telling us that God is stating, ‘this must be for the sake of my name’. So what is the connection between our generosity, the contributions we were giving to the creation and upkeep of the sanctuary and the name of Hashem?

The Be’er Mayim Chaim suggests as follows. In the Gemara in Mesechet Pesachim, (Daf 50a) our rabbis teach us that the name of Hashem is never to be uttered by us – the only occasions it could be uttered were in rare circumstances in the Mishkan, the Sanctuary, and later in the Temple. Therefore Hashem is saying to us, in order for my name to be uttered you have to be generous. Without that Terumah, your contribution, my name will never be said. Give generously said Hashem, to enable my name to be heard.

I believe that there is a deeper message here for us. Hashem wants us to know that our natural kindness, our selflessness, the contribution we make to the world around us is an integral part of what He Himself stands for. We should never separate the concepts of our relationship with God from our relationship with our fellow human being. On the contrary, the greater we are in the performance of kindness the more kedusha, the greater the sanctity in our world. It is through the Terumah that we give, the contributions we make to others that we enhance the name of Hashem within our world.

### OTS Dvar Torah

#### The Correct Way to Rebuke

##### Rabbi Shuki Reich

At times, the elders wished to explain to the younger generation what the difference is between their generations. Since they didn’t wish to speak too harshly, in the form of a rebuke, they would convey the harsh messages in a more agreeable way. This is how they would keep the principles of the wisest of men:

“Do not rebuke a scoffer, for he will hate you; Reprove a wise man, and he will love you.” If you wish to admonish someone, don’t do so by calling that person a jester, but rather, by calling that person wise. This is what King Solomon taught us. “Through forbearance a ruler may be won over; A gentle tongue can break bones.” As soon as he says that, we would lend him our ears and hear this admonishment out of love”. The elder of the generation would only say this based on the words of the Torah, for so it was in his world – they had spoken out of their love of the Torah and their respect for God’s creations, and thus, the Torah and Israel’s love for God’s creations flourished.

He would ask: “What made the Holy Ark so special, that from it the Divine Presence would emerge to dwell among Israel?” Immediately, he would look directly at us with his wise eyes, and continue as follows: Our holy Torah was concerned that it wouldn’t be interpreted properly, and that human beings would peruse the streets with despondent faces, thinking of Hashem and His Torah, thus the Creator, Blessed Be He, cautioned us: ‘The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark: they shall not be removed from it.’ The same Holy Ark, from which Hashem spoke to the world, for there I will meet with you, and I will impart to you – from above the cover, from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the Covenant”. Thus commands our holy Torah – that the poles must never be removed from them.

Yet, in the description of the altar, the text reads: “The poles shall be inserted into the rings”. But didn’t we just read that the poles were never to be removed from the rings?!

This question was asked by Rabbi Yossi, the son of Rabbi Hanina, in Tractate Yoma. When I would ask my father, he would turn his head away from us, close his eyes, and mutter that he did not want to denounce the ancient sages brazenly and loudly.

Sefer Hachinuch answered this question in the following way: “Lest we might be required to depart quickly with the Ark, heading somewhere, and perhaps, due to our haste and tarry, we do not properly verify that the poles are held in place steadfastly, as required, and lest, God forbid, one of the poles falls; this would dishonor the ark”. Yet my father was not placated by this response, because it spoke in admonishment of the People of Israel.

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Another interpretation was offered by Rabbi Haim of Chernovitz, in his book, Be’erei Mayim Hayim: “For the poles, when they are separate from the Ark, they are prepared for any bad thing, and usually, they are bad themselves, without the Ark. Therefore, a person should always ensure that the poles, which are like earthly weapons, are kept within the rings of the Ark, such that they remain connected, and tied to the worship of Hashem.” The elder could not accept Rabbi Haim’s fears, for he wondered why any evil would be done with the poles.

This was his answer: Every generation, there are those who cling to the Torah, and do not let the Torah move forward and advance within their generation, and there are those who help the Torah advance, but do not see those eternal precepts within it. The Torah addresses both groups: “They shall not move...” – for the Torah must move, but “and his poles were brought” – the Torah’s movement is tied to its permanence, and therefore, the poles aren’t permanently installed within the Ark.

In any case, the Divine Presence shall make itself heard above the Ark, and its words shall be as illuminating as the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

#### Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

##### Do Clothes Really Make the Man?

The story of Megillas Esther is punctuated by references to clothing. At his lavish royal parties, Achashveirosh wears the special garments of the Kohen Gadol (Esther 1:4 and Megillah 12a). When Mordechai hears of Haman’s decree, he rips his clothing and puts on sackcloth (Esther 4:1). Before Esther enters the king’s chamber, she dresses in royal garments (5:1). Haman expresses his desire to be dressed in royal clothing (6:8). And finally, after Haman’s plan is foiled, Mordechai leaves the king’s presence wearing royal clothing (8:15). What is the message behind these multiple references to clothing? What’s more, the custom on Purim is to dress up in costumes and masks. What is the idea behind this type of masquerade?

Next week, in Parshas Tetzaveh, we will read how the Torah instructed Moshe to make special clothing for the kohanim - l’chavod u’l’sifares, for glory and splendor (28:2). The bigdei kehunah are designed to give honor and respect. The question is whose honor are they meant to accentuate? The Ramban offers two interpretations. First he suggests that the bigdei kehunah give honor to the kohanim who wear them. Just like royal vestments give honor to a king, and cause his subjects to treat him with greater respect, so too, the bigdei kehunah make the kohanim look distinguished, so that those who see the kohanim wearing these garments will view them differently and they will treat them with greater respect.

The Gemara (Bava Kama 91b) says that R' Yochanan would call his clothing mechabdusa - things that honor me. Clothes may not make the man, but they certainly can help him make a more powerful impression. They can shape the way people view him. And this is one of the purposes of the bigdei kehunah - to bring honor to the kohanim.

But the Ramban adds another idea. He suggests that perhaps the phrase l'chavod u'l'sifares does not refer to the kohanim at all. The bigdei kehunah are not meant to bring honor and glory to the kohanim. But rather, they are designed to make the kohanim appreciate the importance of the avodah that they are performing, so that they will treat the avodah with proper respect and dignity.

This idea is echoed by the Sefer HaChinuch (#99) as well. The mitzvah of wearing bigdei kehunah is one of the places where the Sefer HaChinuch makes his famous statement that ha'adam nif'al l'fi p'oo'losav - a person is affected and shaped by his actions. When a kohen wears bigdei kehunah, he feels differently about the avodah. He takes it more seriously and treats it with greater respect. The Sefer HaChinuch adds that the same should be true of someone who wears tefillin. He should feel elevated and more spiritually focused. He should feel inspired to live with a renewed sense of purpose, to take his mission in life more seriously. Clothes don't necessarily make the man. But they can make him more aware of his mission.

Sometimes clothing is misused. People dress in fancy expensive clothing to draw attention to themselves, to cause others to treat them with honor and respect they do not deserve. This is what happened at the time of Purim. Achashveirosh threw elaborate parties to demonstrate his power and prestige. He wore the bigdei kehunah to show off y'kar tiferes gedulaso - the honor and splendor of his majesty (1:4). The emperor was wearing beautiful clothing, but the clothes were not his own. He was covering himself in the superficial trappings of majesty, but (according to one opinion) he did not really deserve the honor of kingship (Megillah 11a).

Haman also had delusions of grandeur. He wanted to be dressed in royal garments, to be treated with the honor and respect worthy of a king. And Klal Yisrael at the time played along with this charade. They attended the party of Achashveirosh and they bowed to Haman. They were willing to pay homage to the majestic charlatans who were masquerading around in borrowed clothing and undeserved glory. They were taken by the glitz and glitter being displayed in Shushan, and they had lost their ability to strip away the superficial veneer of all that fake majesty, and to appreciate that Hakadosh Boruch Hu was the only one who truly deserved their respect and their attention.

Perhaps that is why when Mordechai hears of Haman's decree, he rips his clothing, not just as a sign of mourning and teshuva, but as a symbol of the lesson he wished to convey to Klal Yisrael. Mordechai wanted to teach them not to be taken by superficial impressions. Looks can be deceiving. Only by ignoring external appearances can we perceive the truth that is lying beneath the surface. Esther and her maidservants fasted for three days (4:16). They perfected themselves through introspection and tefillah, so that when Esther finally approached the king's chamber, she was not only dressed in royal garments, but she was infused with a spirit of ruach hakodesh (Megillah 14b). Her inner purity matched the splendor and majesty of her outer appearance.

Similarly, when Haman's decree is finally annulled, Mordechai emerges from the king's presence wearing royal vestments. This posuk is a turning point of the Megillah, and one that we read aloud, not only because it signals the complete reversal of fortune for Klal Yisrael (v'na'hafoch hu), but because it presents Mordechai as a model of true majesty, one whose inner humility, modesty and purity of spirit match the splendor of his regal attire. This is the image that Chazal wished to highlight at the end of the Megillah, to show the kind of people that are truly deserving of our respect.

On Purim, we masquerade in costume to demonstrate that we appreciate Mordechai's message. All too often people fail to realize that superficial appearances are just an illusion. Only by looking past the costume and penetrating to the inner nature of people and of situations, will we gain a more accurate perception of reality, and ensure that we stay focused on our spiritual mission in life.

#### Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

##### The Essence of the Holy of Holies

And you shall make an ark cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits its length and a cubit and a half its width. And you shall make two golden cherubim; you shall make them of hammered work, from the two ends of the ark cover. And make one cherub from the one end and the other cherub from the other end; from the ark cover you shall make the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim shall have their wings spread upwards, shielding the ark cover with their wings, with their faces toward one another; [turned] toward the ark cover shall be the faces of the cherubim... and I will speak with you from atop the ark cover from between the two cherubim that are upon the Ark of the Testimony, all that I will command you unto the children of Israel. (Shemos 25:17-22)

It's really quite surprising and even alarming on some level. Inside the Kodesh Kedoshim, the Holy of Holies, the Heart of the Heart of the Mishkan were to be found two golden cherubic, childlike figures. Through them

## Likutei Divrei Torah

prophecy would be transmitted! What's that all about?!

I once heard from Rabbi Nota Schiller, the Dean of Ohr Somayach in Israel, that there is a huge distinction to be made between being "childlike" and "childish". He said that Gedolim are often childlike, because they are filled with golden goodness, and they project purity and innocence. They are naturally happy, endlessly curious, filled with wonder, and refreshingly transparent. Gedolim are not just great in Torah knowledge but they are like a vigorous tree, healthy to and from the core, approachable and surprisingly normal.

What's "childish"? Somebody once said that if a child does not break dishes when they are young then they will break dishes when they are older. If this identity crisis is not eventually cured then it will lead to a prolonged adolescence and after that it just may morph into a case of terminal midlife crisis. Childishness is born from a quest for a happy inner child that often leads to person on an endless search and thirst for outer validation and attention.

There's a condition that I call "The Citizen Kane Syndrome". It's based on the story line of a 1941 movie. The play begins with an old time movie reel, a sort of post mortem biography of a successful and wealthy man, Citizen Kane.

After giving an overview of the magnitude of his estate and the reach of his power, the camera zooms in on the last moments of his life. There he lay breathing his last and as he expires he utters, "Rosebud" and then a crystal filled with fake snowflakes falls from his hand and shatters.

The next part begins with a few curious reporters who are determined to find out who was this mysterious woman in his life named Rosebud. The film then flashes retrospectively to a young boy and his mom living in a little shanty of a home. The poverty of their existence and the struggle of this single mom to provide basics is abundantly clear.

In one critical scene the boy is out on his sled enjoying the thick snow, when two men show up and quietly explain something to the mother. She reluctantly grants them permission to something.

Then the two men approach the boy and in the struggle for control they take his sled and throw it forcefully to the ground. Apparently his rich uncle had died leaving him the sole heir and controller of a huge industry. The mother could not resist the temptation to send him, even against his will, to have the opportunity for a "better life".

Narrative follows him through the vicissitudes of his business and personal life. As time goes on his financial success and influence expand

beyond imagination, while his private life is a series of broken relationships and failures. In the end he dies a lonely man with a snowy glass ball clutched tightly in his hand and "Rosebud" on his lips. In the final scene these two fatigued reporters standing there in the mansion, after having thoroughly reviewed all his life, express their frustration and despair at ever finding out about Rosebud.

The camera is now trained on group of workers who are busy throwing items of little value from the estate into a large bon fire. As the reporter had just finished stating, "Well, I guess we'll never know who that woman Rosebud really was!" a sled is tossed into the inferno and there painted is bright red letters is the word "Rosebud". As the sled burns the letters curdle and the credits roll!

That's childishness, while childlike is the essence of the essence of the Holy of Holies.

#### **Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash**

#### **"And It Came to Pass, in the Days of Achashverosh..."**

**Adapted from an article by Harav Yaakov Medan**

A unique feature of Megillat Esther is the absence of any mention of God's Name. This omission seems to be intentional, since there are verses in which the appearance of God's Name would seem not only appropriate, but even necessary.

The most obvious example is Mordekhai's declaration to Esther (4:14): "Relief and deliverance shall arise for the Jews from elsewhere..." There is an obvious and deliberate avoidance of explicitly naming the "elsewhere" that would be the source of deliverance.

The Midrash addresses the concealment of God's involvement in the megilla, offering the following insight: Wherever "King Achashverosh" is mentioned in Megillat Esther, the text refers to Achashverosh; but wherever it says only "the king," the text alludes to the King of Kings. (Midrash Abba Gurion 1)

Clearly, the Midrash is not addressing the literal text, and we are not meant to understand that wherever the word "ha-melekh" (the king) appears in the story alone, the reference is to God. Rather, the Midrash is hinting to us that the background of the story of the megilla is the Jews' sin of abandoning God and assimilating into Persian culture — effectively replacing the King of the Universe with a mortal king, such that there is no difference for them between the "king" mentioned in the megilla and the King of Kings.

The Gemara alludes to the same idea in its assertion (Megilla 12a) that the decree of annihilation comes about "because they partook of the banquet of the wicked one [Achashverosh]." Obviously, the Gemara does

not mean to say that the entirety of their sin is attendance at Achashverosh's banquet; rather, this highlights that the Jews have no problem with participating in this event.

I shall not elaborate here on the historical background to the banquet; suffice it to say that we may reasonably posit that Achashverosh (Xerxes) organizes this massive party, inviting "the army of Persia and Media" (1:3), in order to plan his war against Greece, with the stated goal of expanding the Persian Empire to cover the entire world. How can the Jews participate in a banquet hosted by the king to celebrate his anticipated conquests, where Achashverosh himself declares his intention to "render Persian territory coterminous with Zeus' heaven" (as recorded by the Greek historian Herodotus, 7.8/2)? Moreover, with Jerusalem standing in ruins, despised and desolate, how can the Jews willingly display identification with the Persian Empire, which is poised to rule over the entire world? It is as though the Jews of that time have abandoned the Sovereignty of God, replacing it with Achashverosh as king.

To illuminate and emphasize this sin, the megilla chooses to describe the events from the perspective of the "women's house" and the relationship between Achashverosh and Vashti, his wife. The first chapter of the megilla describing the "riches of [the king's] glorious kingdom" and the "honor of the excellent majesty" (1:4) of the king who seeks to rule over the entire world, concludes with a convocation of ministers, who are all summoned at urgent notice only to discover that the man who imagines himself as ruler of the world lacks the power to dominate even his wife's house. Each minister is struck with uncertainty as to the extent of his own authority and the power relations between himself and his wife.

The next chapter, offering a detailed and colorful picture of the women's house, listing the names of those responsible for the women and even focusing on the ointments and cosmetics used by the women, likewise exposes the sordidness of this mortal kingdom and its moral weakness.

Even when Achashverosh sits astride his horse at the head of his infinite legions, there is no mistaking the essence of his sovereignty, and the contrast between him and God cannot be clearer.

The beginning of the megilla records two banquets held by Achashverosh: the first, "for all his princes and servants", lasts a hundred and eighty days (1:3-4); the second, "for all the people who were found in Shushan, the capital," lasts seven days (*ibid. 5 ff.*).

Correspondingly, in Chapter 9, Mordekhai and Esther institute that Purim be marked with two celebrations — the first being meant for all the provinces, while the second is meant for the people of Shushan.

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

The original pair of banquets are meant to give honor to Achashverosh and to display the "riches of his glorious kingdom," while the second pair is instituted for the glory of God, with the Jews celebrating His Sovereignty over them.

The teshuva (repentance and repair) for the willing participation in the banquet of the wicked Achashverosh is the establishment of a holiday in honor of God and the enjoyment of this celebration, at its appointed time, each year. [Translated by Kaeren Fish] (A greatly expanded version of this article appears in *Be'er Miriam: Purim*, edited by Rav Medan [Tel Aviv, 2015].)

## Parshat Terumah: Moshe's Mishkan

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

### HOW SEFER SHEMOT IS "BUILT":

The first half (chaps 1-24) of Sefer Shemot (Exodus) recounts:

- 1) The story of the enslavement and exodus.
- 2) The establishment of a covenant between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael through the Decalogue (known affectionately and inaccurately as "The Ten Commandments") and the laws of Parashat Mishpatim.

The second half (chaps 25-40) of the sefer (book) recounts Hashem's instructions for building a movable Temple (the "Mishkan") and the implementation of these instructions by Bnei Yisrael.

This week, we stand at the opening of this second half. This part of the sefer contains five parshiot: the first two and last two focus on the Mishkan, while the middle parsha (or at least the middle of the middle parsha) tells the infamous story of the Egel (Golden Calf):

- 1) Parashat Teruma: Mishkan
- 2) Parashat Tetzaveh: Mishkan
- 3) Parashat Ki Tisa: Egel
- 4) Parashat Va-Yak'hel: Mishkan
- 5) Parashat Pekudei: Mishkan

Or, divided by perakim (chapters):

25-31: Hashem commands Moshe to build the Mishkan and its contents, create clothing for the Kohanim (priests), and anoint the Kohanim.

31: a) Hashem tells Moshe to command Bnei Yisrael to observe Shabbat.  
b) Moshe receives the Luhot ("Tablets") while the people create and worship the Egel.

32-34: Aftermath of the Egel: punishment, forgiveness, a new covenant (including Shabbat).

35: a) Moshe commands Bnei Yisrael to observe Shabbat.  
b) Moshe commands Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan, Kelim, clothing, etc.

36-39: All of the work is done as instructed and brought to Moshe for inspection.

40: Assembly of the completed parts of the Mishkan, and investiture of the Shekhinah (divine presence).

### THE TWO HALVES OF SEFER SHEMOT:

The first half of Sefer Shemot progresses from the arrival of Ya'akov's family in Egypt to their enslavement there, then to the birth and rise of Moshe, the plagues, the exodus, the miracles at the sea, the people's complaints, the visit of Yitro, the revelation at Sinai, and finally the laws of Parashat Mishpatim. Although what unites all these components of the story is the development of the nation and its relationship with Hashem, these events are all independent narrative/legal units.

For instance, while the story of Moshe's birth and development into adulthood is related, to some degree, to the account of the plagues, and both of these are related to the splitting of the sea, and all of these themes are related to Hashem's increasing level of Self-revelation (climaxing at Sinai), and all of these have some connection to the visit of Yitro and the laws of Mishpatim, we can see that despite the connections between these units and the larger themes toward which they contribute, they are all distinct units.

In contrast, the second half of Sefer Shemot is unified and tightly cohesive, narrowly focused on one topic: how and whether Hashem will maintain an intimate Presence among Bnei Yisrael in the movable Temple, the Mishkan. Instead of looking at this unit piece by piece, parsha by parsha, this week we will take a bird's-eye view of the whole Biblical terrain before us.

### THE MISHKAN PLAN -- AND THE EGEL:

In the end of Parashat Mishpatim, Moshe ascends Har Sinai to receive instructions from Hashem. In extraordinary detail, spanning Parshiot Teruma, Tetzaveh, and the beginning of Ki Tisa, Hashem lays out for Moshe the plan for His residence within the camp of Bnei Yisrael. All of these details come together to accomplish a fantastic (as in "fantasy") goal: "They shall make a Temple for Me, and I shall dwell in their midst" (25:8). Hashem plans to pitch His tent among the people's tents; He will be their next-door Neighbor.

## HERE WE GO AGAIN!

Many people have wondered (some of them great biblical commentators, some of them bored shul-goers who can't believe they're hearing all of the innumerable details of the Mishkan, which they heard in Teruma and Tetzaveh, repeated almost word for word in Va-Yak'hel and Pekudei) why the Torah repeats all of the descriptions of the Mishkan and its peripherals. Is it not enough for us to "listen in" on Hashem's conversation with Moshe in Teruma and Tetzaveh, in which He goes through all of the details? What need is met by the nearly verbatim repetition of these details in Va-Yak'hel and Pekudei, where we hear that the Bnei Yisrael did all that Hashem had commanded? Why not just tell us, "Bnei Yisrael built the Mishkan exactly as Hashem had commanded Moshe at Har Sinai. They assembled the parts, and then Hashem's glory filled the Mishkan" -- end of sefer?

One oft-quoted answer is that the Torah wants to contrast the people's total obedience to the instructions for building the Mishkan with their disobedience in building and worshipping the Egel. There is some textual support for this idea in Parashat Pekudei: every time the Torah reports that the people finish working on a particular piece of the Mishkan, it ends by saying that they did the work "as Hashem had commanded Moshe." Some examples:

(39:1) . . . they made the holy clothing for Aharon, JUST AS HASHEM HAD COMMANDED MOSHE.

(39:5) . . . gold, blue, purple, and red, and fine-twisted linen, JUST AS HASHEM HAD COMMANDED MOSHE.

(39:7) . . . on the shoulders of the Efod as a reminder of Bnei Yisrael, JUST AS HASHEM HAD COMMANDED MOSHE.

This refrain appears so many times in Pekudei -- fifteen times! -- that one begins to feel that it cannot be incidental, and that the Torah is using this device to contrast the people's complete obedience to Hashem's commands with their earlier "Egel behavior."

This is a tempting reading, but there are at least two reasons why it is not a satisfying explanation for why the Torah repeats the intricate descriptions of the Mishkan and its contents:

1) All of the "just as Hashem had commanded Moshe" formulations appear only in Parashat Pekudei; none of them appear in Parashat Va-Yak'hel, where the Torah begins to repeat all of the Mishkan descriptions. If the purpose of the repetition of the descriptions is to drive home the "just as Hashem had commanded Moshe" point, this phrase should be hammered to us again and again starting in Parashat Va-Yak'hel, where the Mishkan repetition starts, not 118 pesukim (verses) later, when Parashat Pekudei begins.

2) If the point of the "just as Hashem had commanded Moshe" formulations is to emphasize the \*people's\* obedience, it is strange indeed that of the fifteen times the phrase appears, seven of its appearances refer to action done by \*Moshe\* himself, not the people. If the Torah is emphasizing \*Bnei Yisrael's\* obedience, this makes little sense.

While the "just as Hashem had commanded Moshe" is an important pattern and surely communicates something, it is difficult to use it to explain the repetition of the Mishkan's details. (Next week I will offer an explanation of this pattern which I believe works better than the above idea.)

## THE EGEL AND THE MISHKAN:

Our question -- why the Torah repeats the Mishkan instructions in Va-Yak'hel and Pekudei -- may be answered by examining the relationship between the two poles of the second half of Sefer Shemot and the fulcrum between these poles; or, to put it in English, if the second half of Sefer Shemot is a sandwich, with Mishkan Description #1 (Teruma and Tetzaveh) and Mishkan Description #2 (Va-Yak'hel and Pekudei) as the "bread" sandwiching the Egel Disaster (Ki Tisa) between them, what is the relationship between the "bread" and the "filling" of this sandwich? How does the Egel disaster affect the Mishkan plans?

While Hashem is communicating the plans to Moshe, Bnei Yisrael are busy worshipping the Golden Calf. Hashem, of course, becomes infuriated; first He threatens to destroy the people completely, but then, somewhat appeased by Moshe, He spares them. But He refuses to accompany the people on their journey to Cana'an:

## SHEMOT 33:2-3 --

"I will send an angel before you -- and I will drive out the Cana'ani, Emori, Hiti, Perizi, Hivi, Yevusi -- to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked nation, and I might destroy you on the way!" The people heard this evil news and mourned.

## EVERYBODY OUT OF THE POOL:

Hashem's decision to not accompany the people on their trip to Eretz Cana'an is not simply a moment of discomfort in the developing relationship between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael; it brings the relationship screeching to an emergency stop. In response to the people's rejection of Him through their worship of the Egel, Hashem 'recoils,' completely cancelling the plan for the Mishkan! All of the intricate blueprints we have traced through Ki Tisa become, well, doodling paper. Since He refuses to dwell ("shokhen") among people who worship idols, what purpose would a dwelling ("Mishkan") serve? If there

will be no "ve-shakhanti," then obviously there can be no "Mishkan." Ibn Ezra makes this point explicit:

#### **IBN EZRA, SHEMOT 33:3 --**

"I [Hashem] will not accompany you [to Cana'an]: they should not make a Mishkan, for I will not dwell among Bnei Yisrael.

#### **THE "OHEL MO'ED" -- AND THE OTHER "OHEL MO'ED":**

That the sin of the Egel spells the end of the Mishkan is not only logical and intuitively suggestive, it is also implicit in the way the Torah refers to the Mishkan throughout these parshiot. The Mishkan is referred to by several different names; one of the most prominent names is "Ohel Mo'ed," "The Tent of Meeting," which appears thirty-two times in Sefer Shemot in reference to the Mishkan. (Despite the fact that some people \*do\* go to shul in order to meet their friends, the "meeting" meant here is the meeting between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael.)

The word "mo'ed," "meeting," shares the same root as the words "no'adti" and "iva'ed," a word which Hashem uses in sentences like, "I will meet you ["ve-noadti"] there [in the Mishkan] and speak to you from atop the Kaporet [covering of the Ark], from between the two cherubs on top of the Ark of the Testament . . ." (25:22). The name of the movable Temple communicates its function: a place to meet with Hashem and stand before Him in worship and communication.

But then the people worship the Egel. Moshe descends the mountain, smashes the Tablets, punishes the chief offenders, and chastises Aharon for his role in the catastrophe. Hashem spares the people's lives but refuses to accompany them on their journey to Cana'an. Then the Torah reports (in Ki Tisa) that Moshe creates a new "Ohel Mo'ed":

#### **SHEMOT 33:7 --**

Moshe took the tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the "OHEL MO'ED." Anyone who sought Hashem would go to the "OHEL MO'ED" outside the camp. In place of the real "Ohel Mo'ed,"

- a) a structure of beauty, grandeur, and complexity, with gold and silver, exquisite weavings, coverings, and architecture,
- b) intended as a national center to meet with Hashem and
- c) located in the center of the camp,

there is now instead

- a) a plain tent where
- b) only individuals, not the nation as a group, can seek Hashem,
- c) far outside the camp.

**Moshe does not name this tent "Ohel Mo'ed" by accident. He is chastising the people, showing them what they must live with (or without) now that they have lost the Mishkan.**

But the people do teshuva, and Moshe pleads their cause before Hashem. In several incredible scenes in Ki Tisa (which we will examine in microscopic detail when we get there), Moshe intercedes with Hashem and "convinces" Him to return His presence to the people and lead them "personally" to Cana'an. Hashem's agreeing to once again accompany the people means that the plan for the Mishkan is restored: His agreement to maintain His presence in their midst means that He will "need" the Mishkan to live in. (For some elaboration on whether Hashem needs a Temple or not, see this past week's haftara, "Ha-Shamayim Kis'i," Yeshayahu 66:1-2.) The next two parshiot, Va-Yak'hel and Pekudei, detail Moshe's instructions to the people about the Mishkan and their faithful obedience to the instructions. And since Hashem has forgiven the people and restored His Presence, the Torah returns to using the term "Ohel Mo'ed" to refer to the grand Mishkan where He will reside (the term appears 15 times post-Egel in Sefer Shemot as a reference to the Mishkan) rather than the forlorn tent of the period of His anger.

#### **WHY THE REPETITION?**

With the understanding that the second half of Sefer Shemot is a cohesive "Mishkan unit" with the Egel at its core and "Mishkan sections" on both sides, we may have an explanation for why Va-Yak'hel and Pekudei repeat Teruma and Tetzaveh: the details of the Mishkan are repeated in order to powerfully communicate to us the total restoration of the plan of infusing the camp of Bnei Yisrael with Hashem's presence. If the audience of the Torah (i.e., us) were emotionless, purely intellectual beings, it might have sufficed to say simply, "Hashem forgave the people for the Egel at Moshe's behest and reinstated the plan to build the Mishkan. The people built the Mishkan, assembled it, and Hashem moved in." But the Torah's audience is people, emotional beings; we need more reassurance than just the stated fact of Hashem's return.

**To illustrate with a cliched joke about Jews: a middle-aged Jewish couple come to see a marriage therapist. They have been married for thirty years. "What seems to be the trouble?" asks the therapist. "My husband doesn't love me anymore," the wife complains. "Ridiculous!" barks the husband, "of course I still love you! How could you say such a thing?!" The wife turns to her husband in surprise: "You still love me? You never tell me you love me!" The husband raises his finger in the air and says indignantly, "Thirty years ago, on our wedding night, I told you I loved you. If anything had changed, don't you think I would have told you?!"**

It is not enough to just be told. Having read of the Hashem's murderous fury at Bnei Yisrael, then the severing of the close connection between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael, we need powerful reassurance to feel that He has truly forgiven us for our rebellion, that He has truly come back. The way the Torah communicates that Hashem is with Bnei Yisrael once again is by offering the Mishkan again in all of its detail. In a sense, we have 'lost our faith' in the first rendition of the Mishkan command; that command was taken away when we were unfaithful. We need to hear it again to believe that Hashem is again willing to live among us.

If this still seems far-fetched, perhaps an illustration will help. In Tanakh (the Bible), the relationship between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael is often compared to a relationship between a man and a woman. Midrash Tana de-Vei Eliyahu Zuta, chapter 4, offers the following parable to convey the impact of the Egel on this relationship:

"... To what is this comparable? To a king of flesh and blood who had betrothed a woman and loved her completely. What did the king do? He sent for a man [i.e., Moshe] to serve as an intermediary between him and her. He showed him all of his marriage canopies, all of his rooms, all of his secret places [i.e., all the divine secrets revealed to Moshe during his seclusion with Hashem atop Sinai], and then he said to the intermediary, 'Go to the woman and tell her that I do not need anything of hers; except that she should make for me a small marriage canopy [i.e., the Mishkan] so that I can live with her, and all of my servants and the members of my household will know that I love her completely.' While the king was still busy commanding the intermediary about the marriage canopies and preparing to send many gifts to the woman, people came and said to him, 'Your fiance has committed adultery with another man!' [i.e., the Egel]. Immediately, the king put everything aside, and the intermediary was thrown out and left in haste from before the king. And so it was with the Holy One, Blessed be He, and Yisrael, as it says, 'Go down now, for your nation has strayed . . . (Shemot 32)."

To summarize and extend this mashal: Hashem sits in private (Har Sinai) with his closest confidant, telling his friend (see 33:11) how he plans to make permanent his relationship with the 'woman' he loves. He talks in great detail about his plans for the home in which they will share their relationship and excitedly shows his friend drawings of the home and the furnishings he has designed for it (Parashat Teruma and Tetzaveh). But while he is eagerly sharing this dream with his friend, the woman he loves is in someone else's arms (Ki Tisa). A messenger interrupts the man's conversation with his friend to report his lover's betrayal. In a flash, his love turns to rage. He shreds the plans for the home they were to share.

Slowly, over time, the man's friend succeeds in convincing him to forgive the woman (latter half of Ki Tisa); he is also moved by her regret for what she did in a moment of weakness and insecurity ("We have no idea what happened to Moshe . . ."). But she is overcome by guilt; she cannot forgive herself, cannot believe that he has truly forgiven her. In order to convince her that he has forgiven her, the man re-draws for her all of the intricate drawings he had made of the home they were to share and all the things with which they would fill it (Va-Yak'hel and Pekudei). He presents her with the images in all of their detail and intricate beauty -- and now she can believe it.

**This may be why the Torah repeats the details of the Mishkan: we need to see the "drawings" again in all of their detail in order for us to believe that despite our infidelity, Hashem can forgive us when we do teshuva.**

If you are one of the bored shul-goers, wondering at all this repetition, maybe thinking about the Mishkan in this way will help. Besides the repetition, we may be put off by the 'ritualistic' tone of the sections of the Torah which describe the korbanot (sacrifices, coming up mainly in Leviticus/VaYikra) and the technical-sounding sections of the Torah which describe the structure and contents of the Mishkan. But the essence of the Mishkan is not the ritual/technical, it is the place where Hashem 'goes' to be near us and where we go to be near Him. This is not a "modern" theme we are reading into a ritual/technical text, it is explicit in several places in the plans for the Mishkan, where Hashem articulates the theme that the Mishkan in general and the Aron (ark of the covenant) in particular are where "I will meet with you": see Shemot 25:22, 29:42, 29:43, 30:6, and 30:36. Obviously, then, both parties (Hashem and us) should be deeply caught up in the details of the encounter we experience when we visit Hashem at 'home.' Next week we will examine some of the technical details -- the special clothing of the kohanim -- and consider how this clothing contributes to the relationship between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom

Emphasis added

## Parshas Tetzaveh: A Continual Offering

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

### “THEY SHALL MAKE FOR ME A MIKDASH”

Hashem spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel, that they bring me an offering; from every man that gives it willingly with his heart you shall take my offering. And this is the offering which you shall take from them; gold, and silver, and bronze, And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, And rams' skins dyed red, and goats' skins, and shittim wood, Oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil, and for sweet incense, Onyx stones, and stones to be set on the ephod, and on the breastplate. And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all its utensils, so shall you make it. (Sh'mot 25:1-9)

Rambam (MT Beit haBechirah 1:1), quoting what is arguably the most famous verse in our Parashah, sees in it the Toraic command to construct the Beit haBechirah (Beit haMikdash):

It is a Mitzvat 'Aseh to build a house for Hashem, constructed to bring offerings; we congregate there for celebration three times a year, as it says: "They will build for Me a Mikdash". The Mishkan constructed by Moshe Rabbeinu was already explicated in the Torah – and it was only temporary, as it says...

Rambam's adumbration clearly presents the Mishkan as being the forerunner of the Mikdash. This can be stated in one of two ways:

The Mishkan was the "temporary" Mikdash OR  
The Mikdash is the permanent Mishkan.

While there are significant distinctions between these approaches – chiefly, which of the two abodes is seen as the "essential" one – both assessments share a common premise: That the Mishkan and the Mikdash are essentially, functionally and teleologically one and the same. This is, by and large, the conventional understanding, prevalent both in classical Rabbinic writings and more recent homiletic literature.

I would like to suggest that a closer look at the Mishkan and Mikdash, as they are presented in T'nahk, reveal a different relationship between the two, one that, if properly assayed, can help us appreciate the significance of each structure in its own right, as well as clarifying a number of troubling textual and extra-textual difficulties relating to these edifices.

Before continuing, it is prudent to point out that it is not a consensus in the exegetical tradition to interpret our verse as referring to the Beit haMikdash:

Granted that Mikdash is called Mishkan, for it is written: And I will set My Mishkan among you; but whence do we know that Mishkan is called Mikdash? Shall we say, because it is written: And the Kohathites, the bearers of the Mikdash set forward? This refers to the Ark, Well then, from this verse: And let them make me a Mikdash, that I may dwell among them; and it is written: According to all that I show thee the pattern of the Mishkan. (BT Shavuot 16b)

First of all, I'd like to point to several difficulties which the "conventional" approach generates within T'nahk.

## II. THE QUESTIONS

### A: AND IT CAME TO PASS IN THE 480TH YEAR...

The first glaring problem raised by the "Mishkan=Mikdash" approach is one of timing. If the Mishkan is simply the "temporary solution" to the Mikdash, i.e. that until the B'nei Yisra'el are settled in their land, they need a portable "mini-Mikdash", then why isn't the Beit haMikdash constructed as soon as they enter the Land. We see that the B'nei Yisra'el began implementing those commands which are Land-dependent (Mitzvot haT'loyot ba'Aretz – see Kiddushin 1:9) immediately, or as soon as it was feasible. For instance, as soon as the B'nei Yisra'el entered the Land, they performed the Pesach (see Yehoshua 5 – see also Sh'mot 12:25). Why, then, did they not construct the Mikdash immediately? Note how long it took:

And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the B'nei Yisra'el came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Sh'lomo's reign over Yisra'el, in the month Ziv, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of Hashem. (I M'lakhim 6:1)

In other words, it took four hundred and forty years after entering the Land before the Mikdash was built.

The immediate and nearly visceral defense to this challenge is one of specific location – although they had entered the Land, they had not yet arrived at Yerushalayim – thus prolonging the reality adumbrated by Moshe:

For you are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which Hashem your God gives you. (D'varim 12:9)

And yet, this defense does not stand up well to the testimony of the text. Among the first wars fought by Yehoshua (perhaps, as I argued in the essay in Parashat Beshalach this year [V'shinantam 3/16], his first real war of conquest), the

king of Yerushalayim, who organized the “southern alliance” of five kings, is vanquished. One might counter that even though he was defeated, that doesn’t mean that the city was conquered – but the text is quite clear in the summary of wars (Yehoshua 12):

And these are the kings of the country whom Yehoshua and the B’nei Yisra’el struck on this side of the Yarden on the west, from Ba’al-Gad in the valley of L’vanon to the Mount Halak, that ascends to Se’ir; which Yehoshua gave to the tribes of Yisra’el for a possession according to their divisions...The king of Jerusalem.... (Yehoshua 12:7,10)

Yerushalayim was in Yisra’eli hands as early as the first all-out war fought in the Land – and it remained a Yisra’eli town throughout the period, as indicated by the verse at the beginning of Shoftim:

And the sons of Binyamin did not drive out the Yevusi who inhabited Yerushalayim; but the Yevusi live with the sons of Binyamin in Yerushalayim to this day. (Shoftim 1:21)

The next counter-argument is that since Yerushalayim was not totally under Yisra’eli control – and rid of any foreign citizens – the Beit haMikdash could not yet be built. This argument rests on three questionable premises:

1) The situation changed in the times of David or Sh’lomo; i.e. that David drove the Yevusi out of the city such that it was a totally Judean city. Every indication of the text, up to and including the purchase of Aravnah the Yevusi’s granary (the future site of the Mikdash) by David (II Sh’mu’el 24:24) points to a continued Yevusi presence in the city.

2) Absolute control of the city is necessary in order to build the Mikdash. Again, the testimony of the text clearly refutes this. We need go no further than the rebuilding of the Mikdash by Zerubavel and Yehoshua (c. 518 BCE), when the city itself, inhabited by Cutean enemies and controlled by the Persian empire, was still a valid location for construction of the Mikdash. Even if one were to posit that this is only true once the first Mikdash was constructed (following the argument that the first sanctity was eternal – see MT Beit haBechirah 6:15-16), we still come back to the presence of the Yevusi, as a significant population in the city, during the times of David.

3) Yerushalayim was always destined as the place of the Mikdash. This is the conventional way of explaining the oft-repeated reference to “The place that I will choose to place My Name”, which is nearly anthemic in Sefer D’varim (12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21; 14:23, 24, 25; 15:20; 16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16; 17:8, 10; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11). It is generally understood as a veiled reference to Yerushalayim. For instance, Sifri identifies The place which Hashem will choose (12:18) as “Yerushalayim”. This is consistent with the Rabbinic interpretation of a key verse which appears in the earliest context of “the place that I will choose”:

For you are not as yet come to the Menuchah (rest) and to the Nachalah (inheritance) (D’varim 12:9) – Our Rabbis taught: Menuchah alludes to Shiloh (the site of the Mishkan from Yehoshua’s time until the end of the period of the Shoftim); Nachalah, to Yerushalayim. (BT Zevahim 119a)

Haza”l understand that the presence of the Mishkan in Shiloh was merely a “rest”; whereas the arrival in Yerushalayim was the “inheritance” i.e. final settlement. It is prudent to note that there are four opinions regarding the interpretation of these two terms, only one of which is quoted by Rashi (and thus is the “famous” one):

- a) R. Yehudah: Menuchah = Shiloh; Nachalah = Yerushalayim
- b) R. Shim’on: Menuchah = Yerushalayim; Nachalah = Shiloh
- c) The school of R. Yishma’el: Menuchah = Shiloh; Nachalah = Shiloh
- d) R. Shim’on b. Yohai: Menuchah = Yerushalayim; Nachalah = Yerushalayim

However we may wish to understand these four divergent interpretations, one thing seems clear and unanimous: that Yerushalayim is the proper understanding of “the place that I will choose”. I would like to suggest that this is not necessarily the case – that these Midrashim reflect the historical reality that Yerushalayim was chosen as the site of the Mikdash. In other words, instead of reading these Midrashim as “the place that I will choose means Yerushalayim”, we should understand them as “the place that I will choose turns out to be Yerushalayim”. This idea will be explicated further down.

In any case, the argument that the Mikdash could not be built immediately after Yehoshua’s conquest due to the “foreign” presence in the city of Yerushalayim is a difficult one.

One final argument might be mustered to explain the delay in building the Mikdash.

The Halakhah clearly states that the B’nei Yisra’el were given three commands which took effect upon their entry into the Land:

R. Yose said: Three commandments were given to Yisra’el when they entered the land;

to appoint a king;  
to cut off the seed of Amalek;  
and to build themselves the chosen house [i.e. the Temple]  
and I do not know which of them has priority. But, when it is said: The hand upon the throne of Y-H, Hashem will have war

with Amalek from generation to generation, we must infer that they had first to set up a king, for throne implies a king, as it is written, Then Sh'lomo sat on the throne of Hashem as king. (BT Sanhedrin 20b)

Since they could not (or perhaps were not obligated to) build the Mikdash until a king was anointed, the delay is now understandable – but is it?

First of all, this Halakhah itself begs the question – especially if we accept the underlying premise that the Mikdash is the “permanent Mishkan”. Why would the Mitzvah of building a Mikdash be dependent on the prior anointing of a king? We do not find that other “Land-dependent” Mitzvot require a monarch and his throne to activate obligation or allow fulfillment – why does making the temporary Mishkan a permanent edifice have this prerequisite?

We have already addressed the second question raised by this Halakhah – why it took so long for the B'nei Yisra'el to appoint a king (see V'shinantam 1/27).

If we are to understand the role of the Mikdash, we must also find a solution to this “Halakhic sequencing” – something we will endeavor to do in this essay.

In sum, the first set of problems we have encountered if we accept that the principle of identity applies to the Mishkan and the Mikdash is the lengthy delay in building that great building.

## **B: THE ARON**

It is abundantly clear that the Aron (ark), which houses the Edut (testimony – the tablets of the covenant) is the central “vessel” in the Mishkan. It is the first item listed in the order of building (Sh'mot 25:10-16) and, more significantly, it is the base of the Keruvim, from where God will communicate with Mosheh:

And there I will meet with you, and I will talk with you from above the cover, from between the two Keruvim which are upon the ark of the Testimony, of all things which I will give you in commandment to the people of Yisra'el. (25:22)

In addition, the Aron (with attendant Kapporet and Keruvim) is the only vessel which sits in the Kodesh Kodashim, that most intimate and holy of locations.

If the Mikdash serves the same function as the Mishkan and is its permanent housing, we would expect the Aron to play a similarly central and significant role in the Mikdash. The text is quite clear on this point – the significance of the Aron changes dramatically (yet subtly) and its role is diminished once the Mikdash is constructed. This can be most easily seen from Rambam's description of the building of the Mikdash and its appurtenances (MT Beit haBechirah 1-4). Whereas Rambam lists the Shulchan (table), Menorah, incense altar, copper (outer) altar etc., there is no mention of the Aron. Rather, Rambam relegates the Aron to a somewhat historical presentation:

There was a rock in the west of the Kodesh Kodashim upon which the Aron rested. In front of it stood the vessel with the Mahn (see Sh'mot 16:32-34) and Aharon's staff (see Bamidbar 17:25). When Sh'lomo built the House and he knew that it would ultimately be destroyed, he built a place to hide the Aron, underneath in a deep and crooked hiding place and Yoshiyahu the king commanded and hid it in the place that Sh'lomo built as it says: And he said to the L've'im who taught all Yisra'el, who were holy to Hashem, Put the holy ark in the house which Sh'lomo the son of David king of Yisra'el built; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders; serve now Hashem your God, (II Divrei haYamim 35:3) Along with it, Aharon's staff, the vessel which held the Mahn and oil of anointment were hidden – and they were never retrieved for the second (rebuilt) House... (MT Beit haBechirah 4:1)

Why was the Aron hidden? We understand Sh'lomo's concern – that when the Mikdash would be plundered, the Aron would not fall into enemy hands. Yet the practical implementation of this is difficult – how could a king (or anyone else) take it upon himself to remove (or pre-arrange for the removal of, as in Sh'lomo's case) the central vessel of the Mikdash? Aren't we commanded to maintain a proper Mikdash – and if God allows the enemy to plunder, so be it? How can we remove the central vessel from its place?

Our second question relates, then, to the Aron and its role. If the Mikdash is the “settled” Mishkan, why doesn't the Aron play the same prominent and central role in Yerushalayim as it did in the desert – and in Shiloh?

## **C: DAVID'S REQUEST**

The key passage relating to the initiative to build the Mikdash is found in Sefer Sh'mu'el:

And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and Hashem had given him rest from all his enemies; That the king said to Nathan the prophet, See now, I live in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within curtains. And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in your heart; for Hashem is with you. And it came to pass that night, that the word of Hashem came to Nathan, saying, Go and tell My servant David, Thus said Hashem, Shall you build Me a house for Me to dwell in? Because I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the people of Yisra'el out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places where I have walked with all the people of Yisra'el spoke I a word with any of the tribes of Yisra'el, whom I commanded to feed my people Yisra'el, saying, Why do you not build Me a house of cedar? And therefore so shall you say to My servant David, Thus said Hashem of hosts, I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Yisra'el; And I was with you wherever you went, and

have cut off all your enemies from your sight, and have made you a great name, like the names of the great men who are in the earth. And I have appointed a place for my people Yisra'el, and have planted them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; nor shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as formerly. From the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Yisra'el, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. Also Hashem tells you that He will make you a house. And when your days are fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who shall issue from your bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with such plagues as befall the sons of men; But My mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Sha'ul, whom I put away before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you; your throne shall be established forever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak to David. (II Sh'mu'el 7:1-17)

This selection raises a number of difficulties:

- 1) At the beginning of Nathan's prophecy, God seems to reject the notion of a dwelling place – "spoke I a word...saying, Why do you not build Me a house of cedar?" Yet, further on, God acceded to David's request. Does the Mikdash have Divine approval or not?
- 2) When God approves of David's initiative, He promises that the house will be built – by David's son. Why isn't David allowed to build it himself? Keep in mind that this prophecy occurs during the early part of David's career as "full monarch" (post-Sha'ul) – a career which spans 40.5 years. The commonly assumed reason for this generational delay is found in a passage in Divrei haYamim:

And David said to Sh'lomo, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a house to the name of Hashem my God; And the word of Hashem came to me, saying, You have shed abundant blood, and have made great wars; you shall not build a house to My Name, because you have shed much blood upon the earth in My sight. (I Divrei haYamim 22:7-8)

This is, however, not found anywhere in the contemporary texts (Sh'mu'el/M'lakhim) and reflects the overall perspective of Divrei haYamim (composed during the Second Temple era – see BT Bava Batra 14a), which heightens the "spiritual/religious" nature of the Yisra'eli monarchy. If this is a piece of the reason for prohibiting David from building, it is certainly not the whole story – for, if it were, why would it not be mentioned either by Nathan, by David (to Sh'lomo – see I M'lakhim 2) or by Sh'lomo (in his words to Hiram [I M'lakhim 5:17, 19] and to the nation [ibid. 8:17-19])

Why is David prevented from building the house himself?

#### **D: URIM VETUMIM**

An ancillary question, one which does not – at first blush – seem relevant to our discussion, revolves around the role of the Kohanic breastplate – the Hoshen – more commonly and directly known as the Urim veTumim. Through the first post-Mosaic eras, the Urim veTumim played a central role in leading the nation – whenever the leader (be he Kohen, Navi or Melekh) had to resolve a crucial military or political matter, he would turn directly to God through the office of the Urim veTumim. (Indeed, it was the lack of response from the Urim veTumim [I Sh'mu'el 28:6] that drove Sha'ul to go- incognito – to the sorceress at Ein-Dor).

Here are a few examples of the use of this direct form of Divine guidance through the early political and military history of settlement:

- 1) The apportionment of the Land by Yehoshua and Elazar was accomplished through the breastplate (Bava Batra 122a, interpreting "Al Pi Hashem" in Yehoshua 19:50).
- 2) And it came to pass, after the death of Yehoshua, that the people of Yisra'el asked Hashem, saying, Who shall go up for us against the K'na'ani first, to fight against them? And Hashem said, Yehudah shall go up; behold, I have delivered the land into his hand. (Shof'tim 1:1-2 – see Ralbag and Rabbenu Yeshaya ad loc.)
- 3) And Sha'ul asked counsel of God, Shall I go down after the P'lish'tim? Will you deliver them into the hand of Yisra'el? (I Sh'mu'el 14:37)
- 4) And he inquired of Hashem for him, and gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine. (I Sh'mu'el 22:10 – see, however, the animadversion of R. Yeshaya ad loc.)
- 5) Therefore David inquired of Hashem, saying, Shall I go and strike these P'lish'tim? And Hashem said to David, Go, and strike the P'lish'tim, and save Keilah. (I Sh'mu'el 23:2)
- 6) And it came to pass after this, that David inquired of Hashem, saying, Shall I go up to any of the cities of Yehudah? And Hashem said to him, Go up. And David said, Where shall I go up? And He said, To Hebron. (II Sh'mu'el 2:1)

Curiously, the Urim veTumim – or any direct address to God for this type of guidance – disappears during David's career.

Our final question, then, seems to be unrelated to the analysis of the relationship between the Mishkan and Mikdash: Why are the Urim veTumim "put to rest" during David's career?

It should be noted that Haza"l maintain the continued use of the Urim veTumim throughout the First Commonwealth (see, *inter alia*, *Sotah* 9:12 and *Shavu'ot* 2:2 and the *Bavli ad loc.*), nonetheless, they were used in a different fashion than earlier. Whereas in the pre-Davidic and Davidic examples noted above, the individual leader approached God via the Urim veTumim on his own, the Rabbinic description of the use of Urim veTumim necessitates the participation of the king and the *Beit Din haGadol* (*Sanhedrin*).

Regardless, the *T'nakh* makes no mention of their use after this period – and this certainly is a sea change in the relationship with God and in His direct leadership of His people. How can we understand this change?

#### **E: SH'LOMO'S TEFILLAH**

This, again, is a question which may not seem to relate to our question but its resolution is most certainly a piece of this puzzle.

In the beautiful *T'fillah* offered by Sh'lomo at the dedication of the *Mikdash* (*I M'lakhim* 8), Sh'lomo describes the apparent futility of attempting to "house God". He goes on to (apparently) describe the future function of the *Mikdash*, pointing out how His people will face His house in prayer when in need, at war etc. What is curiously missing from this *T'fillah* is any mention of offerings (*Korbanot*) – although that is certainly a most central and critical function of the *Mishkan*. How can we explain this omission?

#### **III. SUMMARY**

We noted that conventional wisdom holds that the *Mishkan* was the temporary forerunner to the *Mikdash* – or that the *Mikdash* was the permanent version of the *Mishkan*. Although these two formulations are not identical and reflect distinct understandings of the focal point of the *Mishkan/Mikdash*, they share a perspective which raises difficulties in several passages in *T'nakh*.

We asked why there was such a delay (nearly half a millennium) between entering the Land and the construction of the *Mikdash* – and that *Yerushalayim*, the eventual site of the *Mikdash*, was already in *Yisra'eli* hands during the early parts of *Yehoshua*'s career. We also questioned whether *Yerushalayim* was the pre-determined location of the *Mikdash*, a topic we will expand upon next week, and pointed out that there was never a requirement of absolute *Yisra'eli* control over the town in order to build the *Mikdash*.

We then noted that the *Aron* seems to lose its role as the centerpiece of the *Sanctuary* within the context of the *Mikdash* – a role which is unquestioned and clear in the *Mishkan*.

We further pointed out the difficulties arising from David's request to build the *Mikdash* – and God's response through the prophet *Nathan*. It is unclear whether the "House of God" is even a *desideratum*, and once God agrees to David's request, he delays the construction until David's son will ascend the throne.

We concluded our questions with two apparently unrelated issues in *T'nakh* – the dramatic shift in the use of the Urim veTumim after the Davidic period and the omission of offerings from Sh'lomo's *prayer* at the dedication of the *Mikdash*.

In next week's essay, we will analyze the distinct functions of the *Mishkan* and the *Mikdash*, clarifying each and thereby responding to these difficulties.

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## PARSHAT TERUMA

Had it not been for **chet ha-egel** [the sin of the Golden Calf], would Bnei Yisrael have needed a **mishkan**?

Many claim that the answer to this 'philosophical' question lies in the famous 'exegetical' controversy between **Rashi** and **Ramban** concerning **when** the commandment to build the mishkan was first given, **before** or **after** the sin of the golden calf.

In this week's shiur, as we study this controversy and its ramifications, we will show how the answer to this question is not so simple. While doing so, we will also try to make some sense out of the thorny issue of 'ein mukdam u-me'uchar ba-Torah'.

### INTRODUCTION - FOUR UNITS

To understand the source of this controversy between Rashi and Ramban, we first divide the last half of Sefer Shmot into **four** distinct units. In last week's shiur, we defined and discussed the first of these four units - chapters 19-24, the unit we refer to as **Ma'amad Har Sinai**.

Chapters 25-31 [i.e. parshiot Teruma, Tetzaveh, and the first half of Ki Tisa] also form a distinct unit, as this section includes a set of laws whose sole topic is God's commandment to build the mishkan.

Similarly, Chapters 32-34 [the 2nd half of Parshat Ki Tisa] also form a distinct unit, as they contain a narrative that describes the incident of chet ha-egel.

Lastly, chapters 35-40 [parshiot Vayakhel/Pekudei] form the final unit in Sefer Shmot, as they describe the mishkan's actual construction.

The following table reviews these four units:

CHAPTERS	TOPIC	PARSHA
(A) 19-24	<b>Ma'amad Har Sinai</b> [the first luchot]	Yitro/Mishpatim
(B) 25-31	<b>The commandment to build the mishkan</b>	Teruma/Tetzaveh/ 1st half of Ki Tisa
(C) 32-34	<b>Chet Ha-egel</b> [the second luchot]	2nd half of Ki Tisa
(D) 35-40	<b>Building the mishkan</b>	Vayakhel/Pekudei

The above table can help us better understand the basic controversy between Rashi and Ramban. While Ramban keeps Chumash 'in order' [A-B-C-D], Rashi claims that God ordered the mishkan's construction [unit 'B'] only after the events of chet ha-egel [unit 'C'], and hence the order would be A-C-B-D. [See Rashi on 31:18.]

At first glance, Ramban's opinion appears most logical. To understand and appreciate Rashi's opinion, we must first explain more fully the basis of Ramban's approach.

### THE FIRST FORTY DAYS - FOR WHAT?

Recall that at the conclusion of Parshat Mishpatim [the end of Unit A], Moshe ascended Har Sinai to receive the "**luchot, torah, & mitzva**" (see 24:12). As we know, the **luchot** are the tablets (upon which God inscribed the Ten Commandments). It is unclear, however, to what the words **torah & mitzva** refer. [Note how many different opinions are found among the commentators on 24:12!]

However, when we study the above chart, it may provide a simple answer to this question. If we simply follow the simple order of narrative in Chumash, then the **torah & mitzva** mentioned in 24:12 must be the mitzvot that follow, i.e. - **unit B!**

In other words, 24:12-18 tells us that Moshe ascends Har Sinai to receive the **torah & mitzva**, and then 25:1 continues by explaining what God told Moshe. Those commandments continue until the end of chapter 31.

[For those of you familiar with computers, this is similar to the

concept of 'WYSIWYG' - What You See Is What You Get. What the Torah records when Moshe goes up - is exactly what Moshe received at that time.]

Furthermore, Moshe ascends Har Sinai first and foremost to receive the **luchot** (see 24:12) - the symbol of the covenant at Har Sinai (see 19:5, 24:7). Considering that these luchot are to be housed in the **aron**, then it is only logical that the **torah & mitzva** refer to the laws of the **mishkan**.

Finally, considering that God informs Moshe that once the mishkan is assembled he will continue convey His mitzvot from above the 'kaporet' (see 25:21-22), it stands to reason that the laws of the **mishkan** are not only the first - but also the **only** mitzvot transmitted to Moshe during those forty days. Once the mishkan is built, the remaining mitzvot can be transmitted to Moshe via the kaporet!

[In fact, note that once the mishkan is assembled (see Shmot chapter 40), immediately afterward God transmits an entire set of mitzvot to Moshe from the 'kaporet in the ohel mo'ed - better known as Sefer Vayikra! (See 1:1.)]

Despite the simplicity of this approach, not a single commentator advances it, for two very good reasons:

- \* First of all, it would not require **forty days** for God to teach Moshe just the laws of the **mishkan**. There must have been something else as well.
- \* Many other sources later in Chumash imply that Moshe Rabeinu learned many other mitzvot on Har Sinai. See, for example, Parshat Behar (see Vayikra 25:1) and the mitzvot in Sefer Devarim (see 5:1-28 and 6:1).

For these reasons, the commentators must explain why specifically the laws of the mishkan are recorded at this point in Sefer Shmot, even though many other mitzvot were also given to Moshe during those forty days.

Ramban (see 25:1) offers a very comprehensive and emphatic 'pro-mishkan' approach. Drafting both textual and conceptual arguments, Ramban claims that the mishkan serves as a vehicle to perpetuate the experience of **Ma'amad Har Sinai**; it is therefore the **first** mitzva that Moshe receives when he ascends Har Sinai. Even though Moshe received other mitzvot at that time as well (see Ramban on 24:12), Sefer Shmot focuses specifically on the mishkan because it reflects the unique level that Bnei Yisrael attained when they accepted God's covenant at Har Sinai.

Furthermore, at the focal point of the mishkan lies the **aron**, which contains the **luchot** - the symbol of that covenant at **Har Sinai**. [Hence the first mitzva is to build the **aron**.]

To summarize Ramban's approach, we will quote a few lines from his commentary [though it is highly recommended that you read the entire Ramban inside]:

"After God had given the Ten Commandments **directly** to Yisrael and instructed them with a sampling of the mitzvot (i.e. Parshat Mishpatim)... and Bnei Yisrael accepted these laws and entered a covenant (24:1-11)... behold they became His nation and He became their God, as was originally stipulated [at brit mila and Har Sinai]... Now they are worthy to have a house - His dwelling - in their midst dedicated to His Name, and there **He will speak with Moshe** and **command Bnei Yisrael**... Now the 'secret' ('sod') of the mishkan is that God's **glory** ('kavod') which dwelled on **Har Sinai** will now dwell [instead] on the **mishkan** 'be-nistar' [in a more hidden manner, in contrast to Har Sinai]..." (see Ramban 25:1).

### RASHI'S APPROACH

Despite the beauty and simplicity of Ramban's approach, Rashi claims exactly the opposite (see 31:18): that the commandment to build the mishkan came not only **after**, but actually **because** of, chet ha-egel. In other words, Rashi posits that the parshiot are not presented according to their chronological order. Rashi goes even further, claiming that during the first forty days Moshe received **all** the mitzvot of the Torah

**except the laws of the mishkan!**

At first glance, such an interpretation seems untenable. Why should the Torah record at this point specifically the mitzvot that Moshe **did not** receive at this time, while omitting all the mitzvot which he **did** receive at this time? What could possibly have led Rashi to this conclusion?

To answer this question, we must first explain the exegetical principle of 'ein mukdam u-me'uchar ba-Torah' [literally: there is **no order** in the sequence of parshiot in the Torah]. Despite the common misunderstanding to the contrary, this principle does not imply that Chumash progresses in random sequence. Rather, it simply means that the arrangement in which Chumash records its parshiot does not necessarily reflect their chronological order.

[Most commentators, and especially many of the Midrashim quoted by Rashi, employ this approach. **Ramban**, however, consistently disagrees with this assumption, arguing that Chumash **does** follow in **chronological** order. Unless a certain technical detail 'forces' him to say otherwise, he will assume that the order in which Chumash is written corresponds with the precise chronological order of the events as they took place.]

The principle of ein mukdam u-me'uchar implies that when Moshe wrote down the Torah in its final form in the fortieth year (see Devarim 31:25-26), its parshiot were organized based on thematic considerations, and hence not necessarily according to the chronological order of when they were first given. By doing so, the Torah conveys its message not only by the content of each parshia, but also by intentionally juxtaposing certain parshiot next to one another.

[See Chizkuni on Shmot 34:32 for an important insight regarding this explanation.]

Rashi, following this approach, assumes that Chumash (at times) may prefer a conceptual sequence over a chronological one. Therefore, Rashi will often explain that a certain parshia actually took place earlier or later when the progression of theme implies as such.

With this background, we can better understand Rashi's approach in our context. Employing the principle of ein mukdam u-me'uchar, Rashi always begins with considerations of theme and content in mind. He therefore cannot overlook the glaring similarities between the construction of the mishkan and **chet ha-egel**. It cannot be just by chance that:

- \* Bnei Yisrael must collectively donate their gold to build the mishkan (compare 25:1-2, 32:2-3);
- \* Betzalel, Chur's grandson, is chosen to build the mishkan; [Rashi follows the Midrash which claims that Chur was killed because he refused to allow Bnei Yisrael to build the **egel**. (See Chizkuni 31:2.)]
- \* The opening pasuk concerning the mishkan - "and they shall make for Me a **mikdash** and I will **dwell in their midst**" (25:8) - appears to rectify Bnei Yisrael's situation in the aftermath of chet ha-egel, when Moshe must move his tent (called the **ohel mo'ed**) far away - outside the camp (33:7);
- \* Aharon must bring a **par** (a bull / an **egel** is a baby bull) for a **chatat** offering during the mishkan's dedication ceremony. [The requirement of a **chatat** implies the committal of a sin; see Rashi 29:1.]

Rashi therefore explains that the commandment to build the **mishkan** came **after** chet ha-egel (during the last forty days), for it served as a form of atonement for that sin.

[Nevertheless, it remains unclear according to Rashi **why** the Torah chose to record these parshiot out of chronological order. We'll return to this question later in the shiur.]

### LECHATCILLA or BE-DI'AVAD?

It is very tempting to consider this dispute between Rashi and Ramban a fundamental argument regarding the reason behind the mishkan.

Clearly, according to Ramban, the mishkan is 'lechatcilla' [ideal]. In other words, even had chet ha-egel never occurred, it

still would have been God's desire that Bnei Yisrael build a **mishkan**, for it serves as a physical representation of God's presence in their midst.

How should we understand Rashi? Can we infer from his interpretation that the mishkan is 'be-di'avad' [a compromise]? In other words, had it not been for chet ha-egel, would there never have been a commandment to build a **mikdash**? Was the mitzva to build the mishkan simply an 'after-thought'? Was it only in the aftermath of Bnei Yisrael's sin that God realized the people's need for a physical representation of His presence?

Despite the temptation of this conclusion, we must first prove that, even according to Rashi's interpretation, one **can** (and **must**) agree that God had originally intended that at least some form of physical symbol be used to represent Him.

### TEMPLE TERMINOLOGY

To reconcile Rashi's interpretation with Ramban's explanation of the mishkan, we must differentiate between two concepts:

- (1) **MISHKAN** and
- (2) **MIKDASH**.

Although both words describe a **sanctuary** dedicated to the worship of God, for the sake of clarity, each word (in our explanation that follows) will be given a more specific meaning.

\* The **mishkan** is a **temporary** sanctuary (a Tabernacle), a portable, tent-like structure. [Good for travel.]

\* The **mikdash** is a **permanent** sanctuary (a Temple), such as the massive stone structure built by King Solomon.

We posit that both Rashi and Ramban must agree that the concept of a Sanctuary, a symbol of God's **Shchina** (the divine presence) dwelling with Bnei Yisrael, is lechatcilla and in fact comprises a fundamental theme throughout the entire Tanach. To prove this, we must return to some basic concepts previously discussed in our shiurim on Sefer Breishit.

Recall that we first encountered the theme of **mikdash** when Avraham Avinu builds a **mizbe'ach** in **Bet-El** and "calls out in God's Name" (see 12:8 & 13:4). Later, at this same site, Yaakov Avinu awakes from his dream and exclaims:

"Alas, this is the site for a **Bet Elokim**, for it is the gate to the heavens" (Br.28:17).

Yaakov then erects a 'matzeva' (monument) and vows that upon his return to Canaan he will establish the site of his matzeva as a **Bet-Elokim** - a House for God. [See Breishit 28:17-22.]

Thus, the very concept of a **Bet-Elokim** clearly preceded the golden calf.

Furthermore, even in 'shirat ha-yam', the song that Bnei Yisrael sung after they crossed the Red Sea, we already find an allusion the establishment of a **mikdash** immediately upon their arrival in the land:

"Tevieimo ve-titaeimo be-**har** nachalatcha, machon le-shivtecha... - **mikdash**, Hashem konanu yadecha..."

(See Shmot 15:17, and its context!)

Finally, in Parshat Mishpatim we find conclusive proof that the basic concept of a **Bet-Elokim** is totally unrelated to the events of chet ha-egel. Recall that even according to Rashi, the laws recorded in Parshat Mishpatim were certainly given **before** chet ha-egel. [See Rashi on 31:18, where he explains that these laws were given to Moshe Rabeinu during his first forty days on Har Sinai.]

Recall as well that within that set of laws we find the mitzva of 'aliya la-regel' - to 'visit God' three times a year:

"Three times a year you shall celebrate for Me... Keep chag ha-matzot... and do not **visit me** empty-handed... Three times a year all your males shall appear before me..." (23:14-17).

First of all, the very existence of a mitzva to 'be seen by God' implies that there must be some type of sanctuary that would represent Him! Hence, without some sort of a **mikdash**, this mitzva of aliya la-regel could not be fulfilled.

However, the next pasuk provides conclusive proof that this sanctuary corresponds to the concept of a **Bet-Elokim**: "Your first fruits must be brought to **bet Hashem Elokecha** - the **house** of Hashem your God..." (23:19).

This commandment to bring the 'bikurim' to the Bet Elokim clearly implies that there would have to be some sort of 'sanctuary' that will serve as God's House.

Hence, even Rashi must agree that there would have been a need for a **Bet-Elokim** even had Bnei Yisrael not sinned at chet ha-egel.

Furthermore, there is no reason why Rashi would have to argue with Ramban's explanation that the primary function of the mikdash was to perpetuate Bnei Yisrael's experience at Har Sinai.

Instead, we posit that the dispute between Rashi and Ramban stems from a less fundamental issue - concerning the need to construct a **temporary** sanctuary before Bnei Yisrael entered the Land of Israel.

According to Rashi's interpretation, we can assume that God's original intention was for Bnei Yisrael to build a mikdash only after they conquered the Land of Israel. However, because of their sin, conquest of the Land would now be delayed. Therefore, God ordered them to build a **temporary** mikdash [= mishkan] while they remained in the desert.

Ramban would argue that even had Bnei Yisrael not sinned, it would still have been necessary for them to build a temporary **mikdash** before they embarked on that journey.

Let's attempt to explain why.

## THE WAY IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN

Rashi's position may be based upon God's original plan that Bnei Yisrael would conquer the land through supernatural, divine intervention (see 23:20-28). Assisted by God's miracles, Bnei Yisrael would have needed only a very short time to complete at least the first wave of conquest. Had that actually occurred, there would have been no need to build a temporary mishkan, for within a very short time it would have been possible to build a permanent mikdash instead.

However, in the aftermath of chet ha-egel, the entire situation changes. As God had removed His **Shchina**, Bnei Yisrael must first bring the **Shchina** back to the camp **before** they can conquer the Land. Hence, according to Rashi, the actual process of building the mishkan could be considered a form of 'spiritual rehabilitation'. Furthermore, the mishkan would now provide Aharon and Bnei Yisrael with the opportunity to offer korbanot and thus achieve atonement for their sin.

One could also suggest that due to chet ha-egel and the 'lower level' of the 'mal'ach' that will lead them into the land (see Shmot 33:1-5 and shiur on 13 midot), it may now take much longer for Bnei Yisrael to complete the conquest. Therefore, a **temporary** mikdash [= mishkan] is required, until a more permanent mikdash can be built.

## A CONCEPTUAL JUXTAPOSITION

According to this interpretation, we can now suggest (according to Rashi) a beautiful reason for why the Torah places the commandment to build the mishkan out of chronological order:

Even though the mitzva to build the 'temporary' mishkan should have been recorded **after** the story of chet ha-egel, the Torah intentionally records it earlier - immediately after Ma'amad Har Sinai - to emphasize its thematic connection to that event! In other words, Rashi, like Ramban, can also understand that the primary function of the mikdash was to perpetuate Ma'amad Har Sinai. In fact, had Bnei Yisrael not sinned, the laws of the 'permanent' mikdash may have been recorded at this spot in Chumash. However, now that a mishkan was needed (due to the events of chet ha-egel), the laws of this temporary mikdash are recorded at this point in Chumash, to emphasize the very same thematic connection that Ramban describes in great detail!

Now that Rashi makes so much sense, why wouldn't Ramban agree? To answer this question, we must return to our

discussion of the differing approaches to 'mukdam u-me'uchar'.

Ramban prefers his principle that Chumash follows chronological order. Despite the similarities between the mishkan and the story of chet ha-egel (as listed above), they are not convincing enough to warrant, in Ramban's view, a distortion of the order of these parshiot. Therefore, Ramban maintains that even had it not been for chet ha-egel, there still would have been a need for a temporary mishkan.

In fact, one could suggest a very simple reason for the immediate need of a temporary sanctuary. As we explained earlier, Bnei Yisrael must still receive many more mitzvot from God. A mishkan - with the **aron** and **keruvim** at its center - is therefore necessary as the medium through which God can convey the remaining mitzvot to Moshe. Furthermore, once the **Shchina** descended upon Har Sinai, some sort of vehicle is necessary to 'carry it' with them as they travel from Har Sinai towards Eretz Canaan.

[Accordingly, Ramban explains that most of all the mitzvot recorded in Sefer Vayikra and Sefer Bamidbar were actually given from the *ohel mo'ed* (mishkan). See Ramban Vayikra 1:1 & 7:38. In regard to Sefer Devarim, see Ramban on 24:1 & 24:12.]

To summarize, the dispute between Rashi and Ramban stems from their different exegetical approaches and pertains only to **why** a **temporary** mishkan was necessary. However, both would agree that a **permanent** mikdash would have been necessary even had Bnei Yisrael not sinned at chet ha-egel.

In our shiur on Parshat Tetzaveh, we will analyze the internal structure of this unit of chapters 25-31 in order to uncover additional parallels between the **mishkan** and the events of Ma'amad Har Sinai. Till then,

shabbat shalom  
menachem

## FOR FURTHER IYUN:

**A. In the shiur we argue that even according to Rashi, the concept of a required mikdash for serving Hashem existed even prior to the worship of the golden calf. Along similar lines, Rav David Pardo, in his supra-commentary on Rashi entitled, "Maskil le-David", writes that even in Rashi's view, the general command to build a mishkan was transmitted to Moshe during his first forty days atop the mountain. Only the details of the construction, as presented in parshiyot Teruma & Tetzaveh (and the beginning of Ki Tisa), were transmitted later. Rav Pardo proves this from the repeated reference in parshat Teruma to Hashem's having shown Moshe the appearance of the mishkan "on the mountain" (25:40; 26:30; 27:8). In the final two of these three references, Hashem employs the past tense ("you have been shown"), suggesting that Moshe viewed the image of the mishkan before receiving these detailed instructions. Apparently, as Rav Pardo argues, Moshe learned of the mishkan - albeit only the generalities - during his first forty days on the mountain, even before the calf. Thus, Rashi clearly did not view the mishkan as necessary only in response to the sin of the egel ha-zahav.**

## B. RAMBAN / RASHI - earlier sources

The argument as to whether Hashem ordered the construction of the mishkan before or after the sin of the golden calf predates Rashi and the Ramban; conflicting views appear already in the Midrashim. Rashi's view, that the parshiyot appear out of order, is the position of the Midrash Tanchuma (Teruma 8, Pekudei 6), Yerushalmi (Shkalim 1:1) and Midrash Hagadol to Shmot 25:17. The Ramban's opinion is found in Seder Eliyahu Rabba 17, which states explicitly that Hashem ordered the construction of the mishkan after Bnei Yisrael declared 'na'aseh ve-nishma'. Ibn Ezra (25:1) adopts the Ramban's approach, as do the Abarbanel (31:18) and the Netziv (29:20). Despite his general affinity for the Ramban's commentary, on this issue Rabbenu Bechayei adopts Rashi's approach (25:6).

## C. Mikdash Before Chet Ha-egel: Midrashic Sources

Several Midrashic passages support our contention that a mikdash would have been necessary even had it not been for the golden calf. Bemidbar Rabba 12:12 compares the world before the mishkan to a chair with two legs, which cannot stand; the construction of the mishkan added the third leg, so-to-speak, which enabled the world to stand independently. However one understands the image of the chair, it clearly points to the indispensability of the mishkan - regardless of chet ha-egel. Similarly, Bemidbar Rabba 13:6 describes that from the time of creation, Hashem wished ('kivyachol') to reside on earth. When the mishkan was consecrated, Hashem announced that on that day the world was created. Once again, we see that the construction of the mishkan marked a critical stage in the history of the world and was necessary since the dawn of creation. In the same vein, Bemidbar Rabba 13 writes that when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, Hashem wished to "bring them into His quarters", and thus instructed them to build the mishkan. This Midrash makes no mention of the incident of the golden calf as necessitating a mikdash. A similar passage appears in the Tanchuma Yashan - Bechukotai 65.

We suggested in the shiur that according to Rashi, the Torah presents Parshat Teruma immediately following Matan Torah - despite its having occurred later, after the egel - to emphasize the thematic relationship between the mishkan and Matan Torah. Rabbenu Bechayei (25:6), however, explains that the Torah rearranged the sequence in order to demonstrate how Hashem is "makdim trufa le-maka" (recall that, as cited earlier, Rav Kasher reads this explanation into the Midrash Lekach Tov). Rav Zalman Sorotzkin (Oznayim La-Torah) mentions this explanation without quoting Rabbenu Bechayei. A different answer was suggested by the late Lubavitcher Rebbe ("Be'urim Le-perush Rashi al Ha-Torah" - Shmot 31:18). The Torah specifically wanted to juxtapose the tzivuy ha-mishkan with the end of Parshat Mishpatim - the formal establishment of the 'brit' between Bnei Yisrael and Hashem. As the residence of the Shchina in the mishkan marked the complete fulfillment of that brit, it is only fitting that the parsha of the mishkan immediately follows that of the covenant. (This explanation, too, seems to point to the fact that the mishkan is lechatchila even according to Rashi.)

#### D. SEFORNO

The Seorno takes a particularly extreme approach to the concept of the mishkan. Already in his comments to 19:6, he notes that as a result of the egel, Bnei Yisrael forfeited "all the goodness of the future" promised to them before Matan Torah. As we will see in his comments elsewhere, this refers to God's direct revelation, which was supplanted by the mishkan. In his commentary to the final psukim of Parshat Yitro (20:20-22), the Seorno interprets these psukim as informing Bnei Yisrael that they have no need to construct a sanctuary to God. Matan Torah demonstrated that Hashem would descend, as it were, and reside among them even without any physical mediums. Commenting on 25:9, Seorno writes that after the incident of the golden calf Bnei Yisrael were required to construct a sanctuary; the direct communication experienced at Har Sinai could no longer be maintained. Seorno expresses his position even clearer in 31:18, where he describes more fully Bnei Yisrael's spiritual descent as a result of the golden calf, as a result of which they did not achieve the divine plan initially intended at Matan Torah. In this passage, he alludes to an interesting interpretation of the promise in 19:6 that Bnei Yisrael would be a 'mamlechet kohanim' (a kingdom of priests): that they would have no need for kohanim to serve as intermediaries. God had originally intended for all of Bnei Yisrael to serve God directly as kohanim. (Curiously, however, this is not how the Seorno explains the term in his commentary to 19:6 - "ve-tzarich iyun".) He develops this idea even further in Vayikra 11:2. There he explains that in response to the golden calf, Hashem decreed that He would remove His Shchina entirely from Bnei Yisrael. Moshe's intervention succeeded in restoring a very limited measure of 'hashra'at ha-Shchina', by which God would reside among Bnei Yisrael only through the structure of the mishkan. (In this passage, Seorno spells out more clearly what he meant by "the goodness of the

future" of which he spoke in his comments to Shmot 19:6 - the direct presence of the Shchina, without the need for a physical representation.) Later in Sefer Vayikra, in his commentary to the brachot of Parshat Bechukotai (26:11-12), Seorno describes the ideal condition of God's constant presence among Benei Yisrael without it being confined to any specific location and without requiring any specific actions on Benei Yisrael's part. In direct contradistinction to the Ramban, Seorno there reads the pasuk in Truma, "Ve-asu li mikdash ve-shachanti betocham", as a punishment, confining the presence of the Shchina to the mishkan. Seorno's most elaborate development of this notion appears in his treatise "Ma'amar Kavanot ha-Torah" (published as a separate volume by Rav Yehuda Kuperman in 5754; the relevant material for our topic is found primarily in chapter 6 in Rav Kuperman's edition).

This position of the Seorno, of course, requires some explanation in light of the proofs mentioned in the shiur to the necessity of a mikdash even prior to the egel. In fact, the Seorno himself identifies Yaakov's Bet Elokim (Breishit 28:17) and the mikdash in the Shirat Ha-yam (Shmot 15:17) as the beit ha-mikdash. How could the concept of a mikdash be discussed before chet ha-egel - if it was never to have been necessary?

The Seorno does not address this question, but in at least two instances he alludes to what may be understood as a moderation of his approach. Commenting on the pasuk "be-chol ha-makom asher askir et Shmi avo eilecha" ("every place where I will have My Name mentioned I will come to you" - Shmot 20:21), the Seorno explains, "[Every place] that I will designate as a meeting place for My service". He then adds, "You will not need to draw My providence to you through mediums of silver and gold and the like, for I will come to you and bless you". Apparently, even according to this original plan, there would still be a place designated as a mikdash of sorts, only Bnei Yisrael would not need to invest effort in its lavish and intricate construction. In Ma'amar Kavanot ha-Torah, Seorno makes a somewhat similar comment in explaining this same pasuk: "In any place that will truly be called a Bet Elokim, such as batei midrash and the like - I will come to you and bless you." Here, too, he implies that there would be a special location - or perhaps several or many special locations - for avodat Hashem, only not what we know as the mishkan or mikdash. However, in his commentary to Parshat Bechukotai (Vayikra 26:12), the Seorno strongly implies that in the ideal condition Hashem reveals Himself anywhere, without any need for an especially designated location - 've-tzarich iyun'.

**E. RAMBAM** - Review Devarim chapter 12. Note the repeated use of the phrase "ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem" and its context. Pay special attention to 12:5-12, noting when is the proper time to build the mikdash. Relate this phrase to the concept of a **permanent** mikdash, as discussed in the above shiur. Considering that Sefer Devarim contains the mitzvot that God originally gave Moshe at Har Sinai (before chet ha-egel), explain why Sefer Devarim makes no mention of the **mishkan**, yet mentions "ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem" numerous times.

Although the Rambam did not write a commentary on Chumash, we can infer his understanding of certain psukim based on his psak halacha in Mishneh Torah.

The opening Rambam in Hilchot Beit Ha-bechira (Sefer Avoda) defines the source of the commandment to build a **mikdash** (see 1:1). Read that Rambam (and, if you have time, the first five halachot). What is difficult about the Rambam's wording in 1:1? What is the source of our obligation to build a **mikdash**? Why, according to the Rambam, is the phrase "ve-asu li mikdash" (25:8) insufficient as a source for this obligation?

Why does the Rambam include the criteria, 'ready to offer upon it korbanot' and 'to celebrate there **three** times a year'? Can you relate these phrases to Shmot 23:14-19 and this week's shiur? Why does the Rambam quote the pasuk from Devarim 12:9-11? Read those psukim carefully!

## **Megillat Esther: She'Asah Nissim La'Avoteinu**

by Rabbi Yitzhak Etshalom

### **I. WHERE IS GOD IN THE MEGILLAH?**

Every year on Purim, Jews all over the world fulfill the Mitzvah of K'riat haMegillah – reading the complete Book of Esther from a proper scroll. Before beginning, the reader/leader recites three B'rakhot – the middle of which is Birkat haNes (the blessing recited at the commemoration of a miracle): Barukh...she Asah Nissim la'Avoteinu baYamim haHeim baZ'man haZeh (Who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time [of year]). Considering that, unlike the Exodus (and all other Biblical miracles), God's hand is nowhere to be found in the text of the story of Esther and Mordechai, we have to wonder which miracle is the focus of this thanksgiving to God? For which Nes are we praising God? (Parenthetically, the same question could be asked in reference to Hanukkah, where the most central "miracle" we celebrate is a military victory which did not, from the accounts we have, include any miraculous intervention in the conventional understanding of the word. To whatever extent this shiur answers the question vis-a-vis Purim, that answer should carry the same validity for the Hanukkah question. Significantly, Purim and Hanukkah are the two occasions when this B'rakha is recited.)

A second question, certainly related to the first, focuses on one of the unique features of the Megillah. As is well known, Esther is the only book in T'nakh with absolutely no mention of God (by any Name). Much as the Midrash interprets some occurrences of "the king" in Esther (e.g. 6:1) as a reference to God, this is certainly not p'shat. Why is this story even included in the Biblical canon?

Before moving on, it is prudent to note that some approaches within Rabbinic literature see "hidden Nissim (miracles)" throughout our story; these are, however, not evident from the p'shat. In keeping with the general approach of this shiur, we will try to identify the Nes/Nissim within the text of the Megillah.

In order to provide satisfactory answers to these two questions, we will have to address two issues – the nature of a Nes and a new understanding of the story line in Megillat Esther.

### **II. NES L'HITNOSES**

The root of Nes is N-S-S – which means "banner". See, for instance, the verse in T'hillim (60:6): "You have given those who fear You a Nes l'hitNoses – (a raised banner), to rally to it out of bowshot."

A miracle (i.e. deliberate suspension of the laws of physics in order to save the righteous individual or people) is a raising of the banner of God's Name in the world – hence the word Nes. (See also B'resheet 22:1 and see if this approach explains Avraham's "trial" – see also Midrash Rabbah ad loc.)

There is more than one way in which God's Name becomes glorified in this world. Besides an overt intervention, it is possible for human beings to make His Name manifest by demonstrating the most noble of traits. Keep in mind that we are all created in God's "Image" (whatever that may mean...conscience, free will etc.). When we demonstrate the most noble side of human existence and utilize those traits in the most productive manner possible, this is another (certainly more subtle) demonstration of God's power and glory. It is possible for a Nes to take place within the realm of human valor; although it should be stated that unless the people in question take the next step and utilize this experience to enhance their direct relationship with God, it may be that the whole enterprise would be considered a vain effort.

I would like to suggest that the two most noble human traits, each of which is a reflection of the Tzelem Elokim (Image of God) which sparks all of us, are Wisdom and Courage. I am not talking about wisdom or courage in the usual sense; rather about a special kind of wisdom, a unique type of courage and a special synthesis of the two. We will explore these two characteristics throughout the story and clarify how each was utilized in the most productive and positive manner to bring about the successful salvation of the Jews.

Instead of focusing on one or two passages in the Megillah, we're going to read through the whole story and point out the key "Nes-points" along the way. You'll need a copy of the text – all citations, unless otherwise noted, refer to chapters and verses within the Book of Esther.

As we read through, I will point out several other "layers" of the story – or, alternately, several other ways to read the story and the various messages embedded in the text. As usual, we will be reading the text alone; I will point out various Rabbinic interpolations and interpretations as needed for support and illustration.

### **III. CHAPTER 1**

#### **A) THE PARTY (1:1-1:8)**

One other "layer" of the story is satiric; especially when viewed within the context of the rest of T'nakh (as will be explained later), the text is a clear parody. Of what...we will see.

As the story opens, we meet our first player: Achashverosh. Although he is described as a powerful king, ruling over 127 provinces from Hodu (India?) to Kush (Ethiopia?) – we soon find that his power is more illusion than reality.

First of all, the party about which we read in the first chapter (1:3-8) seems to be his inauguration ball (see v. 2); yet it only takes place in the third year of his rule. This seems to indicate that the transfer of power into his hands was not so smooth. We will soon see that plots abound in and around his court and that his control over the realm is not very secure.

The description of the party brings three issues to the fore:

The many allusions to the Mishkan (Tabernacle) / Mikdash (Temple). Keep in mind that the Ba'al haMegillah (author) expects every reader to be familiar with T'nakh and will pick up any word-associations made here. Among the materials described here are several which are prominent in the Mishkan: T'khelet (royal blue), Argaman (purple), Kesef (silver) and Shesh (marble). Indeed, the Midrash posits that the vessels which Achashverosh used at this party were the vessels of the Mikdash – this interpretation was probably motivated by the many Mikdash-associations in the description of the party.

(Rav Menachem Liebtag has a fascinating shiur on exactly this point – with many more illustrations. You can find it at his Tanach Study Center Website: it comes highly recommended!)

Ahashverosh seems to be very insecure – both personally and politically. He spares no expense to show off his wealth – and specifically invites the governors, ministers and soldiers of the Persian and Medean armies. It seems that he is trying to consolidate his power and bring the military into his good graces. At the end of his six-month party (!), he invites all the citizenry of Shushan to his gala bash. This insecurity will increase and become a prominent feature in the events of the Megillah.

The image of Ahashverosh's kingdom, a monarchy governed by protocol. Note how often the word *Dat* – a Persian word meaning "custom" or "protocol" – shows up in the Megillah: 20 times! (Save for one verse in Daniel, it doesn't appear in any other books of the T'nakh). This would seem to indicate that everything in Ahashverosh's realm was done "properly" and that the system was orderly and just. We soon find that this kingdom of *Dat* is just as illusory as his power.

## **B) VASHTI (1:9-22)**

Vashti is not, properly speaking, a "player" in this narrative. She is much more of a foil, presented as the set-up for the story to unfold. Even after she is gone (dead? exiled?), her shadow hangs over the palace – but more on that later.

The first indication that Ahashverosh's power is a lot of fluff is when he decides to show off his beautiful queen (presumably to outshine the beauty of their wives) – and she refuses to come out! This great king, protector of the realm, defender of the empire, ruler of Persia, etc. etc. controls nothing! His own queen refuses him and is not obedient to his wishes. (Although in modern times this would seem to prove nothing about his political power – in Persia of 2500 years ago, this "failing" was quite telling – as we see from the tone of the letters sent out at the end of the first chapter).

We soon learn something else about the king. For all of his power – he never makes any decisions (is he passive-aggressive?). As a matter of fact, he doesn't ever say "no" to any of his advisors! A strange king – a classic "yes-man" sitting on the throne.

We get some insight into how his advisors have learned to "play him". Memuchan (who the Gemara identifies as Haman) knows that if he advises the king to kill (or banish) Vashti on account of her defiance of the king – the drunk monarch may wake up on the morn and feel foolish and humiliated that he had to exile the queen for his own honor – and take out his anger on Memuchan. In order to get the king to "get rid" of Vashti, Memuchan appeals to Ahashverosh's sense of justice. He is the defender of men's rights throughout the kingdom and must act decisively on behalf of all the poor princes and governors throughout the Empire whose wives will surely rebel, following Vashti's (unpunished) lead. By appealing to Ahashverosh's sense of nobility, the wise advisor allows the king to do what he wants without feeling a sense of humiliation.

Two more notes about the first chapter. First of all, as the Gemara points out, this first set of letters (v. 22) seems to be quite foolish. The king sends out letters to every province, announcing that every man rules in his own house!!??!! (According to the Gemara, this caused the second letters – announcing the "loosing" of Jewish blood – to be taken less seriously by the citizenry who already cast a jaundiced eye on this king's pronouncements).

Second, as R. David Hentschke points out (Megadim vol. 23), the king has to send these letters to each province in their own language (v. 22 – this phrasing shows up several times in the Megillah). As powerful as the king may be, he hasn't been successful in establishing Persian as the language of the realm; perhaps his rule is not so ironclad as it might seem (reminds us a bit of the USSR??).

## **IV. CHAPTER 2**

### **A) A NEW QUEEN (2:1-4)**

We are quickly reminded of Ahashverosh's inability to decide anything for himself. It takes his servants to suggest finding a new queen by gathering all of the maidens to Shushan for a "tryout" with the king.

As any student of T'nakh remembers, such a call went out once before – when David was old and near death. As we read in the beginning of Melakhim (Kings), they searched for a young maiden throughout Yisra'el – and found Avishag haShunamit. Note the contrast – whereas the one girl was found (although many undoubtedly would have wanted to be chosen); here, all the girls have to be forcibly brought to Shushan (note the wording in v. 3). And why not...who would want follow Vashti?

There is another interesting allusion in v. 3: The phrase *v'Yafked haMelekh P'kidim v'Yik'b'tzu* reminds us of a nearly similar phrase used in the first "Jew in the foreign court" story. When Yosef successfully interprets Pharaoh's dreams, he advises that Pharaoh appoint officers to collect the wheat of the seven plentiful years – *Ya'aseh Pharaoh v'Yafked P'kidim...v'Yik'b'tzu...* (B'resheet 41:34-35). This allusion is not for naught; the Ba'al haMegillah is showing us how Ahashverosh and his servants viewed these young girls – just like wheat to be collected and brought to the palace.

### **B) MORDECHAI AND ESTHER (2:5-20)**

We are immediately introduced to our two heroes – Mordechai and Esther. It is critical to note that both of these names are not only Persian (and not Hebrew) – they are both pagan names related to various gods of the pantheon! The Esther-Ishtar-Astarte connection is well-documented (besides the fact that the Megillah explicitly gives her "real" name – Hadassah); our heroine is named for the goddess of fertility. The Gemara (BT Menahot 65) gives Mordechai a more "Jewish" name – *Petah'ya* – and, again, the Mordechai-Marduk (god of creation in many mythologies throughout the Near East) connection has been extensively written up.

Why do these two righteous people, through whom God saves His people, have such names?

[note: Jews taking – or being given – non-Jewish "alternate" names when in the foreign court is the norm in T'nakh. Note Yoseph, who is named "Tzoph'nat Pa'a'ne'ach" by Pharaoh; Daniel, who is named "Belt-Shatzar" by N'vuchadnetzar, as well as Daniel's three companions. Note that Jews were occasionally given names which were associated with pagan gods – compare Daniel 1:7 with 4:5. Mordechai and Esther seem to be two examples of the same phenomenon. Note that according to the Gemara (BT Megillah 13a), the name "Esther" was given to her by the non-Jews, in response to her beauty.]

Even more curious is Mordechai's insistence that Esther not reveal her identity (as a Jewess) while in the palace (v10, 20). As we shall

soon see, even Mordechai's identity was not obvious; he was not distinguished in any external way from any other citizen.

There are a couple of verses which are telling within the scope of Esther's successful entrance into the palace.

(v. 16) – Esther was finally chosen in the seventh year of Achashverosh's reign – in other words, the selection of a queen took four years. (One very tired king! – See 2:12; even in his hedonistic behavior, he followed Dat!).

(v. 17-19) Compare the royal feast in honor of his queen (ironically – "in place of Vashti" – the dead (or exiled) queen's shadow hangs over the palace and Esther is likely aware that her fate may be no better than her predecessor's) with v. 19. As much as the king loves Esther – his servants are bringing more virgins into the palace! Insecure is the best description of anyone with a position of power in this court.

### **C) THE PLOT (2:21-23)**

As we all know, this little paragraph is critical to the later success of our heroes. Note, however, that it is Achashverosh's own guards – who are charged with defending him – who are plotting against him. This kingdom is, indeed, unstable and always ready for a shake-up.

## **V. CHAPTER 3**

### **A) ENTER HAMAN (3:1-7)**

Suddenly – and very much out of the blue – Haman is elevated to a position of importance in the kingdom. This again demonstrates – despite the appearance of Dat – the helter-skelter way in which power and impotence, success and failure – even life and death – are handled most capriciously in the palace.

As much as we know about Achashverosh's terrible insecurity – we quickly learn about Haman's personal devil – his ego. Imagine that the king of the greatest empire on earth has just appointed a relative nobody (as it seems Haman was beforehand) to be grand vizier and that all citizens should pay him homage. Wouldn't he be too enthralled with the sudden attention and respect to care about one or two people who don't bow down? Not Haman – his ego just takes him right past all the knee-benders and focuses his attention on the one person who refuses to bow – Mordechai. As much as we would expect him to be happy with the new position – he is merely enraged (and seemingly obsessed with that rage) at Mordechai.

Note that it isn't obvious to Haman that Mordechai is Jewish – Haman has to find that out from someone else in order to figure out which nation to destroy (as he wants to annihilate all of Mordechai's people. By the way, this paints Haman as much less of an ideological anti-Semite than we are used to thinking – but that belongs to another shiur.) Evidently, Mordechai's behavior – or, at least his dress and external demeanor – did not mark him as a Jew. Just like his niece, he seems to have been quite assimilated (see the Book of Ezra for more background on this phenomenon).

Now – Haman, the grand vizier of the kingdom of Dat, decides to wipe out an entire nation due to the slight to his ego. How does he decide when to do it? By lottery (Pur)! What a joke this Dat proves to be!

### **B) ACHASHVEROSH AND HAMAN (3:8-15)**

There isn't a whole lot say here; the dialogue between these two speaks for itself. Although everything is done properly, the reader instinctively feels that a king who is willing to condemn a people without even finding out who they are (read 3:8-11 carefully) is not doing a good job of running his empire.

In order to keep an eye on the story, let's put together the chronology of events. The king's party (Vashti's farewell bash) took place in the third year of his reign. Esther was crowned – and Mordechai saved the king's life – in the seventh year. Haman had the letters (allowing the anti-Semites to kill the Jews) sent out on Nissan 13 in the twelfth year of the king's reign. In other words, Esther has been queen for a bit more than four years by this time – and her identity was still a total secret.

## **VI. CHAPTER 4**

### **A) ESTHER AND MORDECHAI (4:1-17)**

Mordechai finds out about this plot – and begins to demonstrate signs of "Teshuvah" (repentance). (Compare 4:1,3 with Yonah 3:5,6,8) He does not, however, do this in front of the palace gate, where he seems to retain his composure. He does, however, get the message in to Esther as to what is going on and he pleads with her to go to the king and have Haman's order overturned.

We are immediately reminded of how capricious this king really is. The beloved queen hasn't seen the king in thirty days (v. 11) (and probably wonders in whose arms he sleeps tonight) – and even she is subject to death if she comes to him unbeckoned unless he agrees to see her (shades of Vashti again)!

At this point, Mordechai sends the message which turns Esther around – and she begins to demonstrate not only her tremendous commitment and courage to her nation; but also an amazing type of wisdom – those very characteristics which reflect her Tzelem Elokim in the most powerful way.

For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this. (4:14)

Mordechai told her about the B'rit (covenant) between God and the B'nei Yisra'el. We are promised that we will outlive all of the Hamans – but that B'rit only applies to the nation as a whole, not to individuals or families. Esther – you may make it through this next upheaval – and you may not. In any case, the Jews will be saved, as God always has His ways of keeping the B'rit.

Esther realizes the wisdom and truth of this argument and acquiesces to Mordechai's plea. Now, she plans her strategy...let's take a peek behind the scenes. First, a few words about this remarkable type of wisdom.

It is natural to see everything in life through the eyes of our experience. This is why honest people often find it difficult to disbelieve

others or question their motivations; they cannot recognize the lie in the other person's words because they have no such possibility inside of their own hearts. In the same way, kind people often ascribe positive motives to questionable behavior of others – because they could never recognize mean thoughts in others as they have no such thoughts in their own persona.

It takes a tremendous type of wisdom to separate yourself from what you instinctively feel and how you usually view the world and to see it from the other person's perspective. While this may be easy in a sympathetic conversation (although not nearly as easy as it seems); it is most difficult when deciding how to fight an enemy. The trick is to learn how to think like the enemy – without becoming the enemy.

This was perhaps the greatest miracle of Hanukkah – that the Maccabees were able to think like Greeks (it certainly took great strategy to outfox that mighty army with a small band) – without becoming Greeks (well, not for a couple of generations at least).

In the same way, we will see how Esther manipulates Achashverosh and Haman into a fateful (and, for Haman, fatal) collision course – simply by playing them according to their own personalities and weaknesses.

## VII. CHAPTER 5

### A) ESTHER AND ACHASHVEROSH (5:1-5)

Let's keep in mind that Esther is risking her life to come into Achashverosh's throne room – and she knows that the king knows this. In other words, she is aware that Achashverosh will consider her request to be very important – important enough to risk her life. We would think that when the king favors her and agrees to grant nearly any request – "even until half the kingdom" – that she would seize this opportunity and ask for salvation and for Haman's orders to be rescinded.

Instead, she invites Achashverosh and Haman to a special party she has prepared for that very evening. Why didn't she ask for salvation at this point?

Esther understood a great deal about politics. Remember – she hasn't seen the king for thirty days. Even if she is still his favorite – she is still not on the "inside" right now. Haman, on the other hand, has just had a drinking party with the king (3 days earlier), celebrating their letters sent out to kill the Jews. If she were to accuse Haman, the king might not believe her and the whole effort would be lost.

She invites the two of them to a party. As disgusting as the prospect sounds, it is the first step in a brilliant plan of psychological warfare.

Let's consider how each of them would react to this invitation:

Haman, as the consummate egotist, has his ego blown up even bigger than before (as we will soon see). He alone is invited to sup with the king and queen!

Achashverosh, on the other hand, must be suspicious. There has already been (at least) one plot on his life – now, Esther risked her life just to invite him and Haman to a party? Is something going on between the two of them (more on this later)? Are they plotting against me?

### B) THE FIRST PARTY (5:6-8)

At this party, the king expects to find out what Esther really has on her mind – maybe his suspicions were for naught? Instead, she surprises him by asking him to return – with Haman – for another party the next night!

Following the psychological makeup of our two party guests – each of the states of mind described above became exacerbated.

Esther knew that Haman's ego would continue to grow – and she also knew that he would leave the palace via the gate – and see Mordechai sitting there. Just feed his ego – and he will self-destruct.

### C) HAMAN AT HOME (9:14)

Indeed, Haman becomes so enraged when he sees Mordechai that, after a short bragging session with his family, he runs back to the palace to ask Achashverosh to allow him to hang Mordechai immediately. He cannot wait eleven months to kill his arch-nemesis – he needs satisfaction right away (ah, the impetuous egotist.)

## VIII. CHAPTER 6

### A) HAMAN AND ACHASHVEROSH (6:1-10)

Why couldn't the king sleep? The Gemara provides the obvious answer – he had thoughts of plot and coup on his worried mind. Why did he call for his chronicles to be read? It seems that this powerful king, ruler over 127 provinces – had no friends. There was no one he could trust or turn to. Esther had planted a terrible bug in his mind – two parties in a row with Haman – what are the two of them planning to do? Indeed – what have they already done?

Just as the king discovers that he owes Mordechai a favor from over four years ago – and decides that the way to gain the allegiance of the citizenry is to publicly demonstrate the rewards of loyalty to the crown – Haman turns up in the outer courtyard of the palace. The king had to wonder what Haman was doing there so late at night (!?) The king summoned Haman for some advice – and for a chance to take him down a peg or two. Now, the king demonstrates some acumen of his own.

In 6:6, the king asks Haman what to do for someone he really favors. Haman, that old egotist, is so caught up in his own power, that he describes a truly regal parade which he assumes will feature him as the honoree. How very surprised he is when the king orders him to take the self-same Mordechai and lead him on the king's horse.

(Note that the phrase to be called out while leading this honoree: Kakhah ye'Aseh la'Ish Asher... shows up in one other place in T'nakh. This is the beginning of the formula of Halitza – the refusal of Levirate marriage, which accompanies the woman's disdainful spit. [D'var[D'varim 25:9]ur own conclusions about the satiric effect accomplished by the Ba'al haMegillah).

## **B) HAMAN AND MORDECHAI (6:11-14)**

Haman returns to his house "in mourning". The Rabbis have a lot to say about the events of this morning – but, even on a p'shat level, it is clear that Haman's fortunes have taken a significant turn for the worse. He is quickly rushed to the second party – and, in his case, his own farewell.

## **IX. CHAPTER 7**

### **A) THE SECOND PARTY (7:1-9)**

This is the denouement of the story as far as we are concerned. Haman still doesn't know who Esther is – but he is clearly shattered and his ego is as fragile as ever. Achashverosh is equally disturbed and must be getting more confused by Esther's repeated parties without asking for what she really wants (it is clear that the king knows she wants something more – which is why he keeps asking her).

Now, she pulls out all the cards. The king thinks that she and Haman are hatching a plot against him (and have been having an affair?) – and suddenly Haman is revealed as the villain who is plotting against her. Haman thinks that he is still on the road to satisfaction in the matter of the Jews; he'll just need to wait until Adar. He has no idea that Esther is one of "them".

Esther points to Haman and all is lost. The confusion and anger of the king, the confusion and fear of Haman – create an emotional jumble which ultimately leads to the king's explosion when he finds Haman lying on Esther's divan, begging for mercy. Haman is erased and (here we go again) Mordechai takes his place (compare 8:2 with 3:10). The capricious king has (for the meantime) elevated the Jews and they are saved. We all know, however, that the happy ending of the story isn't permanent and that the rocky shores of existence in exile (which is probably one of the sub-messages of the Megillah) are not safe for Jews.

## **X. POSTSCRIPT**

We have taken a cursory look at some of the events as described in the Megillah and found that Esther displayed extraordinary wisdom and courage in her successful effort to save her people. We are very right to regard this as a Nes as it is a reflection of God's Image as found within our heroine. God's Name is not found – because, unlike Pesach, this is not a story about the suspension of the laws of nature. It is, rather, a story about human strength and nobility used in the most positive and productive effort imaginable – the salvation of Am Yisra'el. (That and a really great satire of the Persian Kingdom)

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### **MEGILLAT ESTHER, ITS 'HIDDEN' MESSAGE**

Is the Megilla a satire? It certainly contains many strange details that beg interpretation. But if so, why would a satire be included in the Tanach. In the following shiur, we attempt to 'unmask' Megillat Esther by considering its historical and prophetic setting.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

We begin our study with one of the most well known psukim of the Megilla:

"**ish yehudi** haya be-Shushan ha-**bira** - u-shmo  
**Mordechai**" (see Esther 2:5).

Even though this pasuk is proudly read aloud by the entire congregation, most people do not appreciate its prophetic 'sting'. However, an ear tuned to the prophecies of Zecharya and familiar with Tanach immediately catches its irony, as:

**ish yehudi** - implies more than simply someone who is Jewish;  
**ha-bira** - implies more than just 'the capital city'; and  
**Mordechai** - is not a Jewish name!

\* The phrase **ish yehudi** is mentioned only one other time in the entire Tanach - in Sefer Zecharya 8:23. There it describes a devout Jew in the city of Jerusalem - leading a group of non-Jewish followers in search of God.

\* the word **ha-bira** in Divrei Ha-yamim (see 29:1 & 29:19) is used by King David to describe specifically the bet ha-mikdash (the Temple). Prior to the time period of Megillat Esther, the Hebrew word bira finds no other mention in Tanach.

\* The name **Mordechai** is probably the most provocative word in the entire Megilla for it stems from the name of the Babylonian deity -Marduk (see II Kings 25:27 & Yeshayahu 39:1). Prior to the Babylonian exile, no one would have dared give his son such a 'goyish' name.

[This does not imply that Mordechai was assimilated, rather his name may reflect the assimilation of his generation.]

And this may be only one of many psukim of the Megilla that are filled with irony and possibly satire. Yet, if this conclusion is correct, we must explain why the Megilla would employ satire to deliver its prophetic message. Furthermore, we must also determine more precisely what that prophetic message is, and how it relates to our celebration of Purim.

To answer these questions, our shiur will take the following steps:

- I. Base our above assumption that the Megilla should contain a prophetic message, related to its historical setting.
- II. Review both the historical and prophetic setting of the time period of the Megilla.
- III. Search for a thematic connection between this setting and the story in the Megilla, and support it with both textual and thematic parallels from other books in Tanach.
- IV. Explain why the Megilla employs this unique style.
- V. Explain how the celebration of Purim, as defined in the Megilla, relates to this theme.

#### **PART I - 'HESTER PANIM'**

As every book of the Tanach contains a prophetic message, Megillat Esther should be no different. It is commonly understood that the Megilla teaches us how to see the 'hidden hand' of God behind the events that ultimately lead to Bnei Yisrael's salvation from Haman. Some even suggest that the Megilla's use of the name Esther (from the Hebrew verb 'lehasfir' - to hide) instead of her real name - Hadassa (see 2:7) teaches us this very lesson.

However, if the Megilla wants to show us how God saved His people, why isn't this message explicit? Furthermore, why isn't God's Name ever mentioned? Most every other sefer in Tanach expresses this point explicitly. Why is Megillat Esther different?

Furthermore, most all other seforim in Tanach explain not only how God saves Am Yisrael, but also why they are being punished. This theme of divine retribution is explicit in the Torah in the tochachot (Vayikra 26:3-46, Devarim 11:13-17, 28:1-69, etc.) and reiterated over and over again by all of the prophets. In fact Chazal's explanation of the name Esther reflects this very same concept:

"Esther min ha-Torah minayin?"

[What is the source in Torah for the story of Esther?]

"ve-Anochi haster aster panai ba-yom ha-hu"

[I will surely hide my face from you on that day.]

(Devarim 31:18 / See Chullin 139b).

However, if we take a closer look at that pasuk in Devarim, we find that its message is significantly different. Rather than explaining how God 'saves' Am Yisrael in a 'hidden manner', it explains how God 'punishes' them:

"And God told Moshe, after you die... this nation will leave Me and break My covenant... And My anger will be kindled against them on that day and I will forsake them, ["ve-histarti panai"] and I will hide My face from them... and many evils and troubles shall befall them - & they will say on that day, these evils are because God is not among us.

- Ve-anochi haster astir panai ba-yom ha-hu -

and I will hide My face from them on that day because of all the bad that they have done... [Therefore,]

- Write down this song and teach it to Bnei Yisrael, so that it will be My witness..." (see Devarim 31:16-18).

In these psukim, God warns Bnei Yisrael that should they betray His covenant, great evil will befall them. Even though it may appear to Bnei Yisrael that God has left them, these psukim teach them that God only appears to be 'hiding His face' ['hester panim'] from them. Nonetheless, Bnei Yisrael are expected to realize that their punishment is from God. Therefore, Moshe is to teach Bnei Yisrael Shirat Ha'azinu in order that they recognize this. The shira will teach Am Yisrael to contemplate their predicament and relate their punishment to their wayward behavior. To verify this point, simply read Shirat Ha'azinu [note especially 31:19-20].

Above all, Shirat Ha'azinu explains how we are to determine why we are being punished. In that song, we are told:

"Zechor yemot olam, binu shnot dor va-dor..." (Devarim 32:7).

[Remember the days of old; consider the years of ages past.]

The shira teaches us to contemplate our history, especially how and why we were chosen (see 32:8-9), in order to realize why we are being punished. It reminds us that when something does go wrong, it is our fault, not God's (see 32:4-6!).

Even though God may hide His face, Shirat Ha'azinu does promise that God will ultimately redeem His people, however, not necessarily because they deserve redemption. Rather, God will have mercy on our pitiful predicament (see 32:26-27, also 32:37-38) and save us at the 'last minute'.

Most all of the prophets deliver a very similar message. They explain to Bnei Yisrael what they have done wrong, and hence why they are being punished. Prophecy teaches man not only to thank God for salvation, but also to recognize his faults and correct his mistakes.

Therefore, the Megilla should be no different, and especially because its name alludes to the pasuk in Chumash that commands us to search for a reason why we are punished.

[This supports the Gemara's question in Masechet Megilla 12a (middle) "sha'alu talmidav et Rashb'i: mipnei ma nitchayvu..."]

Even though the Megilla does not provide an explicit reason for this impending punishment, this background and its name suggest that we search for a 'hidden' (or implicit) one. To find that reason, we must consider prophetic and historical setting of that time period.

## PART II - HISTORICAL AND PROPHETIC SETTING

The opening psukim of the Megilla immediately point us to its time period (see 1:1-3). Achashverosh is a Persian king who reigns from India to Ethiopia in the city of Shushan. Considering that Cyrus (=Koresh) was the first Persian king, the story in Megillat Esther takes place during the Persian time period and thus after the time period when the Jews had an opportunity to return to Jerusalem.

Even though there is a controversy concerning precisely which Persian King Achashverosh was, he most certainly reigned after Koresh (the first Persian king), and thus, after Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over.

[Note: If you are not familiar with this time period, it is highly recommended that you review Kings II 23:31-25:12, Ezra 1:1-10 and 3:1-4:7, and Yirmiyahu 29:1-15. As you read Ezra 1:1-9, note how the Jews who did not make 'aliya' were encouraged to send 'money' instead! Seems like not much has changed in 2500 years!]

For those of you unfamiliar with this time period, here is a quick overview:

In the first year of his reign, Koresh issued his famous proclamation allowing and encouraging all of the Jews of the Persian Empire to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. The prophets clearly understood this historic decree as the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy (see Ezra 1:1-9, II Divrei Ha-yamim 36:20-23). As God had promised, the time of redemption from the Babylonian Exile had come.

### YIRMIYAHU'S SEVENTY YEARS

To appreciate the prophetic importance of this opportunity, we need only quote Yirmiyahu's final message to the Babylonian Exile in regard to what was 'supposed' to happen when these seventy years were over:

"Thus said the Lord, when the 70 years are complete, I shall remember you and keep my promise to return you to this land.... [At that time.] you shall call out to Me - you shall come and pray to Me - and I will hear you...and you will ask for Me and find Me; if you will search for me with all your heart. Then I will be there for you, and I shall turn away your captivity and gather you from all the nations wherein you may be dispersed... and I will return you to the land from which you were exiled ..." (29:10-14).

According to Yirmiyahu, the return of the Exile would not be automatic. Rather, it was God's hope that their return would be catalyzed by sincere repentance and a yearning to return. In other words, God intended for the Babylonian Exile [as the word 'exile' implies] to be temporary. People don't stay in 'exile' unless they are forced to be there. Exile implies that one cannot return to his own land. [Otherwise the translation of 'galut' would be 'diaspora' instead of 'exile' / hey, not a bad idea!]

Note as well how Yirmiyahu's message is congruent with a primary theme of Chumash, i.e. God's desire for the Jewish people to become His 'model' nation - a vehicle through which all nations will come to recognize God (see Devarim 4:5-8 & Shmot 19:4-6). Recall as well that in that ideal setting, the bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim was to serve as a symbol of this national purpose.

[See previous shiurim on Parshiot Re'eh, Noach, and Vayetze.

Recall that the mikdash is referred to as: "ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem le-shaken **shmo** sham" / see Devarim 12:5-14.]

God's decision to destroy that Temple and exile his people was for a rehabilitative purpose. According to Yirmiyahu, God's hope was for the Exile to 'learn its lesson' during these seventy years in Bavel. Afterward, God hoped that the nation would be spiritually ready and anxious to return to their homeland, and to reconstruct their symbolic shrine - the Temple in Jerusalem.

Precisely as Yirmiyahu had predicted (seventy years after Bavel had risen to power), the opportunity to return arose when the Babylonian empire fell to Koresh (= Cyrus the Great), the first king of the Persian Empire (see Yirmiyahu 25:11-12, Ezra 1:1).

## A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Unfortunately, the response of the Exile to this historic opportunity was less than enthusiastic. A group of some forty thousand did return; however, the majority of Am Yisrael remained in Bavel. For an insight into the tragedy of the missed opportunity we need only quote the explanation given by Rav Yehuda Ha-Levi in Sefer Ha-Kuzari (II.24):

"Had the entire nation enthusiastically answered the divine call to return to the Land, the idyllic prophecies of the return to Zion would have been fulfilled and the Shchina would have returned. In reality, however, only a small portion returned. The majority remained in Bavel, willfully accepting the exile, as they did not wish to leave their homes & businesses etc." (sounds familiar...)

Even those who did return lacked enthusiasm. The apathy of the returnees is echoed in the prophecies of Chagai and Zecharia, the prophets of this time period (see Chagai 1:1-3; 2:3 see also Zecharia 4:10; 6:15; 7:4-7; 8:6.

- How does all of this relate to Megillat Esther?
- How could it not relate?
- Could the fact that Am Yisrael remained scattered among the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire, while they could have returned a generation or two earlier to Jerusalem, not relate to the prophetic message of the Megilla?

Considering that Yirmiyahu's seventy years are over, why are so many Jews living in Shushan and all over the Persian empire during the time period of Achashverosh?

Could not this fact alone supply sufficient reason for God to consider Am Yisrael negligent of their covenantal responsibilities?

With this in mind, we must now take a second look at the Megilla in search of at least a 'hint' of this theme.

## PART III - THE THEME OF THE MEGILLA AND ITS SATIRE

Based on this historic and prophetic setting, one could suspect that the impending destruction of Am Yisrael by Haman may be a Divine punishment for their apathy. After all, the Jews living in the Persian empire appear to have:

- \* preferred Shushan over Yerushalayim;
- \* opted to subjugate themselves to Achashverosh rather than respond to God's call to return to their land;
- \* Replaced the bet ha-mikdash with the palace of Achashverosh! ["ve-nahafoch hu"]

Even though this prophetic message is not explicit in the Megilla, we will now show how it may be hidden in its satire.

[Note: Before we continue, it is important to clarify a problematic issue. We are about to relate many elements in the story of the Megilla to a satiric commentary on Persian Jewry. This does not mean that these events did not actually occur. The story of the Megilla is true and based on historic facts. However, its prophetic message is conveyed through the use of literary tools, such as satire and irony. Often, criticism is more poignant when delivered implicitly rather than explicitly. (Lehavdil, take for example George Orwell's criticism of the Russian revolution in 'Animal Farm'.)]

## TEXTUAL AND THEMATIC SUPPORT

For a start, we will bring two examples where there appears to be an 'echo' of God's voice behind certain statements in the Megilla.

For example, the story of Vashti may reflect God's utter disappointment with Am Yisrael for not returning to Israel to fulfill their divine purpose, to become God's 'model' nation:

"[Vashti was called to] come to the king and show all the nations her beauty... but she did not come as the King commanded, and he became very angry..." (see Esther 1:9-12).

Is not Vashti's behavior similar to that of Am Yisrael? Is not the King's conclusion similar to God's? Is not the fear that all the women in the Persian kingdom will now disobey their husbands ironic? If Am Yisrael (destined to be an 'or la-goyim') does not respond to its divine call, what could God expect from other nations?

[Note that in earlier prophecy, Am Yisrael is often compared to God's wife - see Hoshea 2:4,16-18. See also Zecharia 1:1-3, note 'shuvu eilai...' and 'va-yiktzof', compare 1:12.]

Furthermore, who is the real king in the Megilla? Chazal raise the possibility that the word 'ha-melech' [the King] in the Megilla may be 'kodesh', as it often [in a hidden manner] may be referring to God and not to Achashverosh.

Even Haman's petition to Achashverosh to destroy Am Yisrael may echo a similar complaint that God may have against His own nation:

"There is a certain nation scattered among the nations whose laws are different than any other nation, but the laws of the King they do not keep, and it is not worthwhile for the King to leave them be" (3:8).

In a certain way, Haman's accusation is similar to God's threat in Shirat Ha'azinu to destroy am Yisrael for not keeping His laws (32:26). After all, what purpose is there for God to keep His people if they refuse to obey Him and fulfill their divine goal?

Even though these first two examples may appear a bit 'stretched', a more convincing textual proof is found in the parallel between Achashverosh's palace and the bet mikdash. This parallel is significant for it reflects the fact the Bnei Yisrael had neglected the bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim, preferring instead to be dependent on the palace of Achashverosh. We begin by comparing the overall structure of each:

#### **KODESH KODASHIM - CHATZER PNIMIT**

The Megilla refers to the most inner chamber of the king's palace as the 'chatzer ha-pnimit' (5:1), where entry to anyone is forbidden under threat of death - unless called to enter (as Esther feared in 4:11). Here we find an obvious parallel to the kodesh ha-kodashim in the mikdash (Purim - kippurim!).

#### **KODESH - CHATZER CHITZONA**

The 'waiting area' outside the inner chamber is called the 'chatzer ha-chitzona' (6:4). Here 'ro'ei pnei ha-melech' (1:14) like Haman himself are allowed to enter freely. This is parallel to the kodesh where kohanim are permitted to enter.

[See description of the Temple in Yechezkel 40:18-19.]

#### **AZARA - SHA'AR BET HA-MELECH**

In front of the palace is 'sha'ar bet ha-melech' where people like Mordechai are permitted to stand (2:18,21). However, here one must dress properly ('aveilut' is not permitted), therefore he cannot be there dressed in sackcloth (see 4:21). This area is parallel to the azara in the mikdash.

#### **YERUSHALAYIM - REHOV HA-IR SHUSHAN**

This is the area 'lifnei sha'ar ha-melech' (4:2) or 'rechov ha-ir' (4:6) where Mordechai can dress in sackcloth. This is parallel to the city of Yerushalayim surrounding the mikdash.

This parallel is strengthened by the Megilla's use of the word bira to describe Shushan. As we explained in our introduction, in Divrei Ha-yamim, the only other time in Tanach prior to Megillat Esther where this word is mentioned, bira describes specifically the bet ha-mikdash, and in the context of its purpose to serve as a national center and symbol of God's Name. [See DH I 29:1 & 19, you should read from 29:1-25 to see the context. (You'll find there a familiar passage from davening, which maybe you will now understand a little better.)]

[See also Masechet Middot I:9, where the Mishna refers to the bet ha-mikdash as the bira.]

Other parallels to mikdash are found in the use of key words such as 'yekar ve-tif'eret' (1:4); 'tekhelet, butz, ve-argaman' (1:6) in the Megilla's description of the king's party.

[Based on these psukim, the gemara (Megilla 12a) claims that Achashverosh donned the 'bigdei kohen gadol' at his party!]

Even the 6-month party followed by a seven-day special celebration may parallel the six months that it took to build the mishkan (from Yom Kippur till Rosh Chodesh Nissan) followed by

the seven-day 'milu'im' ceremony. Likewise, Chazal explain, 've-keilim mi-keilim shonim' (1:7) as referring to the vessels of the bet ha-mikdash.

Chazal even suggest that Haman's decree may have been Am Yisrael's punishment for drinking from these keilim or alternately for their participation in and enjoyment of the royal party (see Megilla 12a).

[Note that according to pshat, the keilim had returned with Sheshbatzar during the time of Koresh (see Ezra 1:7-8).

However, the Midrash emphasizes the thematic connection between the party and Bnei Yisrael's lack of enthusiasm to build the mikdash.]

Hence we can conclude that the Megilla's satire suggests that during this time period Am Yisrael had replaced:

- \* God with Achashverosh;
- \* God's Temple with Achashverosh's palace; and
- \* Yerushalayim ha-bira with Shushan ha-bira! ['ve-nahafoch hu']

#### **70 DAYS / 70 YEARS**

Another seemingly unimportant detail in the Megilla concerning when the two decrees were sent might also allude to this prophetic backdrop.

Recall that the original decree calling for the destruction of the Jews was sent out on the 13th day of Nisan (3:12). Several days later Haman was hanged and Esther pleaded from the king to repeal this decree (8:3-6). Achashverosh agreed; however, the actual letters were not sent out until the 23rd of Sivan - some two months later (8:9)! What took so long?

By carefully comparing these two dates, we again find an amazing reminder of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of the seventy years. Between the 13th of Nisan until the 23rd of Sivan - 70 days elapsed (17+30+23). During these seventy days, all of the Jews throughout the Persian empire were under the tremendous peril of impending destruction, thinking that their doom was inevitable. Could this be an ironic reminder to the Jewish people that they had not heeded Yirmiyahu's prophecy of what he expected from Bnei Yisrael once the seventy years had expired (see 29:10-14)?

A similar concept of suffering for a sin, a day for a year (and vice versa), is found twice in Tanach in related circumstances. After the sin of the 'meraglim', the forty days are replaced by the punishment of forty years of wandering. Here, too, the nation opted not to fulfill their divine destiny, preferring a return to Egypt to the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Yechezkel, too, is required to suffer 'a day for each year.'

[For 390 days followed by an additional 40 days, he must lie on his side and repent for the sins of Israel and Yehuda that led to the destruction of Yerushalayim (Yechezkel 4:1-14!).]

A similar claim is made by the Midrash which suggests that Achashverosh threw his 180 day party in celebration of the fact that Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over and the bet ha-mikdash was not rebuilt. In pshat, this explanation is unreasonable. Why should the most powerful king of civilization worry about the prophecies of Yirmiyahu, while the Jews themselves do not listen to him? However, on the level of drash, this explanation is enlightening. Chazal, in the spirit of the Megilla - 've-nahafoch hu' - put into Achashverosh's mind what should have been in the mind of Am Yisrael, i.e. the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of seventy years and the desire to return.

#### **PESACH AND PURIM**

Based on our understanding thus far, it is also understandable why Israel's salvation from Haman's decree comes only after Am Yisrael collectively accept a three day fast. This fast takes place on the 15, 16, & 17th of Nisan. Interestingly enough, the events that led to the repeal of Haman's decree take place 'davka' during the holiday of Pesach - the holiday on which we celebrate our freedom from subjugation to a foreign nation and the beginning of our journey to the Promised Land.

#### PART IV - WHY SATIRE?

We have shown that the Megilla is laced with allusions to the fact that Am Yisrael does not answer its divine call during the Persian time period. But the question remains, why is this message only hinted at but not explicitly stated by Chazal? Most probably for the same reason that it is not explicit in the Megilla.

This is the power of satire. In order to strengthen the message, a powerful point is not explicitly stated, but only alluded to. The direct approach used by the other 48 nevi'im of Tanach had not been very successful.

[See Masechet Megilla 14a (top) - "gedola hasarat ha-taba'at shel Haman yoter mi-48 nevi'im..."!]

One could suggest that Anshei Knesset Ha-gdola, in their decision to write (see Bava Batra 15a) (and later canonize) Megillat Esther, had hoped that a satirical message would be more powerful than a direct one. Hence, Midrashim of Chazal that comment on the Megilla may follow a similar approach.

[Note how the prophet Natan's message to David ha-melech in regard to his sin with Bat-sheva was much more powerful because he used the 'mashal' of kivsat ha-rash" (see II Shmuel 12:1-7!).]

#### PART V - THE MINHAGIM OF PURIM

Up until this point we have explained how the satire in the Megilla may reflect a prophetic censure of Am Yisrael in Bavel for not returning to Yerushalayim when the opportunity arose during the time of Koresh. However, if our assumptions are indeed correct, then we would expect the outcome of the Megilla, or at least the celebration of Purim for future generations to reflect this theme.

Instead, we don't find any 'mass aliyah' movement after our salvation. Nor does the celebration of Purim (with 'mishteh' and sending 'mishloach manot') appear to reflect this theme in any manner.

However, with a 'little help' from the prophecies of Zecharia, we can suggest an answer for these questions as well. To do so, we must first identify who the specific Persian King Achashverosh was.

#### SOME MORE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The topic of the history of the Persian time period is very complicated and the subject of a major controversy between most Midrashei Chazal and the historians (& a minority opinion in Chazal). To explain this controversy is beyond the scope of this shiur, instead we will simply present the two conflicting opinions concerning when Achashverosh reigned.

According to Seder Olam (and hence the majority opinion in Chazal), Achashverosh was the Persian King immediately after Koresh, but before Daryavesh, and thus the story of the Megilla takes place after 'shivat tzion' (the return to Zion during the time of Koresh) but before the second bet ha-mikdash is actually built.

According to this opinion, the events of the Megilla had a tremendous affect on the situation in Yerushalayim. Only two years after the story of Megilla, King Darius, son of Esther gives the Jews permission to return and build the Second Temple. Construction began during the second year of Darius (= Daryavesh).

The events of the Megilla also appear to have catalyzed a major aliyah movement. According to Chazal, Ezra's aliyah from Bavel took place only a few years afterward, during the seventh year of his reign of Daryavesh (who Chazal identify with Artachshasta / see Ezra 7:1-9).

Thus, according to Seder Olam's opinion, the events of the Megilla indeed had a major effect on the rebuilding of the Temple and shivat tzion - the return to Zion.

According to most historians (and a minority opinion in Chazal / see Targum ha-shiv'im & Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer chapter 49), Achashverosh was the Persian king who succeeded Darius (486 - 465 BCE), and thus the story of the Megilla takes place some forty years after the second Temple was built, and thus after Chagai & Zecharia's plea to return and fulfill the potential of Bayit Sheni. [Its construction began in 521 BCE / in the second year of Darius the Great; hence the story in the Megilla takes place in 474 BCE.]

According to this opinion, no major event takes place

immediately after the events in the Megilla. In fact, over two decades pass before a new wave of olim come with Ezra and Nechemya to help strengthen the city of Yerushalayim. [The historians identify Artachshasta with Artexerxes, not the same king as Darius.]

If our assumption concerning the satire of the Megilla is correct, why don't we find a mass aliyah movement immediately after the miracle of Purim. [Jews of the twentieth century could ask themselves a similar question!]

Furthermore, according to either opinion, shouldn't the manner by which we celebrate Purim relate to this theme and satire?

Finally, why is it necessary to celebrate Purim for all generations? Purim is not the only time in our history when Bnei Yisrael are saved from terrible enemies. Chazal go even one step further. They claim that Purim will be the only holiday kept at the time of the final redemption! (See Rambam Hilchot Megilla, Esther 9:28 and commentaries).

#### THE MEGILLA AND SEFER ZECHARYA

If we follow the opinion of the 'historians' in regard to the time period of Megillat Esther, then the prophecies of Zecharia concerning the potential of Bayit Sheni precede the story in the Megilla. If so, then we posit that numerous textual parallels between the Megilla and Sefer Zecharia are intentional. In other words, when 'anshei knesset ha-gdola' wrote Megillat Esther (most likely during the time period of Ezra / see Bava Batra 15a), they assumed that anyone reading the Megilla was familiar with Sefer Zecharia, and hence would understand the implicit meaning of these parallels.

We will now show how the Megilla may suggest that Am Yisrael's predicament during the time period of Achashverosh was caused because of Zecharia's prophecies (a generation earlier) were not taken seriously! To appreciate this message, we must study Zecharia chapters 7-8.

For a background, review the first six chapters of Sefer Zecharia, noting how they focus on one primary theme - the return of the Shchina to Yerushalayim. However, Zecharia warns numerous times that the Shchina's return will be a function of Am Yisrael's covenantal commitment (see 6:15). Redemption is indeed possible; however, Zecharia insists that the 'spiritual' return of Am Yisrael was no less important than their physical return:

"Shuvu eilai.. ve-ashuva aleichem" (1:3, see also 8:7-8).

[It is highly suggested that you read at least the first two chapters of Zecharia (note 'hadassim' and 'ish rochav al sus' in chapter 1, and 'prazot teshev Yerushalayim' in chapter 2) and then chapters 7-8 before continuing.]

#### SHOULD WE FAST ON TISHA BE-AV?

According to Chagai 2:18, construction of the Temple began on this same year, i.e. during the second year of Daryavesh. Zecharia chapter seven opens two years later when an official delegation from Bavel arrives in Jerusalem to ask Zecharia a very fundamental question:

"Ha-evkeh be-chodesh ha-chamishi?" Should we continue to fast in the 5th month (i.e. the fast of Tisha Be-av)? (see 7:3)

The question appears to be quite legitimate. After all, now that the Temple is rebuilt, there no longer appears to be a need to fast. However, Zecharia's lengthy and official reply (7:4-8:23) to this question contains an eternal message that relates to the very nature of the ideal redemption process.

In Zecharia 7:4-7, God appears to be quite disturbed by the people's question regarding the need to fast. Instead of showing their interest in the greater picture of the redemption process, the people seem only to be interested in whether or not they have to fast. In the eyes of the prophet, their question reflected a general attitude problem in regard to the entire redemption process.

God's answer implies that the fast of Tisha Be-av is not a divine commandment - rather it was a 'minhag' instituted by Chazal to remember not only the Temple's destruction, but also the reason why the churban took place (see 7:5-6). Thus, God explains, feasting or fasting is man's decision, while God is interested in

something much more basic - that Bnei Yisrael keep the mitzvot which they had neglected during the first Temple period (see 7:5-14).

Zecharia continues his answer with two chapters of 'musar' (rebuke) in which he emphasizes the most basic mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must keep in order for the Shchina to return:

"EMET u-mishpat shalom shiftu be-sha'areichem, ve-chesed ve-rachamim asu ish et achiv. Almana, ve-yatom ve-anu al ta'ashoku..." (7:8-10).

- Truth, social justice, helping the poor and needy, and thinking kindly of one's neighbor, etc.

God is anxious for His Shchina to return, but in order for that to happen, Yerushalayim must first become a city characterized by truth (8:1-3). God foresees the return the exiles from lands in the east and west. With their return, God and His nation will become once again covenantal partners, through "emet & tzedaka" (see 8:7-8).

Finally, after many words of encouragement and repeated 'musar' (see 8:11-17), God finally answers the original question concerning the fast days. Should Am Yisrael return to Israel and keep "emet ve-shalom, the four fast days commemorating the destruction of Yerushalayim will become holidays:

"tzom ha-rvii, v'tzom ha'chamishi... [The four fast days] will be instead for Yehuda days of celebration... [on the condition that] they will love **emet & shalom**" (see 8:18-19 / note parallel to Megilla 9:30-31!)

After two chapters of rebuke, Zecharia finally answers the people's original question. Should Bnei Yisrael indeed show their devotion to God, i.e. if they practice 'emet u-mishpat shalom', then the fast days, the days of crying for Jerusalem, will become holidays instead.

Should Bnei Yisrael indeed love keeping emet & shalom (these two words simply summarize the primary points raised by Zecharia in this perek), then the redemption process will be complete.

#### ISH YEHUDI

Zecharia concludes this prophecy with his vision of numerous people from many great nations will one day come to Yerushalayim in search of God. They will gather around the ish yehudi, asking for his guidance, for they will have heard that God is with His people (8:20-23).

Had Am Yisrael heeded this prophetic call in the time of Koresh and Daryavesh, then they would not have been scattered among 127 provinces during the time of Achashverosh. One could suggest that instead of celebrating with the Persians at the party in Shushan, the Jews could (& should) have been celebrating with God at His bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim.

The ish yehudi would have been in the bira in Yerushalayim, making God's Name known to other nations; instead, the Megilla opens as an ish yehudi is found in the bira of Achashverosh in Shushan, ironically carrying the name of foreign god.

[One could also suggest that Mordechai's institution of the yearly celebration of Purim relates specifically to this prophecy. First of all, note how this day is described as one that turns around from 'yagon' to 'simcha', from 'mourning to holiday' (see Esther 9:22). Purim may symbolize the manner in which the fast days for Jerusalem will one day become holidays.]

This parallel to Zecharia could explain the reason for the special mitzvot that Mordechai instituted for Purim in his first letter (see 9:20-22). They reflect Zecharia's repeated message of helping the needy (matanot le-eyyonim/ note 7:10) and thinking nicely of one's neighbors (mishloach manot ish le-re'ehu / note 8:16-17!). Once a year we must remind ourselves of the most basic mitzvot that we must keep in order that we become worthy of returning to Yerushalayim and rebuilding the Bet ha'mikdash.

Certain halachot instituted by Chazal may reflect this message. Interestingly, Shushan Purim is replaced with Yerushalayim Purim for the walled cities from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun replace the walled city of Shushan! [See Yehoshua 21:42 and its context,

compare to Esther 9:2.]

#### SHALOM VE-EMET

Although this explanation for certain minhagim of Purim may seem a bit 'stretched', textual proof is found in the closing psukim of the Megilla (9:29-32 / read it carefully!).

Mordechai and Esther need to send out a second 'igeret' (letter) explaining and giving authority ('tokef') to the minhagim of Purim explained in the first igeret. What was the content of this special second letter? To our surprise, one short phrase:

"Divrei shalom ve-emet"! [See 9:30, read carefully.]

These two key words point us directly back to Zecharia's prophecy about the fast days becoming holidays (read Zecharia 8:18-19 again)! They explain not only when, but also why the fast days will become holidays - i.e. if Bnei Yisrael keep shalom and emet! The second igeret may simply be an explanation of the purpose of the minhagim of Purim - Mordechai and Esther use this letter to explain to Am Yisrael why Purim has been established - a yearly reminder of the prophecies of Zecharia which remain unfulfilled.

The continuation of this igeret strengthens this interpretation. Under what authority (tokef) does Mordechai institute these halachot?

"Ka'asher kiymu al nafsham divrei ha-tzomot ve-za'akatam" (9:31) [Compare these psukim carefully to Zecharia 8:18-19.]

Recall, God had told Zecharia that fast days and feast days are up to man to decide. Now, according to the second igeret, just like ('ka'asher') the prophets instituted four fast days in order that we remember Yerushalayim, Mordechai institutes a 'feast day' to remember Yerushalayim.

[Note that this pasuk cannot be referring to our Ta'anit Esther, for if it refers to the three day fast, that fast was a one time event and was not "al nafsham ve-al zar'am". Likewise, it cannot be the fast of the 13th of Adar, as that custom only began during the time period of the Ge'onim. Therefore, it must refer to the four fast days on Jerusalem.]

So why didn't everyone return immediately afterward to Israel?

Most probably, after the events of the Megilla, a mass return to Yerushalayim was not realistic. Nonetheless, Mordechai wanted to institute a holiday that would remind Am Yisrael that should such an opportunity arise (once again), that they will know how to relate to it properly. Sefer Zecharia and its theme of shalom ve-emet serve as the spiritual guide.

[This interpretation may help explain why the celebration of Purim will remain even after our final redemption.]

Purim, therefore, has deep meaning for all generations. Its message may have been 'hiding' behind the costumes, the drinking ("ad de-lo yada"), the 'purim Torah', and 'shalach mannos'. It may have been lost within our ignorance of Tanach. Its message, however, remains eternal, just as our aspirations for Yerushalayim and the establishment therein of a just society - remain eternal.

purim sameiach,  
menachem