

CLASS 44 - PEKUDEI

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

"...when Hashem told Moshe to make a Mishkan, he came and told Betzalel. 'What is this Mishkan?', he asked. 'So that G-d should rest His presence within, and teach Torah to Israel', Moshe responded."

"And where will the Torah be placed?"

"After we build the Mishkan, we will make an Aron."

"Rabbeinu, Moshe! Such is not honor for the Torah! Rather, let us make an Aron, and afterwards, the Mishkan..." (Midrash Rabbah 50:2)

The Torah credits Betzalel with the building of the holy ark, for it is with his initiative that the Torah is housed first.

This teaching seems to contradict the Gemara's version of events:

"...Betzalel is called thus on account of his wisdom. When Hashem told Moshe to go and tell Betzalel 'build Me a Mishkan, Aron, and utensils', Moshe went and reversed the order, saying: 'build an Aron, utensils, and the Mishkan.' "

"He said: 'Moshe Rabbeinu! The way of the world is for a man to build a house, and afterwards to bring his utensils inside, and you tell me to build an Aron, utensils, and Mishkan? To where will I bring the utensils that I make! Perhaps Hashem said this: build a Mishkan, Aron, and utensils?' Said Moshe: 'Perhaps you were in the shadow of G-d, that you know!' " (Berachos 55a)

The Gemara quotes a completely different sequence. Here, Betzalel is the one who endeavors to save the Aron for last, insisting that proper behavior demands that the Mishkan be first, and not the Aron HaKodesh.

In our shiur this week, we will attempt to resolve this contradiction, showing that as in every dispute, the argument between Moshe Rabbeinu and Betzalel merely reflects their two different perspectives.

1

The Midrash records a dispute between Rebbe Yehuda and Rebbe Nechemiah:

What was created first, the light, or the earth?

"...a parable: a king who wants to build a palace, and the spot was completely dark. What did he do?"

He lit candles and lamps in order to set the foundation...." (Shemos Rabbah 50:1)

This Mashal teaches that light was G-d's first creation, facilitating the subsequent development of the earth. Yet, the comparison is seemingly inexact, for, while in the example, light is the means by which the king achieves his goal and builds his palace, in reality, the earth is not the purpose of creation, but rather, the light that illuminates man's life is the ultimate goal, while earth serves as the vehicle to uncover this infinite light.

Hence, the Midrash must be teaching not of the creation of earth, but of its parallel, the Mishkan and Bais HaMikdash, the physical abode for G-d on this earth. According to Rebbe Yehuda, Hashem first creates the light, and only afterwards the earth, and this is the argument of Betzalel - the Torah is the purpose of the Mishkan, and it is the spiritual essence of life wherein man discovers a meaning to his existence. The Mishkan is the vessel by which this truth is grasped, but its physical confines cannot match the pure and pristine image of absolute light.

Moshe Rabbeinu feels otherwise:

"And they brought the Mishkan to Moshe..." - "For they were unable to put it up, and because Moshe did none of the Melacha for the Mishkan, Hashem left it for him to put up...." (Rashi, Shemos 39:33)

Only Moshe can put up the Mishkan, for only he reflects with his physical being the perfect truth of G-d's word. While even the greatest individuals must fight off the body that hampers their spiritual growth, the physical Moshe Rabbeinu is indistinguishable from his transcendent soul. For him, even the physical actions of this world are an expression of G-d's will.

While the wise men of Israel can build the parts and instruments that together unite to bring to earth the presence of G-d, Moshe is the sum of all parts, and his perfect existence is itself the Mishkan that is man's goal.

Moshe Rabbeinu identifies with Rebbe Nechemiah - the Mishkan comes first.

It is he who brings the Torah to earth, not as a post factum response to an impossible situation, but in ultimate fulfillment of the purpose of life.

Moshe reflects a higher world. Uncorrupted and undistorted, he plants on earth G-d's permanent home. While Betzalel builds a Mishkan in order to see the light, Moshe's very self radiates with light, the shine and illumination with which he descends from the the mountain of G-d.

2

Let us now explain the argument cited in the Gemara, the version quoted by Rashi in our Parsha.

Is it possible for Betzalel to argue with Moshe Rabbeinu, the teacher of all Torah?

Moshe Rabbeinu indeed is repository of G-d's word, and it is for that reason that his message needs to be revised. While the Torah is pure and and perfect, our world is not.

The Torah needs no improvement, with no process or change - but man certainly does.

Moshe tells Betzalel to build the Aron Kodesh, for it is the Torah that is the purpose of creation. Moshe has no connection to the Olam HaMa'aseh - the world of deed and action. Knowing only of G-d's ultimate plan, he sees all of life is crystallized between the two staves of the Aron, for everything else in Olam HaZeh is merely a preparatory stage for the realization of Heaven's kingdom.

This is "Sof Ma'aseh B'Machshavah Techila" - the end of each deed is the initial plan.

Betzalel, on the other hand, knows that this world is a process, an ongoing operation to reveal a hidden truth. From this perspective, the world is a Mishkan, and it is G-d's will that Olam HaZeh be maintained.

Were the goals of creation completely self-evident, this world would cease to exist, for every man would perceive only the enduring word of G-d. The shadow of our physical existence conceals this overpowering light, and ironically, it the darkside of creation that is the vehicle for all progress and growth.

"Said Moshe: 'Perhaps you were in the shadow of G-d, that you know!' "

This concept defines Betzalel's life, and this is his name - BeTzel Kel. Indeed, this is the identity of each and every Jew, the man created in the image of G-d - B'Tzelem Elokim.

Like a shadow that circumscribes the form it alludes to, a negative snapshot of G-d's domain, with all tone and color cast in reverse, the righteous man sees the world as a battlefield to be conquered, a test of endurance and loyalty for the prize that lies beyond.

Betzalel lives with the process - a means that justifies the end.

"...Moshe Rabbeinu! The way of the world is for a man to build a house, and afterwards to bring his utensils inside..."

Betzalel understands the plan - but he sees something else as well. We must contend with "Minhago Shel Olam - the way of the world" - and to do so, he Mishkan comes first.

Moshe doesn't argue, for he does not disagree, but Moshe is our teacher - Rabbeinu. First we will learn of G-d's plan, and only then of His design.

3

While the Midrash cites an open argument, the Gemara's opposing version adds one little twist:

"...Perhaps Hashem said this: build a Mishkan, Aron, and utensils?"

Here, Betzalel is not arguing - he is trying to uncover the hidden meaning that lies within. Not content with following Moshe's precise command, he strives to take his lesson one step further, and reveal the truth and purpose of the Torah and its teachings.

Moshe is the Torah SheB'Ksav - the word of G-d transmitted directly to man. Betzalel extracts the Torah SheBa'al Peh, the struggle and turmoil of a world that needs to be deciphered.

Rashi, citing the version of our Gemara, alludes to his idea:

"And Betzalel ben Uri...did all that G-d commanded of Moshe: It does not write 'what Moshe commanded of him', but rather - 'all that G-d commanded of Moshe' - even matters that his teacher did not say, his intellect paralleled what was told to Moshe at Sinai..." (Rashi, loc.cit.)

Betzalel understands that the Torah, and life, contains much more than he is told. He sees the light, but he is not blinded. He utilizes the flash of brilliance to discover the world of truth that lies beyond the horizon, the hidden light our world conceals.

Hence, in the Midrash - Betzalel proclaims the reverse: Let the Aron come first, for it represents the light of an inner dimension, the truth for which every Jew must strive. It is the Ohr HaGanuz - the light of creation stored away for the future, for those righteous few who uncover the meaning of life.

Here, Moshe disagrees - for to Moshe Rabbeinu, nothing is hidden, life has no veil. He covers his face when speaking to man, for mortal man is blinded by the fiery light that extinguishes his very being - but Moshe speaks to G-d face to face - as no man has ever done before or since.

To him, the Mishkan and the light are one and the same - for the physical world itself is fired with the brilliant shine of that very first day - a day when both G-d and His name were One.

Each of these four positions are right and true, for each represents a different outlook on life. While some men anticipate a particular reward, and others toil for a higher purpose, still others understand that the work that we do is its own reward: Schar Mitzva - Mitzva, and our very effort is itself an accomplishment.

The Temple contains the light, and the Temple gives forth light. The Aron is first, and the Aron is last - "Ani Rishon, Ani Acharon, V'Ein MiBaladai Elokim"

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