

PARSHAS TERUMAH

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

There is a conflict between the midrash [quoted by Rashì] and the Zohar [Ramban etc] as to when the instructions for the Mishkan which appear in our sedrah were given. The midrash holds that they were given after the Maaseh Haeigel in parshat Ki Tisah but we don't pay attention to the sequence of the parshiot. The Zohar holds that the sequence is correct and the instructions were given before the Eigel and the work started after it. This discussion concerns the purpose and the cause of the Mishkan itself.

We know that that the Aron was not carried by the Cohanim but rather carried its bearers. The same must have been true of all the other vessels. Their weight makes impossible for them to have carried by the two carts allotted to them. They literally possessed a life of their own. The Talmud tells us that when Titus plunged his sword into the parochet, it bled as though it was a living thing (Gittin 56b). We also read that purification of the Temple vessels is like bloodshed. That is because the tumah lessons the holiness and that is what happens when blood is shed (Yoma 23b). If this was true in the Second Temple that did not have the same spirituality, how much more so must have been the case of the vessels in the Mishkan?

Our sages tell us that a spiritual thing like the soul is able to join a material thing like the human body only with the assistance of many agents. What agent gives these inanimate vessels their spiritual quality? It was the outpouring of great love and devotion that the Jews showed through the free will gifts they brought at the building of the Mishkan (Shmot). The Midrash and the Zohar differ as to what prompted this great love and devotion.

The Midrash that says that the commandment concerning the Mishkan came after the Eigel, relates the gifts to the shame and the remorse of Israel at their sin. When they were told of their forgiveness, they were overwhelmed with the kindness of G-d and the gifts were an expression of their thanks. G-d gave Moshe the instructions to build the Mishkan in return. Before the chet of the Eigel there was no purpose in these instructions.

According to the Zohar, Israel was so moved by the Revelation at Sinai and so filled with holiness that their hearts overflowed with spirituality and the gifts they brought to the construction of the Mishkan were the expression of that overflow. This means that these instructions were a reward for their love and their spirituality so that they were given before the Eigel and the parshiot are in their correct order. After the Eigel, the Mishkan acquired an additional role; that of atonement for their sins.

However, there is still a problem with the contention of the Midrash and Rashi. According to them, if Israel would not have sinned with the Eigel, there would have been no Mishkan or Temple at all. This is strange because there is a promise that 'in the end of days', when everything will be without sin and all will be like Adam Harishon in perfection, G-d will gather all the nations to His House and there will be the Third Temple as foretold by Yechezkiel.

There are many different levels of holiness of the nefesh and of time. We are all commanded to make our souls holy. This is equally true for Moshe and the hewer of wood or the drawer of water, despite the enormous differences between them. They obviously see holiness in various perspectives and pursue it in different ways. There is the same element in time. Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, the Chagim, Hannukah and Purim, all have holiness, yet they widely from each other. So too, there are different levels of holiness expressed in the Mishkan. Yechezkiel does not give exact details of the materials etc used to construct the 3rd Temple and Rambam tells us that this is because nobody knows exactly what the nature of achrit hayamaim will be. We know that before the sin of Adam, material things had a spiritual form and they only acquired their present nature as a result of his sin. They will regain that spiritual form at the time of the 3rd Temple. The same could have happened with the Mishkan. The gold and silver wood and skin used to construct it could have lost their material form and nature, if Israel would not have sinned with the Eigel. Then they would have merited a Mishkan of spirituality. This is the teaching of the Midrash and Rashi.

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