

FROM ENGAGEMENT TO MARRIAGE

by Shlomo Katz

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Vayakhel - Pekudei

The commentators note that there are many differences between G-d's commands regarding the construction of the mishkan (as described in Parashat Terumah) and the way the construction was actually carried out (as described in this week's combined parashot, Vayakhel and Pekudei). Most notable among these differences is the fact that despite Hashem's original command that the utensils of the mishkan - such as the aron (Ark), shulchan (Table), and menorah - be built before the mishkan itself, Bnei Yisrael did the opposite. Commentators also note that despite the implication found in Parashat Terumah that Moshe himself was to build the mishkan, in Parashat Ki Tisah we read, "Behold, I [G-d] have called upon Betzalel [to build the mishkan]." Why did all of these changes occur?

R' Yehoshua Heller z"l (mid-19th century rabbi of Telz and Vilna) writes that the changes that occurred in the construction of the mishkan reflect a change that occurred in Bnei Yisrael themselves between the time that the building of the mishkan was commanded and the time that the construction took place. This change was the making of the golden calf and the resulting decline in Bnei Yisrael's spiritual level. R' Heller explains as follows:

There are two different levels in the service of Hashem, one of which is analogous to the period of a couple's engagement, and the other, to their marriage. The period of engagement is a time when love between the couple is first developing. During this period, the future bride and groom perform actions whose purpose is to further the growth of their love for each other. The period of marriage is different, for while the couple's love continues to grow, the husband and wife are already united by their earlier love for each other, and they now serve each other because of that love.

So it is in the service of Hashem. On a "beginner's" level, a person does mitzvot in order to increase his love for G-d, while at a more advanced level, a person serves Hashem because he already loves Him.

When Bnei Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, they achieved the highest level of service of Hashem, corresponding to the higher of the two levels described above. This is known as "The level of Adam before his sin," and is the level we will again attain in the days of mashiach. Had Bnei Yisrael not sinned, but rather remained on this level, Moshe would have entered Eretz Yisrael with them and he would have built the first - and only - Bet Hamikdash, one which would never have been destroyed.

Unfortunately, Bnei Yisrael did sin, and they immediately fell to a lower level of service of G-d. They now had to work their way back up the ladder of service, always hoping to reach, but never quite reaching, the level of Adam before his sin. They had to experience again the engagement period, to be "married" again with the future arrival of mashiach. We continue this service, and its tools are the performance of mitzvot, the gifts that we - the bride - send to Hashem - the groom - during our engagement period.

The mitzvah to build the mishkan was originally commanded before the sin of the golden calf, and Moshe was to build it, for he could invest it with the "spiritual power" to stand forever, just as Bnei

Yisrael were to remain forever on the lofty level that they had achieved. When Bnei Yisrael sinned, however, the fate of the mishkan (and later the Bet Hamikdash) was sealed for eventual destruction. Now Moshe could not build it, and he was commanded to appoint Betzalel as overseer of the mishkan's construction.

The order of the mishkan's construction changed as well. The utensils inside the mishkan - the aron, the menorah, and all the others - represent man's innermost desire to serve Hashem, whereas the outer covering (the "ohel" or "tent") represents the outer distractions which prevent man's innermost feelings from showing. Before the sin of the golden calf, Hashem commanded that the mishkan's internal utensils be built first, for on Bnei Yisrael's lofty level, their innermost feelings of love for G-d shone through brightly. After Bnei Yisrael sinned, however, G-d altered the plans, for just as Bnei Yisrael now had to toil to peel away the distractions which separated them from their loved One - Hashem - so Bnei Yisrael had to be separated from the construction of the internal utensils of the mishkan by the walls and roof of the ohel mo'ed.

(Ohel Yehoshua: D'rush 1)

"The nation was held back from bringing [donations]." (36:6)

True, Moshe commanded them not to bring more donations, says R' Aharon Lewin z"l hy"d (the "Reisha Rav"), but what "held them back"?

He answers: The sage Hillel said, "My legs take me where I want to go" - as if on their own. Similarly, when a person is in control of his inclinations, that which he is commanded not to do becomes impossible to do. Moshe's command held Bnei Yisrael back.

(Hadrash Ve'haiyun No. 296)

Pesach

Hashem told Avraham that Bnei Yisrael would be enslaved in a foreign land for 400 years, but the exile in Egypt lasted only 210 years (and the enslavement, even less). One popular explanation for how Hashem "justified" taking Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt after fewer than 400 years is that Bnei Yisrael were worked harder. But harder than what? asks R' Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer (the Ketav Sofer). There is no record that Hashem ever specified how hard the Jews would work during their enslavement.

He answers: Hashem never told Avraham in what country the enslavement of his descendants

would occur. The mere fact that the enslavement occurred in Egypt made it more difficult for Bnei Yisrael than it would have been had it had occurred elsewhere. After all that Yosef had done for Egypt, the Egyptians' turning against the Jews was more than Bnei Yisrael could bear.

(Ketav Sofer, Parashat Bo)

We say in the Haggadah:

"Even if we all were sages, even if we all were understanding . . .
it still would be incumbent upon us to retell the story of the Exodus."

Rav Azaryah Berzon shlita explains this in light of the gemara (Menachot 99b) which relates that a man named Ben Damah asked his uncle, Rabbi Yishmael, "Since I have learned the entire Torah, may I study Greek wisdom?"

Rabbi Yishmael responded, "One is commanded to speak Torah day and night (Yehoshua 1:8). Find a time which is neither day nor night and study Greek wisdom." What was the logic behind the question and what was the answer?

Ben Damah thought that the purpose of Torah study is to know the Torah. Rabbi Yishmael responded that that is only one aspect. There is another mitzvah, which is to occupy oneself with Torah.

Similarly, the Haggadah is teaching us that the purpose of retelling the story of the Exodus is not (only) to know the story. Rather, telling the story is an end and a mitzvah in and of itself.

(Printed in Hadarom, No. 53, Nissan 5754)

During the plague of locust, Pharaoh hurried to call Moshe and Aharon, and to repent. Then Pharaoh changed his mind. What happened?

Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin z"l explains that each of the previous plagues had lasted seven days. Therefore, Pharaoh thought that if he "repented" quickly, he could save his crops. However, after the locust departed, Pharaoh learned how much damage actually had been done, and he decided that there was nothing to gain from repentance.

R' Avraham Abulafia z"l
born 1240 - died after 1291

In his own day, R' Avraham was considered by many to be a false messiah. Five hundred years later,

however, the widely accepted posek/halachic authority, R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai ("Chida") would write:

You should know that Rashba in his responsa, No. 548, and Rav Yashar [i.e., R' Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo] denigrated him [i.e., R' Avraham] like one of the lowliest people. However, I will tell you the truth that I saw a great rabbi, from the masters of kabbalah whose name is great amongst the Jews and whose word no one can doubt, who drew [R' Avraham's works] close.

Later writers stated that the "great Rabbi" referred to was R' Moshe Cordevero. R' Chaim Vital also quotes R' Avraham extensively.

At age 20, R' Avraham set out in search of the ten lost tribes, but he was turned back by the Crusaders when he reached Akko (Acre). On his return trip to Spain, he stopped in Italy, where he studied Rambam's Moreh Nevuchim/Guide to the Perplexed. Dissatisfied with this branch of learning, he turned to kabbalah. Later, he wrote a kabbalistic commentary to Moreh Nevuchim called Moreh Ha'moreh.

After settling in Spain, he devoted himself to studying the ancient work Sefer Yetzirah, with the commentary, in particular, of R' Elazar of Worms. R' Avraham also began teaching his own students, most notable among them, R' Yosef Gikatilla.

After 1280, R' Avraham settled in Messina, Sicily, where he began preaching of the imminent coming of mashiach. The confused citizens of Messina turned to Rashba, the generation's foremost Torah authority, for advice, and he warned the community not to become involved with a false messianic movement.

Next, R' Avraham moved to Greece, where he composed several works in his own defense. He also composed additional kabbalistic works, leaving behind 48 books in total. (Sources: The Artscroll Rishonim, p. 94; She'eilot U'teshuvot Ha'Rashba Vol. I No.548; Shem Ha'gedolim, Ma'arechet Sefarim, Erech "Chayei Olam"; Ohr Hachaim No. 249)

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