

# THE VALUE OF THE MISHKAN

*by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky*

## 1. Blessing Comes Through Things that are not Counted

The Torah states, "These are the accountings of the Mishkan of the Testimony..." The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh points out that the phraseology used by the Torah - "These are the accountings..." rather than "And these are the accountings..." indicates that only this accounting has value. The Ohr HaChaim asks- how do we understand that there is no reckoning that has value other than the accounting of the Mishkan?

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh answers that the Torah does not mean to negate other accountings, but rather to emphasize that there is uniqueness in the reckoning of the Mishkan which is not found in any other context. He explains by citing the Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia, which states, "Blessing can only come upon something that is hidden from the eye, and not upon something which is counted, measured, or weighed." The Gemara presents an application of this principle. If a farmer brings in his crop and has not yet quantified his harvest, if he prays to Hashem that blessing should come upon his crop it is considered a valid prayer. However, if he prays after the crop has been measured the prayer is done in vain.

The Mishkan was an edifice that was precisely measured and weighed at a level of exactness not to be compared. There is no other blueprint that is more specific than that of the Mishkan. Each vessel, tapestry, beam etc. was created and assembled with the utmost precision. Its accounting needed to be exact in order to bring about its functionality. Nevertheless, the Mishkan was the conduit through which all blessing flowed to the Jewish people and to the world. Yet, this seems to be contradictory to the principle that blessing cannot come upon that which has been quantified. The Ohr HaChaim explains that in fact this is what the Torah is communicating through the phraseology, "These are..." Although the Mishkan was quantified to the nth degree it has the capacity to generate blessing - which is not the case in any other similar situation. He asks why the Mishkan is the exception if this principle is the pre-requisite to generate blessing.

The Ohr HaChaim answers that although under normal circumstances this may be the case, in regard to the Mishkan there was an overriding factor. Since the Jews gave selflessly of themselves and their wealth for the building of the Mishkan, the Mishkan had the capacity to generate unlimited blessing.

We can answer the question differently and discern between the quantification of grain and the quantification of the Mishkan. When the farmer weighs and measures his grain he is quantifying the reality of his harvest. The value of a bushel of grain is determined by functionality of the bushel of grain which is its consumption value. By contrast, although the physical quantities of the Mishkan and dimension are precise, nevertheless its essence and value are of an unknown quantity. Only Hashem knows the true value of the Mishkan and its ramifications. Therefore the Mishkan, although it was quantified in every aspect of its physicality, remained "hidden from the eye" and thus was the conduit for the greatest blessing. Similarly, although the Torah itself can be quantified in its word make up and letter composition, its true value is infinite. Therefore only through the Torah do we derive the greatest blessing.

## **2. Acting in the Best Interest of Your Fellow Jew**

The Torah tells us at the beginning of the Portion of Terumah that the metals that were needed for the Mishkan were gold, silver and copper. The Midrash tells us that although gold was needed for the building of the Mishkan itself, simultaneously it is alluding to the preciousness of the Mishkan to Hashem because it was the Mishkan of Moshe. Moshe was the most special human being that ever lived.

The Torah tells us that Moshe erected the Mishkan. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the Jewish people attempted to erect the Mishkan but were not able to because the weight of its beams was beyond human capacity. It was physically impossible for humans to lift the beams of the Mishkan. The Torah tells us, "The Mishkan was raised through Moshe" and not "raised by Moshe." Meaning, Hashem said to Moshe although physically it is impossible to raise the beams, through your initiative, I will assist you to erect the Mishkan.

The Midrash tells us that Hashem inquired why Moshe was in a saddened state. He responded that he did not participate in the building of the Mishkan. Hashem said to Moshe, "Your involvement will be greater than theirs." Although Moshe did not participate in building the Mishkan he would be the one to erect it. It seems to be incomprehensible that the Jews would not want Moshe to participate in the actual development of the Mishkan.

The Midrash tells us that if the Jewish people could have erected the Mishkan without Moshe's involvement they would have forgotten about Moshe in the total process. One would think that the Jewish people would have insisted that Moshe, who was the direct link to G-d, be involved in every aspect of the Mishkan. Yet they did not involve him to any degree. Moshe was only ultimately involved in the erection of the Mishkan because the Jews were not able to raise the beams. Why did the Jewish people not involve Moshe in the building of the Mishkan? How do we understand their behavior in this matter?

The answer is that even when it involves spirituality people tend focus on themselves. Even though each person was involved with the building of the Mishkan with the best intent - L'Shem Shamaim

(For the Sake of G-d) - they still viewed themselves as individuals and not as a larger group working together. They did not have each other's interest or the interest of the Jewish people in mind. If they had the best interest of the Jewish people in mind they would have insisted that Moshe be involved. The behavior of the Jewish people indicated that although they were at an advanced spiritual level their behavior regarding the building of the Mishkan revealed their shortcomings.

Chazal tell us that the human being was created as a single unit without a counterpart like all other living species in order for him to appreciate the dictum of, "The entire world was created for me." This concept is ingrained in the human psyche. The true meaning of this is that the world in its entirety was created only as a means for man to serve Hashem. Because the concept of the world being "created for me" is so deeply ingrained in man it can express itself with self-interest even in the area of spirituality.

True Torah leadership throughout history has always expressed itself with total selfless dedication to the Klal Yisroel. It is only with this all-inclusive level can we achieve that standard of spirituality that is expected from us by Hashem.

### **3. How Can we Help the Situation in Israel?**

The Torah states, "You should serve Hashem with all of your heart." The Gemara asks, "What is the meaning of serving Hashem with all your heart?" The Gemara answers "it is tefila (prayer)." Rambam (Maimonides) and Ramban (Nachmanidies) argue regarding the obligation of prayer whether it is a Torah obligation or only Rabbinic. Rambam is of the opinion that the obligation of prayer is a Torah Commandment; however, Ramban argues that it is only Rabbinic. Rabbi Meyer Simcha of D'Vinsk zt'l comments that although Rambam and Ramban argue regarding the obligation of prayer, both agree that prayer itself is a Torah concept.

Rambam in Hilchos Taanis (The Laws of Fasting) states that when the Jewish people experience difficulties and suffering there is a Positive Commandment to call out to Hashem. This "calling out" is unrelated to the discussion concerning the obligation of prayer on a regular basis. As is stated, "When the oppressor comes to oppress you, you should call out with trumpets. Whatever anguishes you - whether it is lack of food or plague you should call out and pray to Hashem." The Rambam states that this expression is an important component of Teshuvah (Repentance) that is required during times of difficulty. Tragedies befall us because we are not fulfilling our obligations in this world and we acknowledge this when we do teshuvah in the wake of these tragedies. By doing teshuvah we proclaim that it is only because of our shortcomings that we are experiencing these difficulties.

In these tragic times, if one does not cry out and pray as part of the teshuvah process it is as if one is saying that our difficulties are merely happenstance and that coincidentally the Jewish people are experiencing difficulties as we have always experienced throughout history. The Rambam says that if one does not take to heart these events and do teshuvah by crying out to Hashem it is considered

"cruelty." In addition if one continues to dismiss these events as coincidence, this will only cause Hashem to increase the hardship and bring greater tragedies upon the Jewish people. As the verse states in the Tochacha (at the end of the Book of Vayikra -Leviticus)," If you will dismiss the tragic events which befall you as happenstance and I will come upon you with vengeance until you can no longer dismiss them."

This Wednesday (29 Adar) has been proclaimed a day of tefila (prayer) in order to beseech Hashem to protect the Jewish people in this time of trouble in Israel and around the world. The Chofetz Chaim says in his commentary Mishna Brurah on the Laws of Fasting that Hashem does not look at our "fasting and sackcloth" but rather at our broken hearts. Our daily actions and behavior speak louder than our fasting.

It is obvious and clear that the present situation in Israel is not resolvable through human means. The only way to overcome these tragic times is only with the direct intervention of Hashem. How do we ask for the help of Hashem and how do we merit this? Is it by fasting for a limited twelve-hour period? Or do we need to introspect and upgrade our level of involvement in Torah?

We pray three times a day. What is the quality of our prayer? Do we focus on the gravity of the situation of the Jewish people and our own shortcomings in an earnest effort? Or do we rush through the words while our mind is preoccupied with mundane concerns? Rambam stated that when we are in situations such as these, if we do not cry out to Hashem in teshuvah we are being "cruel."

We pride ourselves as being civilized, ethical and moral people, yet if we do not pray properly during these times we are not that but rather we are being cruel. When our brothers are dying every day there is no other way but to pray and do teshuvah wholeheartedly with our best effort. If we do not do this, then our inaction is no better than leaving a dying person to die in the street without getting him medical attention. We are in a position to make a difference. If we are able to fulfill our obligation properly between Man and G-d, then we will fulfill our obligation between Man and Man.

#### **4. In Trying Times How Do we Get Hashem's Attention?**

The Torah states," A person who brings a sacrifice for Hashem from himself..." The Sforno explains that "from himself" means that when one brings a sacrifice (Korban) to Hashem, one should predicate the sacrifice with confession and be a total submission. As the verse states in Prophets (Novie)," We will bring the oxen with our lips..." and as it is stated in Psalms (Tehillim),"The sacrifice to G-d (Elokim is a broken spirit..." The Sforno explains that Hashem not interested in "those fools" who bring their sacrifice without being in a state of humility and subordination. It is with the sense of hachnaah (submission) that makes the sacrifice effective. If one brings a sacrifice to Hashem without realizing his own unworthiness, Hashem does not respond to that Korban.

When one stands in the presence of Hashem and appreciates to what degree he is a beneficiary of Hashem's Kindness he will realize his own unworthiness. Moshe, the greatest Jew who ever lived,

when he prayed to Hashem to grant him permission to enter into the promised land, the terminology of prayer he used was, "Through Your graciousness allow me to enter the Land." Moshe understood that Hashem owed him nothing. If one experiences this level of humility and feeling of unworthiness then one's Korban (Sacrifice) will have its greatest value.

The Sforno specifically quotes this verse from Tehillim that refers to G-d as Elokim, which is an appellation that refers to the Attribute of Justice (Midas HaDin). We see from the present situation in Israel that a dichotomy exists. We see the Attribute of Mercy (Midas HaRachamim) at an unlimited level because we miracles that are taking place every day. Simultaneously, unfortunately, we also see the Midas HaDin through the many human casualties and untold injuries resulting from Arab terrorism.

Whenever the Torah refers to sacrifices they are referred to as "Korban L'Ashem (Sacrifice to Hashem)" which means that the concept of sacrifice, which is a means of atonement, is only possible as a result of the Attribute of Mercy. Within the context of the Attribute of Justice, there is no forgiveness. Thus there is no place for sacrifices. The Attribute of Justice dictates that when one sins he should be punished immediately.

Rabbeinu Yonah in Shaarei Teshuvah (The Gates of Repentance), explains that the verse from Tehillim-"The sacrifice to G-d (Elokim) is a broken spirit..." is communicating to us a profound insight in words of King David. The psalmist is telling us that although within the context of Elokim there is no place to bring a sacrifice, Midas HaDin will accept the broken spirit of the person as sacrifice to be forgiven. If a person comes before Hashem in a humble state and a broken spirit recognizing one's shortcomings then even the Attribute of Justice is in agreement that the person should be forgiven.

We are currently experiencing tragedies that we have not seen since the Second World War. My Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Yaakov Ruderman zt'l, had remembered that after WWI the value of a Jewish life was less than a flea. It was not an uncommon occurrence in Europe that if a non-Jew encountered a Jew in a secluded location that he would be killed. That is how valueless the blood of the Jew was. Currently in Israel we see unfortunately similar behavior (Hashem Yirachem), being perpetrated against our brothers -yet the nations of the world remain silent.

We need to understand that Hashem is our only true ally and our only connection with Hashem is through the "broken spirit," recognizing our spiritual deficiencies. We can only have a relationship with Hashem if we have relevance to spirituality and that comes only through teshuvah (repentance), Torah, and good deeds. Therefore the situation in Israel is meant to alert us to make the necessary changes in our lives. We should increase our Torah study and prayer; since the destruction of the Temple this is the only means available to us.

## **5. Understanding Spiritual Maintenance**

In this week's parsha we find that the letter aleph in the word Vayikra is written smaller than all of the other letters. Why is the aleph smaller than all of the other letters? The Baal HaTourim cites the

Midrash that explains that in the word Vayikra the letter aleph is small because Moshe was great, yet he was humble. Rashi says that when Hashem normally communicated with prophets of the world He used the word Vayikar (derived from the word Mikreh which means "coincidental") rather than Vayikra, which He used when He summoned Moshe. For example, when Hashem spoke to Bilaam He used the word Vayikar to indicate that the communication was equivalent to something that was coincidental that appeared to Bilaam in a dream. Contrastingly, Hashem used the word Vayikra (with the aleph) to indicate that He had a special relationship with Moshe and the communication was something that was meant to be. Moshe wished that the aleph be omitted from the word Vayikra so as not to openly reveal his relationship with Hashem. After Hashem insisted on writing the aleph, Moshe stipulated that if it will be written it should be written smaller than all of the other letters of the word.

Even if we say that Moshe was more humble than any person who ever lived, we must still say that he understood his own spiritual dimension. Moshe broke the First Tablets (Luchos Rishonim) given to him by Hashem after seeing the Jewish people engaged in idolatry. Hashem congratulated him for his actions. If in fact Moshe had no understanding of his own spiritual dimension he would not have taken the initiative to break the Luchos. One would think since Moshe's spiritual dimension had already been revealed as a result of the breaking of the Tablets, why then would Moshe insist that the aleph in Vayikra be omitted in order to conceal his specialness?

Moshe was the most humble person who ever lived because of his understanding of who Hashem was - therefore he understood who he was not. Moshe did not pride himself on his exceptional level of spiritual achievement because he understood that the only way that he was able to sustain his spirituality was only by doing the will of Hashem in the most perfect way. If one lives his life responsibly would he pride himself that he did not kill, steal, lie, or cheat? Or is it because he understands that a responsible human being does not behave in this manner. Therefore, living responsibly does not illicit pride.

If a person would understand the nature of his spirituality and that it needs to be sustained through Torah study, observance of Mitzvos, would he pride himself for observing them? Everyone understands that we need to breathe, eat, and sleep in order to survive but do we take pride in how many breaths we take a minute? - Clearly not. Therefore tending to one's spiritual well being and survival is no different. Moshe appreciated this level of understanding like no other human being.

When G-d wanted to use the aleph in Vayikra to indicate Moshe's special spiritual level, Moshe believed that he did not deserve that kind of recognition because he was only doing what was necessary for him to maintain himself. Moshe believed that what he had accomplished spiritually was no more than maintaining his physical existence. This is what is stated in the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers), "If you had learned an enormous amount of Torah do not pride yourself in it because for that you were created." Meaning, that the study of Torah is a necessity for our spiritual existence.

Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) tells us in Proverbs, "Nair Mitzvah V'Torah Ohr" - meaning that when one engages in Torah study issues become illuminated because the Torah itself is the "illuminator." Moshe had continuous clarity because of his unceasing involvement with Torah at its most advanced level. He was able to understand good and evil to such a degree that he was not even attracted to evil at all but rather detested it. As a result of this continuous involvement his physicality became fully spiritualized.

We, however, are physical beings with inclinations that need to be kept in check. How do we attain the clarity and strength to control these inclinations? It is only through the study of Torah - as it is stated in the Gemara, "I (Hashem) Created the Evil Inclination and I have created the Torah as its Antidote."

We have the obligation to be continuously engaged in Torah study, as it says, "You shall engage in Torah day and night". However, because of our non-continuous involvement we have lack of clarity. This is why Hashem wants us to study continuously

## **6. The Month of Redemption**

The Torah tells us that the Mishkan was erected on the first day of the month of Nissan. The Chazal tell us - "In Nissan our Ancestors were redeemed and in Nissan in the future we will be redeemed." Being that we are in the month of Nissan, it is possible that we will experience the ultimate redemption and the building of the Third Bais HaMikdash at any moment. As the Chazal tell us, "The Salvation of Hashem comes like a blink of an eye." We may all celebrate Pesach (Passover) in Yerushalaim this year, G-d willing.

The Shalah explains that the building of the Mishkan was to reestablish the initial intent of Creation. G-d's original intent in Creation was that His existence should dwell on this earth amongst all mankind. The entire world would have been the Mishkan; however, due to the spiritual contamination that was brought about by Adam's sin, the world was no longer qualified to function in this capacity.

If the Jewish people had not sin with the Golden Calf (Chet HaAgle) after leaving Egypt, they would have been reinstated to the level of Adam - pre-sin. Thus qualifying to be the dwelling place for Hashem's existence. However, since they did sin with the Chet HaAgle they reverted back to their impure state and thus were no longer able to be the domicile for Hashem's Presence on earth. Therefore Hashem instructed the Jews to build the Mishkan in order to have that dwelling place.

We see that after the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt, Hashem was prepared to reinstate His relationship with the World in the manner He had originally intended. After the 210 year enslavement of the Jewish people, the miracles in Egypt, and the splitting of the Sea, the world had spiritually evolved to the point where it was going to revert back to its pure state before the sin of Adam. At the beginning of Nissan the world was ready to become Hashem's dwelling place once again. The rays of redemption began to come over the horizon from the first of Nissan. In fact

Hashem informed Moshe about the Korban Pesach (Pascal Lamb) on the first of Nissan, which signified the rejection of idolatry by the Jewish people. This evolution towards spirituality was meant to culminate at Sinai with the receiving of the Torah. However, this did not happen because the Jewish people failed with the Chet HaAgle.

What is the ultimate Redemption (Geula) - the ultimate Freedom? Chazal tells us in Perkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers), "Who is the free man? The one who engages in Torah study." The person who studies Torah and lives life according to its principles is truly the free person because through its study he sheds the shackles of physicality and gains true perspective. Freedom is directly related to spirituality. When we say that we will become free in the month of Nissan it means that we will no longer be bound and limited because of our physicality. Every Jew will recognize his own spirituality because Hashem will reveal Himself in this existence (to a degree). Hashem began revealing His Presence in existence through the Ten Plagues and the Splitting of the Sea, and culminating with the ultimate revelation, which took place at Sinai.

The Mishkan was erected on the first of Nissan because Nissan itself is the month of redemption, freedom and spirituality. Nissan is the month when we reconnect with Hashem. The Ramchal and the Maharal explain that when we recount events, which are mentioned in the Torah such as Passover, the Sinai experience, etc., we are not only commemorating these events as something of the past but rather we are re-experiencing and re-living these events. The spiritual influences and forces, which existed during the month of Nissan when the Jews left Egypt, reoccur every Nissan. Therefore since we are currently experiencing the spiritual influences of redemption we should take advantage of these influences and develop them further through tefila, Torah study, and mitzvos. By committing ourselves to Torah study we can gain the clarity and understanding to bring about the ultimate redemption and merit the coming of Moshiach.

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Rabbi Kalatsky is the founder of the [Yad Avraham Institute](#), a New York-based learning center whose mission is to disseminate Torah to Jews of all backgrounds and walks of life.