

THE MEANING OF THE MISHKAN

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Terumah

The Meaning of the Mishkan

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Today's Learning:
Shekalim 8:4-5
O.C. 520:1-521:2
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Pesachim 46
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Kilayim 13

Beginning with this week's parashah, most of the remainder of Sefer Shmot is devoted to the construction of the mishkan / Tabernacle (the precursor to the Bet Hamikdash). Following this, in Sefer Vayikra, we read of the korbanot / sacrifices which were to be brought in the mishkan.

R' Moshe Isserles z"l ("Rema"; 1525-1572) authored a lengthy work containing philosophical and ethical lessons that are derived from the structure of the Bet Hamikdash and the laws of the korbanot. In the introduction to that work, he wrote (in part) as follows:

The Midrash Tanchuma states: "The Torah is greater than all of the sacrifices, as it is written (Vayikra 7:37), 'This is the Torah of the olah / burnt offering, the minchah / the meal offering, the chatat / guilt offering etc.' One who studies the Torah, i.e., the laws, of the olah is deemed to have brought an olah; one who studies the Torah of the minchah is deemed to have brought a minchah; and so on." Similarly, Rema writes, the early commentaries state that if one studies the structure of the mishkan and its utensils, he fulfills a great mitzvah. How much more so is this true if we merit to understand the inner meaning of even one of the things to which the mishkan or its utensils alludes!

In reality, there are two benefits from studying the inner meaning of the mishkan, the Bet Hamikdash, the utensils and the sacrifices, Rema writes. One is that this study will cause us to mourn for the Temple, for we will understand what we are missing. The second benefit is that we will be able to "bring sacrifices" in our minds when we sin; this is relevant to us all, as it is written (Kohelet 7:20), "There is no man in the world who is a tzaddik who does only good and does not sin." (Torat Olah)

"They shall make for Me a tabernacle, and I shall dwell amongst them." (25:8)

Rabbi Asher Weiss shlita writes: According to RambaM z"l, this verse not only was a commandment to build the Tabernacle in the desert, it also is the source of the mitzvah to build the Bet Hamikdash. In RambaM's words, "He commanded us to build a house of avodah / service . . ." RambaM writes further that this mitzvah includes the commandment to build all of the utensils of the Temple, i.e., the menorah, the shulchan, the altar, etc.

RambaN z"l disagrees with RambaM. He writes: The utensils are not part of the mitzvah of the Temple, but rather are a separate mitzvah. Therefore, if we made one without the other [i.e., the Bet Hamikdash without the utensils, or vice-versa], we would at least have performed one mitzvah.

R' Weiss observes: RambaM's and RambaN's respective positions reflect their positions on another question--what is the purpose of the Bet Hamikdash? As noted above, RambaM considers the Bet Hamikdash to be a place of avodah. Naturally, therefore, making the utensils necessary for the avodah is part and parcel of the mitzvah of building the Temple.

According to RambaN, however, the purpose of the Tabernacle and later the Bet Hamikdash was to recreate the revelation that occurred at Sinai. The service that took place in those structures was not the essence of the structures' existence. Therefore, making the utensils cannot be part of the same mitzvah.

R' Weiss writes further: It might be argued that, according to RambaM, who considers making the utensils to be part and parcel of the mitzvah of building the Temple, one completely fails to fulfill the mitzvah if any of the utensils is missing. However, this is not necessarily so, for there are other instances in which a mitzvah is fulfilled even though some of the details of the mitzvah are lacking.

For example, although, in the opinion of most authorities, we do not know how to make techelet for our tzitzit, we still are considered to have fulfilled the mitzvah of tzitzit by wearing white strings.

(Minchat Asher)

"You shall make the planks of the mishkan / Tabernacle of acacia wood, standing erect." (26:15)

The midrash comments: Take from those acacia trees which were already standing for this purpose. Avraham had planted these trees in Be'er Sheva. When Yaakov went to Egypt, he transplanted the trees there. Then, before he died, he told his sons that Hashem would one day command that they build a mishkan, and they should use these trees.

Were there no suitable trees in Egypt? Why did the Patriarchs go to such trouble?

R' Yaakov Kaminetsky z"l (died 1986) explains that the Patriarchs acted thus in order to raise the spirits of their descendants who would be enslaved in Egypt. It was not enough to promise the Jews that they would be redeemed; the groves of acacia trees that Yaakov planted in Egypt were a tangible reminder to the enslaved Jews that their eventual salvation was a reality.

Similarly, R' Kamenetsky writes, this is one reason that the authors of the siddur included the order of the korbanot / sacrifices in the daily prayers. The more we are familiar with what took place in the Bet Hamikdash, the more real the eventual rebuilding of the Bet Hamikdash will seem to us.

(Emet Le'Yaakov)

"Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah"

("The Foundation and Root of Divine Service")

This year, we are presenting excerpts from the work Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah by R' Alexander Ziskind z"l (died 1794). The primary theme of this work is improving one's concentration in prayer. In Sha'ar Ha'ashmoret, Chapter 4, the author continues to discuss the blessings recited upon awakening. He writes:

At the blessing of "Who gives sight to the blind," one should open his eyes upon reciting the final phrase. (Although he recites all of the blessings with his eyes closed [presumably to enhance concentration], for this blessing he should open his eyes.) One should have in mind when he does this that he is demonstrating G-d's greatness in that He gave man the ability to open and close his eyes at will. This wonder is, of course, in addition to the wonder of the eyes themselves-eyes of flesh that shine with such a bright light [so- to-speak]. Therefore, when one concludes this blessing he should think to himself with great joy, "The wonders of G-d! The wonders of G-d!"

Upon reciting the blessings of "Who clothes the naked" and "Who releases the bound," one should have in mind the plain meaning set forth in the Gemara and Shulchan Aruch. [Specifically, the former blessing acknowledges G-d's gift of clothing, and the latter blessing, the fact that G-d gave man the ability to sit up and get out of bed.] At the same time [that one is thinking of this simple meaning], one should recognize that the Men of the Great Assembly established all of the prayers and blessings based on great and wondrous secrets and tikkunim (literally "repairs") in the upper worlds. One who is familiar with these secrets should have in mind when he recites the blessing of "Who straightens the bent"--besides the literal meaning-- also that the Shechinah will soon in our days "stand tall."

In the blessing of "Who spreads the earth out upon the waters," one should think several times of G-d's wonders demonstrated in the fact that the land of the earth floats on the depths. [In terms we are familiar with, the plates of the continents rest on top of layers that are liquid.] One should feel extreme joy at this recognition, for the most important part of serving G-d is joy.

R' Shlomo Ephraim of Lunschitz z"l

R' Shlomo Ephraim was born in Lunschitz (possibly Leczica), Poland in the mid-1500's. His father's name was Aharon, and his primary teacher was R' Shlomo Luria (the "Maharshal"). (Our subject was actually named Ephraim at birth. The name Shlomo was added during an illness in 1601.)

R' Ephraim's first position was as a rosh yeshiva in Lvov (Lemberg). After 1604, he headed a yeshiva in Prague and sat on the rabbinical court of that city with R' Yeshayah Horowitz (the "Shelah Ha'kadosh"). Among R' Ephraim's prominent students were R' Yom Tov Lipman Heller, author of the Mishnah commentary Tosfot Yom Tov, and R' Shabtai Horowitz, son of the Shelah.

Despite heading a yeshiva, R' Ephraim's primary legacy is as a darshan / preacher. Besides delivering sermons in Lvov and Prague, R' Ephraim was a regular preacher at the fairs in Lublin and at meetings of the Va'ad Arbah Aratzot / the Council of the Four Lands, the semi- autonomous governing body of Polish Jewry. Among R' Ephraim's works, which are still popular today, are the Torah commentary Kli Yakar and the homiletic compositions Ir Gibborim, Olelot Ephraim, Amudai Shaish, Siftei Da'at, and Orach Le'chaim. He also composed selichot / penitential prayers to be recited on the second day of Adar, the anniversary of a pogrom which occurred in Prague on that day in 1611. (R' Ephraim records that the work Olelot Ephraim was written when he lived in Jaroslaw and had no library. All of the numerous citations and quotations to the Talmud, midrashim, and commentaries that are in that work were written down from memory.)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics

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