

STUDYING THE MISHKAN

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Terumah

Studying the Mishkan

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Today's Learning:

Tanach: Yirmiyah 39-40

Mishnah: Terumot 10:9-10

Halachah: O.C. 622:2-4

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Zevachim 87

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Bikkurim 7

With our parashah, the Torah begins its description of the building of the mishkan / tabernacle and its implements and the laws of the sacrifices that were offered there. The Gemara (Ketubot 62b, as explained by Rashi z"l) notes that Hashem originally said (Shmot 15:17), "You will bring them and implant them on the mountain of Your heritage, the foundation of Your dwelling-place that You, Hashem, have made [i.e., Eretz Yisrael, and only afterward] the Sanctuary, my Lord, Your hands have established." Later, however, Hashem said (in our parashah--25:8), "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me -- and I will dwell among them." Because of His immense love for His people, He did not wait until they reached Eretz Yisrael before having them build the mishkan.

Why would one think that the mishkan / Bet Hamikdash could be only in Eretz Yisrael? R' Moshe Alshich z"l (Turkey and Israel; 1508-1593) explains: What does it mean for incorporeal G-d to have a "home" on earth? Our Patriarch Yaakov had this very question, and he answered it with the verse (Bereishit 28:17), "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of G-d and this is the gate of the heavens!" Yaakov realized that he felt increased awe in this place, for that is the feeling that the place instills in a person, and he described it as the place where we can be closest to G-d

and from which holiness enters the world! If so, R' Alshich writes, how could there be a "house" for G-d in the desert, outside of Eretz Yisrael, where G-d does not ordinarily reveal Himself directly, especially in a wilderness which is place devoid of G-d's "flow" [which is perhaps why it is a wilderness]! (Nevertheless, in His great love for the Jewish People, Hashem allowed Himself to have a "home" in the desert with them.)

"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and they shall take for Me a donation, from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take My portion." (25:2)

R' Elazar Lew (1758-1837; rabbi of several towns in Poland) writes: Many commentaries have asked why the verse says "they shall take for Me a donation" rather than "they shall give for Me a donation." Furthermore, R' Lew asks: Why does the first part of the verse say "they shall take," while the second part says, "you shall take"?

He explains: The famous answer to the first question is that giving charity really is taking, because G-d repays generously those who give charity. Therefore, if you give Hashem a donation, you also are taking from Him a donation.

However, this is true only if one gives magnanimously, but not if one gives begrudgingly. And, since Hashem does not want there to be a desecration of His Name if someone gives and is not compensated, He commanded in the second half of the verse, "[Only] from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take My portion." (Sama D'chayei: Drush 11)

"They shall make a Sanctuary for Me -- so that I may dwell among them." (25:8)

R' Yisrael Meir Hakohen z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) quotes a midrash: When Hashem showed the prophet Yechezkel the structure of the future Bet Hamikdash and commanded him to describe it to Bnei Yisrael, the prophet replied, "Master of the Universe! As of now, we are in exile in the lands of our enemies. Yet, You are telling me to inform Bnei Yisrael about the structure of the Temple and to write it before them so that they may guard it and its laws! What are they able to do [with this information]? Let them be until they leave the exile, and then I will tell them."

The midrash continues: Hashem replied, "Just because they are in exile, My Temple should be nullified? Their study of its laws are as great as building it! Go tell them that they should study the laws of building the Temple, and, in that merit, I will view it as if they built it." (Torah Or p.10)

"Like everything that I show you, the form of the Mishkan / Tabernacle and the form of all its vessels;

and so shall you do." (25:9)

Rashi comments: "And so shall you do"-for future generations.

R' Eliezer Zusia Portugal z"l (1898-1982; the Skulener Rebbe) asks: How can building a Temple be a mitzvah for future generations when, at least according to some opinions, the Third Temple will descend from Heaven as a building of fire?

He answers: The Temple that will descend is being constructed all the time from our mitzvot. Every good deed adds a course of "bricks" to that Temple. This verse is commanding us to do those good deeds. (Noam Eliezer)

"You shall place [literally 'give'] in the Aron the Luchot of Testimony that I shall give you." (25:16)

R' Moshe Hager shlita (the Vizhnitzer Rebbe in Bnei Brak) writes: Some people find it difficult to give charity because they think that their wealth is the product of their hard work. They fail to realize that they are mortal beings just like the person asking for tzedakah; that but for G-d's decree, their positions in society could just as well have been the reverse.

Our verse may be interpreted as a response to those whose hands are closed. "You shall give." To whom? To those who hold the Luchot, i.e., to Torah scholars and the institutions that support them. If you do, it will show that you understand that "I shall give you," i.e., that your wealth is not your own but rather a gift from Me. (Kuntreis Avodat Hashem B'yemei Ha'Shovavim p.33)

"You shall make two keruvim / cherubs of gold . . . (25:18)

". . . with their faces toward one another." (25:20)

The Gemara (Sukkah 5b) states that the word "keruvim" is related to the Aramaic word for "baby," teaching that the keruvim were baby-faced.

Regarding the second verse quoted above, the Ba'al Ha'turim z"l (14th century) explains that the keruvim faced each other "like two friends discussing a Torah topic."

R' Meir Rubman z"l (Israel; 20th century) asks: Aren't these mixed metaphors? Babies don't discuss Torah topics with each other!

He explains: Every person has hidden powers far in excess of his everyday abilities. These powers manifest themselves, for example, when a person is in danger. A person's powers are like a storekeeper's merchandise; a small amount is on display, and the rest is in the back room.

Most people use only their "visible" powers, but a great person strives to use his hidden powers. This

is because the typical person feels no need to strive for greatness, while a select few do. Indeed, this is one way to differentiate between a "regular" person and a great one.

The lesson of the baby-faced keruvim who face each other like friends engaged in a Torah discussion is that every person, even one whose powers are hidden like a baby's, can bring out his full potential and achieve greatness, just as a person who is engaged in a Torah discussion with his friend should use all of his intellectual powers to prove his point. (Zichron Meir)

Studying the Mishkan

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 Ha'olah)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](https://torah.org/torah-portion/hamaayan-5771-terumah/) page.

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