

THE COMPLETION OF THE MISHKAN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

"God spoke to him from the Appointed Tent, saying ." (Vayikra 1:1)

The mishkan completed, it is now possible to discuss the service that took place inside of it. However, a dialogue from the Talmud, with the help of an insight from the Zohar, sheds new light on just what was really accomplished by the construction of the Mishkan.

First, the dialogue. Upon his deathbed Ya'akov Avinu blessed his sons and wanted to reveal to them what would occur at the End-of-Days (Bereishis 49:1). However, the prophecy left him, and concerned, Ya'akov Avinu questioned his sons:

"Perhaps, God forbid, there is something unfit from my bed, just as Yishmael was born to Abraham, and Eisav to my father Yitzchak?"

His sons answered, "Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad: Just as in your heart only [God is] one, so too in our hearts, there is only one."

At that moment Ya'akov said, "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever!" (Pesachim 56a)

In spite of the reassuring answer of his sons, the prophecy never returned to Ya'akov Avinu, and we still don't know the date of the End-of-Days. We don't even know Ya'akov Avinu's response to his son's proclamation means until we learn the Zohar's take:

Ya'akov wanted to establish the "Mystery of Unity" below, and composed the 24 letters of, "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever." He didn't give it 25 letters since the Mishkan-the Tabernacle- had yet to be built. Once the Mishkan was built the first word was completed . With regard to this it says, "God spoke to him from the Appointed Tent, saying ." (Vayikra 1:1), which has 25 letters. (Zohar 2:139b)

The Mystery of Unity? What's that? It is Kabbalistic concept referring to the supernatural revelation of God to mankind, which will occur during the Messianic Era. Then, just as God is revealed in the world above, His reality will be clear to man below as well, unifying both the upper and lower realms. Apparently, the Mishkan was an oasis of such a reality, a veritable, albeit limited Yemos HaMoshiach.

As for the 25 letters, it is referring to the last part of the first verse. According to the Zohar, once the Mishkan was completed the spiritual root of the light to which the second verse of the Shema alludes was able to emanate and cause the Divine unity that Ya'akov Avinu had intended to draw down, and would have, had the world been ready for it.

This is why the Mishkan was completed on the 25th day of Kislev, 25 being the number of the Ohr HaGanuz-the Hidden Light of Creation. It was also the future day of the first day of Chanukah, at which time the light from Yemos HaMoshiach, the Ohr HaGanuz, illuminates the world for eight days. Like the Mishkan, Chanukah is a taste of the Messianic Era.

Furthermore, says the Zohar, this is why 13 materials were used for the Mishkan, and 12 stones were put into the Ephod-to make a total of 25, alluding to the sublime unity that was to be achieved through the service in the Mishkan. The bottom line: the Mishkan represented the world rectification that we have been working on throughout our long and tiring history. The Mishkan may not exist today, well, at least not in our eye range, but its plans do, and they hold the key to redemption.

In fact, everything about the Mishkan points to unity. For example:

You shall make 50 loops on the end of the one curtain that is the outermost in the joining, and 50 loops on the edge of the curtain that joins to the second. You shall make 50 catches of copper, and put the catches into the loops, and join the tent together, that it may be one. (Shemos 26:11)

Perhaps, the greatest symbol of such unity emerged out from the top of the Aron HaBris, the two cherubim, one male and one female, whose ideal position was towards an embrace. I say ideal position, because, according to tradition, though they were made of gold and firmly attached to the top of the Aron, they were able to swivel, miraculously.

What did their position depend upon? The Nefesh HaChaim explains:

It is well known that one of the cherubim represented God, while the other, His treasured nation. The closeness and adherence of the Jewish people to God, or God forbid, the opposite, was indicated by the positioning of the cherubim, which was a great miracle. If the Jewish nation "faced" God, so would the cherubim face each other. If they turned away from God even a little, this would be reflected by the cherubim immediately. And, God forbid, if they turned their backs towards God, then, immediately, the cherubim would face back-to-back. (Nefesh HaChaim, Ch. 8)

This, of course, is based upon the words of the Zohar:

When is He in a state of mercy? When the cherubim turn ... and face each other ... and since the cherubim are looking into each other's face everything becomes perfected ... As the Jewish

people rectify their relationship with God, thus it is with all of existence. (Zohar, Terumah 152b)

"How nice and pleasant it is when brothers dwell as one." (Tehillim 133:1). With regard to when they face each other, the verse says, "How nice and pleasant it is ..." Woe to the world when they face away from each other ... (Zohar, Acharei 59b)

As long as the Jewish people merited it, the cherubim cleaved face-to-face, but when they sinned, they turned away from each other. Thus when the Jewish people merited it they faced each other, and through this miracle they knew if they had merit or not ... The verse, "Serve God in joy" (Tehillim 100:2) ... refers to the joy of the two cherubim... since God dwelled amongst them, they could know joy and the world was treated with mercy. (Zohar, Terumah 43a)

In other words, and this is crucial, if there is a lack of unity between God and the Jewish people, then there is going to be a lack of unity between man and man. This was the message that Ya'akov Avinu was telling his sons when he tried to reveal the End-of-Days to them, but lost the prophecy, the sign of the lack of unity between his sons and God, in spite of the fact they proclaimed just the opposite by saying the Shema.

And, he was right, as was evidenced after he died and the brothers became fearful of Yosef's revenge. The interchange went like this:

Yosef's brothers, because their father had died said, "Maybe Yosef will hate us and repay us for all the evil that we did to him." They ordered [someone] to say to Yosef, "Your father commanded us before his death to say to Yosef, 'Please forgive the crime of your brothers and their guilt, though they have done evil to you.' Please forgive the crime of the servants of your father's God."

Yosef wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also wept, [and] fell before him and said, "We are here to be your servants."

Yosef said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in place of God? You decided to do evil to me, but God decided it should be for the good, in order to achieve what has occurred, to keep a large population alive." (Bereishis 50:15-19)

As Yosef indicates, their lack of unity was based upon the lack of unity of God in their minds, and therefore, their lack of unity with God, a unity that Ya'akov Avinu foresaw would need a Mishkan to rectify. A Mishkan that was associated with number 25, which is why, as mentioned earlier, its construction was completed, conveniently, on the 25th day of Kislev, 2449, the future day of the holiday of Chanukah.

The trouble is that it seems so simple, begging the question: Why did Yosef's brothers not see this for themselves. And, if they could not see this for themselves, then how can we be expected to see

it for ourselves?

The answer is a phenomenon that everyone knows about, but few like to talk about. It is about how, in the pursuit of greatness, great people can make simple mistakes. Mistakes that simple folk might never make, and regarding which they scratch their heads in wonderment when they see people much greater than themselves make. Jewish history is replete with examples of this.

So, we justify and rationalize and give spin to the errors of our leaders and ancestors, because we are confused about how people who should have been above such errors, in the end, were not. That's what makes it so scandalous, and newsworthy, and damaging for the rest of us. "If they can't control themselves, then how can I be expected to?" goes the rationalization to be less careful about one's moral behavior.

After all, a sin by any other name is still a sin, right?

Well, to tell you the truth, the Torah says not. We see how much intention plays a role in determining culpability when it comes to transgressing the Torah, God forbid. If a person deliberately eats treif, he gets beaten. If he eats treif accidentally, he has to bring a sacrifice to atone for his accidental mistake, but he does not get punished.

Indeed, I can show you how it was Yosef's brothers' sophisticated understanding of Divine Providence, not their lack of it, that caused their error, just as I have discussed in the past how the Spies turned their rejection of Eretz Yisroel into a mitzvah, even expecting God to rubber stamp their decision. Hence, their shock when He didn't, and instead became furious with them.

In fact, the greater a person is, the more he has at his mental fingertips to justify behavior that is actually against halachah, even for him, no especially for him. For, if he permits the forbidden to himself, how much so will people on a lesser level feel justified in doing so?

For example, I used to doven in a minyan in which the person next to me usually learned during the repetition of the Shemonah Esrai. So, one day, I slipped him the halachah, anonymously of course, on a piece of paper, and sure enough, for the first little while, he changed his behavior. Until, that is, a talmid chacham joined our minyan, and learned during Chazaras HaShatz-even though bigger talmidei chachamim in the minyan didn't, and this rav clearly had an attitude.

The remedy? It's that small Aleph in this week's parshah. It represents the source of man's greatness, his soul, but it is small to tell us that humility is the harness that channels the energy of the soul in a Torah direction, on all levels. Without it, there can be no personal unity, no communal unity, and no unity with God, no matter how much you learn and remember His Torah. Without perfect humility, which is really objectivity, one can't help by distort reality to suit his needs.

This is the Mystery of Unity that Ya'akov Avinu sought to instill in his family, but which he required the Mishkan to complete. The Mishkan was designed to humble the Jewish people on a daily basis, allowing them to rise above their petty concerns and desires, in order to see reality as God sees it.

And, once that is the case, a person does not err with regard to Divine Providence, be he great or simple.

Text

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