

# PARSHAS TERUMAH

*by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari*

[The purpose of the Mishkan and that of its vessels have concerned all of our scholars down the ages, so it is natural for Abarbanel to have questions regarding them and to present his very own answers. It is possible with the scope of this lesson to deal only with the most basic of them].

"They shall make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell in their midst" (Shmot, 25:8). How could He command the making of the Mishkan so that He could reside in it? He is not a corporeal being that can be confined to a certain space or place. The heavens are His throne and the earth is His footstool so what of manner of house can humans build for Him? Shlomo Hamelech said when building the Bet Hamikdash, "The heavens and the heavens above them cannot contain You, how much less this house that I have built" (1Kings, 8:27). Therefore there would seem to be a contradiction in the building of the Mishkan.

The Mishkan and its vessels were meant to in-plant, through their sanctity and preparation, the glory of the Shechinah in the hearts and minds of Israel, so that the evil thoughts of helplessness and futility fostered by the vastness of the desert in which they wandered for 40 years, would not affect them spiritually. Rather, thereby they would constantly be aware of Divine Providence and of His Protection. Since humans are bodily and their needs are material and physical, it is easy for them to err and to think that He who has no body or material form cannot be aware of their desires and needs. In the same way, they think that He does see and know all their actions and their deeds, and therefore does not reward or punish them. So Mankind looks at their pettiness, weaknesses and frailty, and are convinced that Hashem is so great and powerful that His Glory and Majesty are so distant and far from them, that He is not aware of them, their fears or their needs. Then they despair of being able to reach Him, praise Him or receive His protection. The Miskan was therefore needed to show Israel that unlike the gods of all the other nations, He was always close by and protective of them; indeed, a personal G-d as well as an All Powerful G-d, despite His being without form or body. [Abarbanel follows throughout his commentary, the insistence of the Rambam that Hashem has no corporeal shape, form or characteristic- "Ain lo demut haguf, veaino guf" (Yigdal)].

The Mishkan and its vessels, the nature of their construction and the sites of their placements all come to teach this truth through symbolism and by allusion, according to the science and nature of reality. [We must remember that all the classical Torah scholars of the Sepharadi world, like many of the Tannaim and Amoraim, were well versed in the natural sciences of their time and make constant allusions to their laws throughout their commentaries and books].

First they were commanded to make the Aron which was the whole purpose of the work of the Mishkan, to teach Israel that the Torah, its study and observance were the sole aim and value of Mankind, but also the secret of all their successes and achievements. Therefore, its making was commanded, even before the making of the Miskan, which would have been the logical beginning since it housed everything. However, the Mishkan symbolizes all the material activities, strivings and quarrels of Mankind, and this is not the purpose and the salvation of Mankind.

Then followed the Shulchan and the Menorah that are to teach that all the plenty and the successes, whether they be material-symbolized by the Shulchan and the Lechem Hapanim, or spiritual-symbolized by the Menorah and its light, have but one source. That source is solely the Aron-Torah and all that it entails and means.

Now comes the commandment to make the Mishkan itself, together with its coverings, staves and curtains. As these involve agricultural husbandry as well as all the various crafts, technical skills and artisans that men need and use, they symbolize the creation of wealth and its accumulation, and the power and honor that men desire and seek. Therefore the Mishkan came after the Aron, Shulchan and the Menorah, so that Israel may learn that without the wisdom and spiritual plenty that come from them, the pursuit of material things and the turning them into the purpose of life, will only lead to considering them the primary aim and essence of life. In the headlong rush after the pleasures and material things of Olam Hazeh, there will be a distancing from Hashem and thereby also from His Providence and material Blessings. So mention is made of the Parochet after the Mishkan but immediately following it, that divides the Kodosh Hakadoshim from the Chatzer. The mizbach haolah, that represents the destructive burning of the desires and lusts of men for material things and pleasures and the reshet, symbolize the same distancing from Hashem whenever there is the pursuit of materialism at the expense of Torah-the Aron and the blessings thereof- the Shulchan and the Menorah.

Furthermore, the measurements of the Mishkan teach us the various periods and stages of our lives. The 100 amot of the Chatzer's length are the maximum allotted years of adulthood while the 20 of the amudim are the years of our youth, while the 50 amot width symbolizes the 50 first years of life that are the best years, since after them a person begins to age and deteriorate. However, the vavim represent the urging, desires and the teshuka with which one should, both in youth and in old age, seek to draw close to and cleave to Hashem.

Finally, came the commandment of the pure olive oil. This oil, used to anoint Aharon as the Kohen Hagadol, symbolizes true knowledge and divine wisdom. This was to warn Israel against the false teachings of the apikorsim and untrue spiritual beliefs that contradict the Torah's truths. Aharon would have to arrange the lamps of the Menorah that burned from evening till morning. So too, he and the Kohanim would be the constant teachers of the Torah to militate against spiritual falsehood, so that the People of Israel would not learn false ideas and concepts.

We may think that all the laws concerning the making and erection of the Miskan and its vessels that our fathers had in those days, but that we now in galut no longer have, are meaningless or valueless to us. So too, we may consider the Mitzvot Hateluyot Ba'Aretz to be valueless to us in our exile. However, all the writings, laws and commandments written in the Torah, irrespective of their nature, current applicability or viability, have wisdom and a knowledge that is important for everyone till they are able to perfect their souls through correct and true concepts and ideas. This striving for spiritual perfection is not dependent on a certain time, place or conditions, but is that which we are commanded to cleave to and to pursue, so that we may be faithful to His covenant and to His way. "And there I will meet with the Children of Israel and the Mishkan shall be sanctified by My Glory.....And I will dwell among the Children of Israel and I will be their G-d" (Shmot, 29:43-45). It is instructive to compare the symbolism of the Mishkan and its vessels as seen by Abarbanel with that of S. R. Hirsch].

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