

CREATING SANCTITY

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

In this week's and next week's Parshios, there is a somewhat repetitive expression of our relationship with G-d. In the beginning of Vayakhel, 35:29, the Torah states that all the donations were given to the Mishkan. "...for all the work that G-d had ordered through Moshe." Starting in Parshas Pikudei, 39:1, the Torah states 16 times, in one form or another, "As G-d had commanded Moshe." In Pasuk 39:43 the Torah states that Moshe reviewed all the work that had been done for the construction of the Mishkan, and it was constructed as G-d had commanded him. Then, Moshe "blessed all the workers." What is the importance of emphasizing time and time again the concept of, "As G-d commanded Moshe;" and why did Moshe bless the workers?

According to Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, the general theme of Sefer Shemos is the history of the Jewish nation and the giving of the Torah. The first four Parshios detail the years of enslavement, persecution and eventual redemption. The fifth Parsha, Yisro, describes Revelation. The sixth Parsha, Mishpatim, presents the judicial structure of society.

At first glance Mishpatim appears to be out of place. Why is the Torah presenting the detailed laws of social justice and interaction in the book that presents the history of the nation and the giving of the Torah? If you consider what our responsibilities are in relation to the other nations, (as "A Kingdom of priests and a holy nation"), the placement of Mishpatim becomes clear. We were intended to model for the rest of the world the meaning of having been created "in G-d's image". In order for us to do so, the other nations must perceive our Torah society as just and fair. Therefore, G-d first instructed us in the laws governing our social interactions before commanding us in the laws of religious observance.

The seventh and eighth Parshios describe the construction of the Mishkan, and the ninth Parsha, last week's reading, relates the sin of the Golden Calf with its consequences. The final two Parshios of Shemos repeat the details of the construction of the Mishkan.

Each book of the Torah has its own distinct theme, and each of the themes follows the other in a logical sequence. Bereishis focuses on the theme of separation and speciation as intrinsic an integral to all of creation. Therefore, it is natural and expected that the Jew be separated from the non-Jew. Therefore, the main story line of the Book of Genesis is the development of the family of Avraham.

Shemos focuses on the reason for the Jews having been chosen and separated from the rest of the other nations. It is the story of the development of Avraham's family into a nation within the foreign

society of Egypt. Once they had become a separate and distinct nation among other nations, they were freed and given the Torah. The reason for their being separated from the other nations was in order for them to receive the Torah.

Vayikra focuses on presenting the goal of a nation that was chosen and commanded to live a lifestyle structured by Mitzvos and Halacha. What should a lifestyle of purity and sanctity look like? Therefore, Vayikra details the laws of the Bais Hamikdash and the responsibilities of the Kohanim and Leviyim.

Bamidbar focuses on the actual challenges, failures and successes, that the Jews underwent in attempting to integrate into daily life the ideals of being separate and apart.

Divarim focuses on the laws and instructions that were needed to facilitate the transition of the Jews from the desert into Eretz Yisroel. A continuous theme in Divarim is the difficulties the Jews would confront in maintaining their separation and identity. Moshe forewarned the Jews against the dangers of intermarriage and assimilation.

In Shemos, the history of our nationality and Revelation is detailed. However, Revelation was not as simple and straightforward as G-d might have hoped. Soon after receiving the word of G-d at Mt. Sinai, the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf. As a result, the relationship between G-d and His chosen people underwent a fundamental change. Before the sin G-d's presence was evident in every aspect of their lives. After the sin, G-d confined His manifest presence within the walls of the Tabernacle. The laws of the Torah remained the same, but our relationship with G-d was irrevocably altered.

As most of the commentaries agree, the building of the Mishkan was in direct response to the sin of the Golden Calf. Whatever we were intended to accomplish in relation to the other nations without the Mishkan, (before we sinned) we can now only accomplish with the Mishkan. Therefore, it makes sense that the story of the Golden Calf and the construction of the Mishkan would be recorded in the Book of Shemos. In essence, the Mishkan, which manifested G-d's presence within the Jewish people ("And they should make for me a Mishkan so that I can dwell in their midst"), was a reformulation of Revelation. Just as our actions were supposed to manifest G-d's presence to the rest of the world, so too was the Mishkan supposed to manifest G-d's presence within the Jewish people.

What does it mean to be G-d's "Kingdom of priests and holy nation?" The overview of the Book of Shemos and the placement of Parshas Mishpatim indicates that our service and devotion must permeate every aspect of our lives. Human relationships are as directed by Halacha as were the workings of the Mishkan. Our behavior should reflect our awareness of G-d whether within the confines of the synagogue, kitchen, or bedroom.

As G-d's kingdom of priests we were enjoined to sanctify the mundane through our devotion to G-d. Sanctity is the recognition of G-d in all that exists and the commitment to use His world to further His

reputation. However, following the sin of the Golden Calf, G-d secreted His presence within nature and only remained revealed within the confines of the Mishkan. This made the job of sanctifying the world much more difficult than it would have otherwise been if we had not sinned with the Golden Calf.

In order to sanctify the mundane, we must learn how to reveal G-d's presence in everything that is, and everything that happens. Therefore, we must develop an attitude that directs our motives and actions toward serving G-d. With the proper attitude we are able to acknowledge G-d's ever present presence and sanctify every activity by directing them toward serving G-d.

The Mishkan was to be the one place where G-d's presence remained overt and in evidence. Therefore, it was essential that every aspect of the Mishkan's construction be directed toward serving G-d and being aware of His presence. The Torah in this week's Parshios emphasizes that from the moment the materials were donated to the final assembling of the Mishkan everything was done, "as commanded by G-d to Moshe."

In Divarim 28:10 Moshe told the Jews that if they sanctify themselves by following the commandments of G-d, "The other nations of the world will see that the name of G-d is upon you and they will be in awe of you!" Our success in influencing the other nations to recognize G-d and sanctify their own lives is in direct proportion to the degree that G-d is evident within our own lives. To the extent that "G-d dwells in our midst," is the extent to which we accomplish the reason for our separation from the rest of the nations and why we were given the Torah.

When the Bnai Yisroel finished creating the Mishkan in accordance with G-d's exact instructions, Moshe blessed all the workers. Moshe's blessing is recorded in Tehillim 90 that is said on Shabbos and Yom Tov mornings. It starts with the words Tefilah L'Moshe - A prayer of Moshe, and concludes with his prayer to G-d that G-d's presence be evident in everything the nation will do.

Following the building of the Mishkan, the Jews were once again ready to do the work of being G-d's priests and sanctifying His world. Therefore, it made sense that Moshe would highlight their ability with a blessing that the nation continue to sanctify the mundane through all of their actions.

The Four Parshios

Practically speaking, Shabbos was the one-day during the week when the community gathered. Therefore, the Rabbis chose Shabbos as the most opportune time to make timely Halachic and communal announcements. Associating these announcements with a Torah portion is indicative of the focus that each of us is supposed to have in regards to integrating Hashem (G-d) into our lives. These announcements were not simply relegated to a public pronouncement or a few lines on a sheet, but were associated with the reading and the study of Torah.

There are four special Shabbosim preceding Pesach when additional portions from the Torah are read. Set rules determine when each of these additional Parshios is to be read.

Parshas Shekalim, the first of the special Shabbosim preceding Pesach, is read on the Shabbos that precedes the month of Adar, or the Shabbos of Rosh Chodesh Adar (when Rosh Chodesh and Shabbos coincide). Parshas Zachor is read on the Shabbos before Purim. Parshas Parah is read on the Shabbos before the Shabbos of Parshas Hachodesh. Parshas Hachodesh is read on the Shabbos before the month of Nissan or the Shabbos of Rosh Chodesh Nissan (when Rosh Chodesh and Shabbos coincide).

Shekalim

A key function of the Bais Hamikdash was the offerings of the daily, Korban Tzibur - communal offerings. The designation of "communal" was because every male adult, 20 years and older, donated a ½ shekel toward the purchase of the daily communal offerings. (Inherent in the concept of the ½ shekel and the communal offerings was the importance of family units, not individuals.) These monies were gathered and used to purchase the daily sacrifices. The law requires that all offerings must be purchased from monies collected for that year. The fiscal year for public offerings was from Nissan to Nissan. Therefore, the Rabbi's ordained that the portion of the Torah (Ki Tisa) describing the first collection of the ½ shekel be read on the Shabbos of or before Rosh Chodesh Adar, one month before the ½ shekel was due, as a reminder that everyone should send in their money.

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