

# OF CLOUDS AND FIRES

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Pekudei

## Of Clouds and Fires

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*Sponsored by Elaine and Jerry Taragin in memory of Asriel Taragin a"h*

Howard Benn on the yahrzeit of his mother Fay Fisher Benn (Fayga Bat Alter Yitzchok Dov a"h)

Our parashah describes the final stages of the construction of the Mishkan, and concludes (40:38): "For the cloud of Hashem would be upon the Mishkan by day, and fire would be on it at night, before the eyes of all of the House of Yisrael throughout their journeys." The Midrash Ha'gadol relates: When Bnei Yisrael saw Hashem's cloud resting over the Mishkan, they rejoiced and said, "Now Hashem is pleased with us." But, when night fell, and a pillar of fire descended and surrounded the Mishkan, they began to cry: "We did all of this for nothing! All that we made will be burned in no time." Early in the morning, when they saw the cloud once again surrounding the Mishkan, they immediately became exceedingly joyous, and they said, "This is a declaration before all the nations of the world, for if they wanted to do this, they would not be able to." Why did G-d do all of this? Because of His great love for Yisrael. Similarly, it is written (Shir Ha'shirim 2:3), "In His shade I delighted, and there I sat, and His fruit was sweet to my palate."

The midrash continues: Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani says: Why, regarding every aspect of the construction, does the Torah state, "As Hashem had commanded Moshe"? This may be compared to a king who had an agent build him a palace. The agent arose and built a large and ornate palace, and he engraved the king's name throughout the palace. When he finished it, the king entered and saw it, and it was very pleasing to him. He said, "The agent did all this for my honor! Why am I inside and he is outside?" Similarly, when Moshe completed the work of the Mishkan, regarding each section of which it says, "As Hashem commanded," Hashem appeared and rested His Shechinah in it, and it was pleasing to Him, much as it is written (Malachi 3:4), "Then the offering of Yehuda and Yerushalayim will be pleasing to Hashem." He said, "The son of Amram [i.e., Moshe] did all of this for



My honor, yet he stands outside? It is fitting that he should enter and bask in the shade of My Shechinah." Therefore, next week's parashah begins (Vaykira 1:1), "He called to Moshe."

The midrash concludes: Until the Mishkan was built, the world was a place of enmity, hatred, competition, incitement and disputes. After the Mishkan was built and the Shechinah rested in it, love, brotherhood, friendship, and justice were given to the world. May the Merciful One bless us with peace and protect us, as it is written (Yeshayah 31:5), "Like flying birds [appear from nowhere], so will Hashem, Master of Legions, protect Yerushalayim, protecting and rescuing, passing over and delivering." And it is written (Zechariah 9:15), "Hashem, Master of Legions, will protect them," so may He protect His nation with His peace.

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"Eleh pekudei / These are the reckonings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Edut / Testimony . . ." (38:21)

The Midrash notes that the word "Mishkan" alludes to "mashkon" / "collateral." The two-fold use of the word "Mishkan" at the beginning of our parashah alludes to the two Batei Mikdash which were taken away from us as collateral, so-to-speak, for our sins.

Why should the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash be alluded to at the time the Mishkan was being constructed? asks R' Yosef David Sintzheim z"l (1736-1812; Chief Rabbi of France; author of the Talmud commentary Yad David). He answers:

The Mishkan was intended to provide atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. The Midrash teaches that since Bnei Yisrael sinned using the word "Eleh" / "These" (as in Shmot 32:4--"These are your gods, Yisrael"), their atonement came through the word "Eleh" (referring to the first word in our parashah). In the future, too, the word "Eleh" will be used, says the Midrash, specifically referring to Yishayah 48:12--"Eleh" / "These will come from afar [at the time of the ingathering of the Diaspora]." The commentary Yefei To'ar explains the message of this latter Midrash to be that since Hashem said that He would remember the sin of the Golden Calf and mete out punishment for it a little bit at a time, we might fear that it will not be forgotten even at the time of the future redemption. Therefore the Midrash assures us that the atonement that began with the construction of the Mishkan ("Eleh Pekudei") will be completed in the future ("Eleh . . .").

R' Sintzheim concludes, answering his original question of why the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash should be alluded to at the time the Mishkan was being constructed: In the interim, however, before the atonement is complete, the sin of the Golden Calf will cause the destruction of the two Temples. The word "pekudei" (as in our verse, "Eleh pekudei") means "accounting," but it can also mean "missing." It refers to the two Temples that will be missing from us until the sin of the Golden Calf is ultimately erased.

Understood in this light, our verse is alluding not just to the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash, but to the entire process of atonement of which the Mishkan is but one part. Why is the Mishkan called



the "Mishkan of the Edut / Testimony"? Because it testifies to the unfolding of the process just described. (Shelal David)

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"Moshe saw the entire work [of the Mishkan], and behold! They had done it as Hashem had commanded, so had they done. And Moshe blessed them." (Shmot 39:43)

The Midrash adds, "What was his blessing? 'May it be G-d's Will that the Shechinah will rest on your handiwork'."

R' Mordechai Wulliger z"l (1895-1995; administrator at Yeshiva Torah Voda'ath in Brooklyn, N.Y.) explains the significance of Moshe's blessing as follows: The Gemara teaches that one may not praise G-d except using the formula that the Sages established. If a person would begin to praise G-d on his own, he could never stop, for we would ask him, "Have you exhausted all of your Master's attributes?!" The Mishkan was intended as a place for man to come close to G-d through prayer and service, but how can man do that? He can never praise G-d enough! The answer is that it is proper etiquette to not praise someone excessively to his face. Thus, when the Shechinah is present in the Mishkan, one can begin to praise G-d and stop. In answer to the question, "Have you exhausted all of your Master's attributes?" he can respond that it is not proper to recite all of G-d's praises to His Face, so-to-speak. Moshe's blessing was that the Mishkan would indeed be a place where this would be possible. (Tefilat Mordechai p.139)

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"He took and placed the Testimony [i.e., the Luchot] into the Aron / Ark . . ." (Shmot 40:20)

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) notes that our verse contains two verbs ("took" and "placed") while the verses relating to the other implements of the mishkan have only one verb. (For example, verse 22 states: "He put the Table in the Ohel Mo'ed.") Why? R' Kluger explains: The Gemara (Kiddushin 7a) teaches that when A gives a gift to B, who is a distinguished person, and B accepts the gift, A is considered to be a recipient because he is receiving a favor from B in that B honored A by accepting the gift. This is why the Torah says earlier (Shmot 25:2), "'Take' a donation for Me," rather than "'Give' a donation to Me," because a person who is fortunate enough to give a gift \*to\* Hashem actually is receiving a favor \*from\* Hashem.

Similarly, it was an honor for Moshe to be able to put the Luchot into the Aron. Thus, when he "placed" them, he also "took" something for himself. (Imrei Shefer)

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"The cloud covered the Ohel Mo'ed / Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Hashem filled the Tabernacle." (40:34)



The cloud is a reference to the fact that Hashem's presence in our world is hidden, taught R' Zvi Yehuda Kook z"l (1891-1982; rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav and mentor of the National Religious Party). He expounded further:

When one sees a rainbow, he must recite a blessing. A rainbow is multicolored; so, too, G-d is revealed in the world in many different ways. [This is a play on the Hebrew word "gevanim" / "colors" or "aspects."] One is forbidden to diminish the greatness of G-d [i.e., His ability to reveal Himself in so many different ways], but unfortunately, this occurs both among the religious and among the heretics.

Sometimes, a brilliant flash of the Divine light occurs in the physical world. When Avraham went to the akeidah, "he saw the cloud from afar." This means that Avraham saw a manifestation of the Divine with his physical eyes. It is possible to "meet" G-d even when He appears in a cloud; indeed, in the haftarah for Parashat Pekudei [which is not read today because it also is Parashat Shekalim] we read, "Hashem has said that we should dwell in the fog." There also are clouds that lead us on the way, just as Bnei Yisrael experienced in the desert.

It is easy to sanctify G-d's Name when one is among angels. The uniqueness of the Jewish people, and its very purpose, is to sanctify G-d in this world, amid its earthiness and materialism (including, writes R' Kook, being an active participant in the State [of Israel] and its armed forces). This ultimately demonstrates the sanctity of Torah study. Such is the meaning of the Vilna Gaon's teaching that a Jew's soul belongs to the earth. Man's mission is to relate G-d's greatness in this world, with all of its complications, as we say in the Rosh Hashanah prayers, "You are revealed in thick clouds of purity." (Sichot Harav Zvi Yehuda, p. 409)

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"For the cloud of Hashem would be upon the Mishkan by day, and fire would be on it at night . . ."  
(40:38)

R' Yitzchak Weiss z"l Hy"d (rabbi of Verbau, Czechoslovakia; killed in the Holocaust in 1942) writes: The Mishkan, where the Luchot were housed, alludes to a Torah scholar. If a Torah scholar publicizes himself, as the \*day\* is public, Hashem will bring a \*cloud\* of obscurity over him. However, if a Torah scholar conceals himself like an object concealed at \*night\*, Hashem will spread his fame as a \*fire\* is seen from a distance. (Siach Yitzchak)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.



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