

G'D'S CONTEXT IN THIS EXISTENCE

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

The Torah tells us that soon after the Jewish people had received the Torah at Sinai G'd commanded them to build the Mishkan and the Holy Ark saying, "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me - so that I may dwell among them...They shall make an Ark..." Ramban explains, "When G'd had spoken to the Jewish people at Sinai face to face regarding the fundamentals of the mitzvos of the Torah, they had accepted them unequivocally by declaring 'Naaseh V'nishma - we will do and we will listen.' G'd entered into a covenant with the Jewish people. They became His people and He became their G'd. He had said to them, 'And it will come to pass that if you continually hearken to My commandments that I have given you today you shall be My kingly, holy, and priestly people.' Now that the Jewish people have been sanctified by receiving the Torah it is appropriate that they build the Mishkan so that the Divine Presence should dwell in their midst...The primary vessel of the Mishkan was the Ark, which was the location of the Divine Presence. This is the reason that the first vessel mentioned to be built is the Ark."

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos states based on a verse in Psalms, "G'd loves the Gates of Tzion more than the sanctuaries of Yaakov." The Gemara explains this to mean that G'd loves the location in which there is the study of definitive Halacha (Jewish Law) more than any other location. The Gemara continues, "After the destruction of the Temple the location of G'd's Presence in this existence is within the four cubits (dahled amos) of definitive law (Halacha)." Just as the Ark, that was the repository for the Tablets and the Torah, was the location of the Divine Presence, so too the location in which the Torah is elucidated is the location of the Divine Presence.

The Torah states regarding the building of the Holy Ark, which was the repository that contained the Torah, "...You shall cover it with pure gold, from within and from without you shall cover it..." The Gemara in Tractate Yomah explains that by specifying that the Ark must be covered with gold on the inside as well as on the outside, the Torah is teaching us that, "A Torah Sage whose inside is not the same as his outside is not a Torah Sage." Meaning, in order for one to be classified as a Torah Sage, his inner purity of commitment should be consistent with his outer demeanor and persona. A Torah Sage is not merely a repository of information, but rather, he must be genuine and sincere in his service of G'd in every aspect of his life. This classification applies only to the one who studies Torah for the sake of its actualization and not merely for the sake of its intellectualism. This is the symbolism of the Holy Ark being inlaid with gold on the inside and the outside.

The Torah Sage, being the equivalent of the Holy Ark, becomes the location of G'd's Presence in

existence. Despite the fact that the Jewish people no longer have the Temple because they are in exile, G'd's Presence continues to dwell in their midst through the Torah Sage.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that although one may be in a contaminated state, he is still permitted to engage in Torah study because the Torah itself is not subject to contamination. G'd dwells in the midst of the Jewish people although they are in exile and are in a spiritually contaminated state because the Jew is able to maintain his relationship with G'd through the study of Torah and through the Torah Sage who is the equivalent of the Holy Ark.

2. The Innate Spiritual Profile of the Jewish

The Torah enumerates the materials that were needed for the building of the Mishkan, "You shall take from them: gold, silver, copper..." The Midrash explains, "G'd showed Moshe three tithings (terumos). One corresponded to the Mishkan, the second to the first Temple and the third to the Second Temple. As it states, 'gold, silver, and copper...' Gold corresponded to the Mishkan built by Moshe because it was precious and beloved to G'd as gold. Silver corresponds to the first Temple. As the verse tells us that the level of wealth that the Jewish people possessed at the time of King Solomon was so great that silver no longer was valued. Since the word 'nechoshes (copper)' alludes to something that is lacking and deficient (nechushta), copper corresponds to the second Temple because there were five things that were lacking in it: the Holy Ark, the kapores, the cherubs, the heavenly fire, and the Divine Presence."

Reb Chaim of Volozhin in his work Ruach Chaim explains that a human being is comprised of three parts: the life source (Nefesh), spirit (Ruach), and soul (Neshama). All physical movement emanates from the Nefesh that is contained within the physical being. This life source is shared by all living creatures alike. The Ruach (spirit - which means wind) is the spirit that gives man the power of speech (ability of verbal expression). The Neshama is the spiritual essence that man possesses which is the basis for him to be classified as an intellectual being. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin explains that just as each individual is comprised of these three elements, the Jewish people also possess these three components.

Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, the founding Patriarchs of the Jewish people, respectively represent each one of these components. Avraham, our Patriarch corresponds to the Nefesh (life source) of the Jewish people as we see his most prominent characteristic was chesed. This was expressed through his physical movement that emanates from the Nefesh. Avraham, as the Patriarch, perfected the Nefesh of the Jewish people through his selfless acts of loving kindness. Yitzchak, our Patriarch is referred to by Chazal as the "unblemished offering." Just as the Kohen needed to meet certain criteria regarding his intent when he brought the sacrifice (so that the offering should not be invalidated), so too was Yitzchak pure in thought when he was brought as an offering. Therefore, he corresponds to the soul of the Jewish people. Yaakov, our Patriarch who is personified as the one who studied Torah. As the Torah refers to him, "The perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah)."

Thus, he perfected the Ruach (power of speech) of the Jewish people because when one engages in Torah study it should be articulated.

If one would want to classify the Mishkan and the two Temples according to the understanding of Reb Chaim of Volozhin, (that there is a soul, spirit, and life source) one would say that the Mishkan of Moshe corresponded to the Neshama (soul) of the Jewish people. Moshe, being the most special Jew who ever lived had infused into the Mishkan an intent of the most advanced level. As a result of his involvement in the Mishkan, it was regarded by G'd as precious and beloved as gold. The purpose of the Mishkan of Moshe was to perfect the soul of the Jewish people because of its innate spiritual capacity.

The Temple built by King Solomon addressed and perfected the Ruach (spirit) of the Jewish people. The Gemara in Tractate Nidarim tells us that the first Temple was destroyed because the Jewish people did not recite the blessing of the Torah before they engaged in their Torah study. Thus, there was a deficiency in the spirituality of their Torah. They did not value the Torah as the wisdom of G'd; rather, it was studied as an intellectual pursuit. Since the Temple was intended to perfect the Ruach of the Jewish people and they failed in this area, it no longer had any relevance to them and was thus destroyed.

The Second Temple, which was the most deficient in spirituality, corresponds to the life source (Nefesh) of the Jewish people. It was thus intended to perfect the life source (Nefesh) of the Jewish people through the mitzvos of loving kindness specific to man and his fellow. The Second Temple was destroyed because the Jewish people failed in this area. The Gemara tells us that it was because of baseless hatred (sinaas chinam) among the Jewish people that caused the destruction of the second Temple. Baseless hatred towards one's fellow is the antithesis of chesed (kindness) which was addressed and perfected by Avraham's selfless kindness.

The Mishkan, first Temple, and second Temple, were each given to the Jewish people in order to perfect an aspect of their spirituality. Although these edifices were taken from them because they had failed, the Jew is still able on a personal level to perfect the three components of his spirituality. By engaging in Torah study, one will perfect his spirit (Ruach). Through his prayer one will perfect his soul (Neshama) by having pure thought when engaging with G'd. One will perfect his Nefesh through performing acts of loving kindness. This is alluded to by the Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers, which states, "The world stands on three principles, Torah, Avodah (service), and acts of loving kindness."

3. The Innateness of the Altar in All of Its Aspects

The Torah states regarding the building of the Altar of the Burnt Offering (Mizbach HaOlah), "You shall make the Altar of acacia wood, five cubits in length and five cubits in width...three cubits its height." The Midrash states, "G'd said to Moshe, 'Instruct the Jewish people to build an altar for burnt offerings so that it should atone for the sins of My children. I had made an agreement with Avraham,

their forefather, that if his children should sin, they will be atoned through the offerings...What is the significance of the word 'Mizbeiach (Altar)'? The word 'Mizbeiach' is an acronym. The first letter of the word is the letter 'mem' which represents 'mechila (forgiveness).' The second letter is 'zayin' which represents 'zechus (merit).' The next letter is 'beis,' which represents 'beracha (blessing). The last letter is 'ches' which represents 'chaim (life).' In the merit of the burnt offering 'olah' you would be elevated. You will be deserving of life."

The Midrash continues, "The Altar was made of acacia wood (atzei shitim) in the merit of Avraham, our Patriarch. He had hosted the angels and told them to rest under the shade of his tree (eitz). What is the significance of 'shitim'? When the Jewish people had engaged in their 'shtus (foolishness)' through the Golden Calf, G'd had said, 'Let the vessel that is made of acacia wood (shitim) come to atone for their foolishness.' The merit of Avraham (who had hosted the angels under his tree) could atone for the sin of the Jewish people. There is another concept that is being alluded with the word 'shitim.' It is an acronym: 'shin', the first letter represents 'shalom (peace)'; 'tes' the second letter represents 'tova (goodness)'; 'yud' which represents 'yeshua (salvation)'; 'mem' which represents 'mechila (forgiveness). "

The forgiveness that comes through the sacrifice that is brought upon the Altar is more than the forgiveness that is given from one mortal to another, it is a rehabilitation of one's spirituality that had become deficient as a result of sin. For example, if a child was forewarned by his father not to drink a certain toxic solution, and he did not heed his father's warning, although the child apologizes profusely begging for forgiveness, regardless of his father's forgiveness, the child will die.

In contrast, the forgiveness of G'd brings about a spiritual healing that repairs the damage that was wrought upon the individual through his transgression. In order to achieve this result, the Jewish people needed to have the Altar made of Acacia wood, to draw upon the merit of Avraham, our Patriarch because G'd had promised him that the Jewish people would be the beneficiaries until the end of time of His Commitment.

Regardless of the worthiness of the Jewish people themselves, they can rely upon the merits of the Patriarchs in order to be atoned. By drawing upon these merits, the Jew may be cleansed of sin and advance his spiritually, despite the lack of his own worthiness.

4. The Mishkan, A Replication of Sinai

The Torah states regarding the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel and let them take for Me a portion (terumah), from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take My portion.'" The only materials that were qualified to be given for the building of the Mishkan were those that were given selflessly and out of the generosity of one's heart. If one felt compelled to give, it would not be considered valid for the Mishkan. The verse states, "...take for Me a portion..." and concludes with "you shall take My portion." Seemingly, the second reference to taking G'd's portion from the Jewish people is superfluous. Ohr HaChaim

HaKadosh explains that the Torah is revealing to us that it was only the portion that was given selflessly/wholeheartedly that was classified as "My portion."

Ramban explains that the Mishkan was a replication of Sinai. The intensity of G'd's Presence in the Holy of Holies in the Mishkan was the equivalent to that of the Sinai event. Just as G'd communicated to Moshe and the Jewish people at Sinai, He spoke to Moshe from between the Cherubs on the Holy Ark that was located in the Holy of Holies. Ramban presents many colorations, based on verses of how the Divine Presence in the Mishkan was the equivalent of Sinai.

The purpose of the Mishkan was to create a setting for G'd's Presence to dwell in the midst of the Jewish people. As the verse states, "Make for Me a Sanctuary so that I can dwell in your midst." One would think that such an important and crucial task of building the Mishkan would be incumbent upon every Jew. As we find regarding the giving of the Machtzis Ha'Shekel (the half silver coin that was compulsory for every Jewish male above the age of twenty to give for the sake of purchasing communal offerings). However, the Torah tells us that the materials that were presented for the building of the Mishkan were not given as a tax or obligation but only out of the generosity of the heart. In fact, this was the only circumstance under which they were acceptable. Why was this so?

When the Jewish people accepted the Torah at Sinai they unequivocally declared "Naaseh V'nishma - we will do and we will listen." The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that when G'd heard this declaration He exclaimed, "Who revealed this secret to My children?" They had spoken in the same manner as angels conduct themselves. The angels do the Will of G'd without first hearing His Command. Thus, the Jewish people at Sinai were the equivalent of angels because they accepted the Torah without knowing the extent of its obligation. They selflessly dedicated themselves to doing G'd's Will. However, as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jewish people forfeited their special relationship with G'd that they had established at Sinai. In order to reinstate that relationship, G'd instructed them to build the Mishkan. Just as the Jewish people at Sinai dedicated themselves to G'd selflessly, as angels do, so too did their giving of the materials towards the building of the Mishkan needed to have a semblance of that selflessness.

The only way the Jewish people could be reinstated to the level of "Naaseh v'nishma", is to once again assume the posture of the angel by giving to the Mishkan in a selfless manner. Because the Mishkan was built with materials that were given out of the generosity of the heart, it was able to function at the same level as Sinai. The Divine Presence dwelt in it to no less of a degree than It did at the time of the giving of the Torah.

Rambam, based on the Gemara in Tractate Moed Katan, writes, "When one chooses a rebbe (mentor/teacher) he should have a semblance of an angels." What characteristic of the angel should the rebbe reflect? An angel is epitomized through "Naaseh v'nishma." The angel selflessly executes the will of G'd without any hesitation or conflict. It is only through the individual who possesses this level of dedication that G'd's Torah is communicated. Therefore, one should choose a rebbe who is

selflessly dedicated to G'd because it is only through a teacher with this degree of dedication that the Torah is properly transmitted.

5. Through Justice the King Shall Establish the Land (from Mishpatim)

The Torah states, "And these are the ordinances (Mishpatim) that you shall place before them..." The Midrash explains, "King Solomon writes in Proverbs, 'A King through ordinances (justice) establishes the land. But one who is as terumah (tithes) destroys the land.' The Torah sage who is proficient in every aspect of the Torah is the equivalent of the king. The justice that he brings about by engaging in Torah and adjudicating disputes establishes existence. However, if this individual acts in a manner that is similar to terumah (tithes), which is stored in the corner of the house, he is the one who destroys existence. This is the individual who despite his qualifications as a judge, chooses to remain uninvolved in the needs of his fellow and community. He is the one who says, 'Why should I be bothered or burdened by my community? Why should I be involved in resolving their legal disputes? Why should I heed their outcries? It is better for me to withdraw from my communal responsibility and only immerse myself in Torah study.' This person is the one who destroys the world by not serving his community as a Torah Sage. Just as terumah remains in the corner of the house undisturbed until it is given and consumed by the Kohen, so too does this individual recluse himself from the world." How does the Torah sage who chooses to withdraw from communal responsibility to only engage in Torah destroy the world?

The Midrash states, "If there is justice below, there is no need for justice from above. However if there is no justice below, then there will be justice from above." Meaning, if justice is served by the earthly court, then there is no need for Divine Justice. However, if man does not implement proper justice, then G'd will mete out His Justice, which is catastrophic and devastating. Divine Justice does not differentiate between the righteous and the evil. There is no individual who is perfect enough to withstand Divine Justice. If the earthly court implements justice as it is prescribed by the Torah, they are the guarantors of existence because G'd's Attribute of Mercy will be in place. This will allow existence to continue. However, if the qualified judge, who is the Torah sage chooses to withdraw from that responsibility, he contributes to the destruction of existence. His in action is the cause of Divine Justice.

The Torah states, "...Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood by Moshe from morning until evening." Despite his exalted level of spirituality and Torah knowledge, Moshe dedicated himself totally to the rendering of justice for the Jewish people. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that although the verse states, "from morning until evening" it does not actually mean that Moshe had spent the entire day adjudicating disputes between individuals. Rather, G'd values the rendering of a truthful judgment as if the individual giving the ruling was engaged in Torah study the entire day. If in fact the Torah sage was not engaged in Torah study while he had adjudicated the case, why does G'd value his time spent as the implementer of justice as one who had engaged in Torah study the entire day?

The Prophet Jeremiah states, "If not for My covenant, which is in effect day and night, the statutes of heaven and earth would not be put in place." The Gemara in Tractate Nidarim explains that "the Covenant" is referring to the study of Torah, which must be in effect continuously in order to maintain existence. G'd wills that existence should continue only the merit of continuous Torah study. The Torah sage who offers his time to render true justice, which averts Divine Justice, is in essence contributing to the continuance of existence. His contribution is the equivalent of continuous Torah study which also allows existence to continue from moment to moment. His rendering of justice has no less value then engaging in Torah study. Text Copyright © 2012 by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).

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