**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**MIDRASH ON THE PARASHA**

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Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Leon Brum for the Refua Sheleima of

Dana Petrover (Batsheva bat Gittel Aidel Leba)

and Marvin Rosenberg (Meir Chaim ben Tzipporah Miriam)

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In memory of six friends and family,   
strong pillars of the Montreal Jewish community,   
who have left us in the past 7 years.   
All were אוהבי עם ישראל, אוהבי ארץ ישראל, אוהבי תורת ישראל.

Joseph (Yosie) Deitcher

Avrum (Avy) Drazin

Rabbi Joseph Drazin

Leibel Frisch

Israel (Mutch) Yampolsky

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**Parashat Teruma:**

**Miraculous Work in the Temple**

**Introduction:**

From the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) first erected at Sinai to the *Mikdash* (Temple) built in Jerusalem, the common theme is the belief that a connection between God and His chosen people, mankind in general, and the entirety of Creation is feasible.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Torah details the erection of the *Mishkan* and the resting of the *Shekhina,* God’s Presence, in it. *Chazal* enhance this by enumerating the miracles of a reality in which the *Shekhina* is manifest. In this *shiur,* we will trace the description of the miraculous reality in the Temple from the words of the Tannaim and Amoraim until the late Midrash.

**The Ten Miracles in the Temple**

Ten miracles were performed for our forefathers in the Temple:

1. No woman miscarried from the odor of the holy [sacrificial] flesh;
2. The holy flesh never became putrid;
3. No fly was seen in the slaughterhouse;
4. No seminal emission befell a high priest on Yom Kippur;
5. The rain did not extinguish the fire of the wood-pile [on the Altar];
6. The wind did not prevail against the column of smoke;
7. No disqualification was found in the *Omer* offering or in the Two Loaves or in the Showbread;
8. They stood pressed together, but prostrated themselves with wide spaces between them;
9. Never did a serpent or a scorpion do injury in Jerusalem;
10. And no man said to his fellow: The place is too crowded for me to lodge overnight in Jerusalem. (Mishna, *Avot* 5:5)[[2]](#footnote-2)

From among the ten miracles mentioned here, the Mishna opens and closes with miracles related to the pilgrimage of the nation as a whole. The first item and the last three items relate to the entire people, whereas the six other items are connected to the Temple and the sacrificial service. All of the miracles are formulated in the negative, things that did not happen (with the exception of "They stood pressed together…”) and relate to things which might have disturbed the sacrificial service in the Temple.

In *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, Version 2, we find an expanded list that includes eighteen miracles. The eight additional miracles all relate to the broadcasting of the Temple service beyond Jerusalem:[[3]](#footnote-3)

Ten miracles were performed in the Temple:

1. No woman ever miscarried in Jerusalem;
2. The holy flesh never became wormy;
3. No seminal emission befell a high priest on Yom Kippur;
4. No disqualification was found in the *Omer* offering or in the Two Loaves or in the Showbread;
5. No fly was found in the slaughterhouse;
6. No creeping creature was found there;
7. No bird passed over it;
8. The wind did not prevail against the cloud of incense;
9. The entrance to the hall [leading to the Temple]was forty cubits high and twenty cubits wide, and forty thousand people would exit through it;
10. The tenth miracle was the most difficult of all: when they stood in prayer they were pressed together, but when they prostrated themselves there was a space of four cubits between one person and the next;
11. The [turning] hinge [of the Temple door] was heard throughout eight Shabbat limits, and it extinguished all sounds;
12. From Jericho, they could hear the sound of the song;
13. From Jericho, they could hear the sound of the [turning] hinge;
14. From Jericho, they could hear the sound of the shofar;
15. From Jericho, they could hear the sound of the trumpets;
16. From Jericho, they could hear the voice of the high priest on Yom Kippur pronouncing God's name;
17. From Jericho they could smell the odor of the ingredients of the incense;

And some say even in the mountains of Mikhbar.

Rabbi Elazar ben Dalgi said: There were goats in my father's house in the mountains of Mikhbar, and they would sneeze from the odor of the ingredients of the incense.

1. The miracle of the [musical instrument in the shape of a] shovel was the most difficult of all: when they placed it between the hall [leading to the Temple] and the Altar, a person could not hear the voice of his fellow in Jerusalem because of the sound of the shovel.

It served three purposes:

A priest who heard its sound knew that his brothers the priests were about to prostrate themselves, and he would run and come.

A Levite who heard its sound knew that his brothers the Levites were standing on the platform and he would run and come.

The head of the *ma'amad* [division representing the common Israelites] would stand the ritually impure at the eastern gate. (*Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, Version B, 39)

The Gemara in *Yoma* alsobrings the list of miracles found in the Mishna in *Avot* with slight changes, and adds another five miracles connected to the Temple service:

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: When the Israelites made pilgrimage, they stood pressed together, but they prostrated themselves with wide spaces [between them]… This is one of the ten miracles that were performed in the Temple.

For we have learned: Ten miracles were performed in the Temple: No woman miscarried from the odor of the holy flesh; the holy flesh never became putrid; no fly was seen in the slaughterhouse; no seminal emission ever befell the high priest on Yom Kippur; nor was there ever found any disqualification in the *Omer* offering or in the Two Loaves or in the Showbread; though the people stood closely pressed together, they still found wide spaces between them to prostrate themselves; never did a serpent or scorpion injure anyone in Jerusalem; nor did any man ever say to his fellow: The place is too narrow for me to stay overnight in Jerusalem.

He started with [miracles in] the Temple and concludes with [those performed] in Jerusalem!

There are two more [miracles performed] in the Temple. For it was taught: Never did rains quench the fire of the wood-pile on the Altar; and as for the smoke arising from the wood-pile, even if all the winds of the world came blowing, they could not divert it from its place.

But are there no more? Has not Rav Shemaya of Kalnevo taught that the fragments of earthenware were swallowed up in the very place [where they were broken]; and Abbayei said: The crop and the feathers, the ashes removed from the Inner Altar and from the Candelabrum were swallowed up in the very place [where they were taken off]?…

There are also other [miracles], for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: A great miracle was performed with the Showbread, namely, when it was removed it was as fresh as when it was put on, as it is stated: "To put hot bread in the day it was taken away" (I *Shemuel* 21:7).

But are there no more? Has not Rabbi Levi said: This matter has been handed down as a tradition to us from our forefathers: The place on which the Ark stands is not included in the measurement.

And has not Rabbanai said in the name of Shemuel: The Cherubim were standing by sheer miracle?

The count refers to miracles performed outside [the Temple], miracles performed inside are not mentioned. If that be so, what of the Showbread which is also a miracle that happened inside the Temple? No, that miracle happened outside, for Reish Lakish said… Rather this teaches us that the Table would be lifted up for the gaze of the pilgrims, and [the priests] would say to them: Behold how beloved you are of God, for it is as fresh when it is taken off as it was when put on, as it is stated: "To put hot bread in the day it was taken away."

But were there no more [miracles]? Did not Rav Oshaya say: When King Shelomo built the Temple, he planted therein all kinds of delights of gold, which were bringing forth their fruits in their season and as the winds blew at them, they would fall off, as it is written: "May his fruits rustle like Lebanon" (*Tehillim* 72:16). And when the foreigners entered the Temple they withered, as it is stated: "And the flower of Lebanon languishes" (*Nachum* 1:4). And the Holy One, blessed be He, will in the future restore them, as it is stated: "It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given to it" (*Yeshayahu* 35:2).

Permanent miracles he does not include in his count. And now that we have come to this [conclusion], the Ark and the Cherubim are also permanent miracles. (*Yoma* 21a-b)

The Gemara distinguishes between three types of miracles performed in the Temple: miracles performed outside the Temple that are visible to pilgrims; miracles performed inside the Temple that are not evident outside; and permanent miracles that are perpetual. The list in the Mishna includes only "the miracles performed outside," and therefore the other miracles are not included ("are not mentioned"). The Gemara goes on to discuss the exact composition of the list of ten miracles, mentioning various miracles performed in the Temple. The recurring question, "But were there no more miracles," points to the Gemara's point of departure, which sees the reality prevailing in the Temple as a reality of miracles.

Unlike the additional miracles appearing in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, the miracles brought in the *Bavli* in addition to the list appearing in the Mishna in *Avot* relate to what takes place inside the *Mikdash*. These miracles portray the Temple as a place where the laws of nature do not apply. The fragments of earthenware and the waste products of the offerings are swallowed up in the ground and disappear; the freshness of the Showbread is preserved, thereby eliminating the physical processes of time; the place on which the Ark stands which “is not included in the measurement” cancels the physical dimension of space; the Cherubim which stand “by sheer miracle” reset the laws of physics; while the growth of the decorative accessories of gold reflect a blurring of the natural categories in the world — the difference between the mineral and plant worlds. All of these miracles are reported in the name of Amoraim: Amoraim of Eretz Israel — Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (first generation), Rabbi Hoshaya (first generation) and Rabbi Levi (third generation?); and Amoraim of Babylonia — Shemuel, Abbayei and Rav Shemaya.

*Avot de-Rabbi Natan* describes the Temple as a central point from which an effect spreads out within a given radius (as far as Jericho). Its effect is on the sensory plane — the senses of hearing and smelling. Such a presentation of down-to-earth life within the confines of the Temple is typical of the Midrashic literature of Eretz Israel.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The different traditions of miracles in the two sources supports the argument that neither one of them claims to enumerate all the miracles that were wrought in the Temple and that each source chooses to focus on a different "type" of miracle. Thus, we find in the *Yerushalmi* additional statements that point to miraculous phenomena in Shelomo's Temple:

And there were gold candelabra there… We find that it was taught: Their location was miraculous work. (*Yerushalmi*, *Sukka* 5:2)

It was taught: Rabbi Yuda the son of Rabbi Ila'i said:

The anointing oil that Moshe made on the mountain involved miraculous work from beginning to end…

For at the outset it was only 12 *log*, as it is stated: "And of olive oil a *hin*" (*Shemot* 30:24).

If to anoint with it the wood, it was not enough.

All the more that the fire absorbs of it, the kettle absorbs of it, and the wood absorbs of it.

From it were anointed the *Mishkan* and all its vessels,

The Altar and all its vessels,

The Candelabrum and all its vessels, the Laver and its base.

From it were anointed Aharon the High Priest and his sons all seven days of consecration.

From it were anointed high priests and kings. (*Yerushalmi*, *Horayot* 3:2)

**The Miracles of the Construction of the *Mishkan*: *Orot Techashim Va-atzei* *Shittim***

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the children of Israel, that they take for Me a contribution; of every man whose heart makes him willing you shall take My contribution. And this is the contribution which you shall take of them: gold, and silver, and copper; and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair; and rams' skins dyed red, *ve-orot techashim va-atzei shittim*. (*Shemot* 25:1-5)

The last two materials that are mentioned here as necessary for the construction of the *Mishkan* stand out in Rabbinic tradition as having a miraculous dimension. While it is clear that they refer to a type of animal skin and wood respectively, their identification is mysterious. *Midrash Tanchuma* explains the origins of both:

Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nechemya [disagreed].

Rabbi Yehuda said: There was a large pure beast in the wilderness, from which they fashioned the curtains.

Rabbi Nechemya said: It was miraculous work.

It was created for a short time and then hidden away.

Know this, for it is written: "And you shall make curtains… the length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits" (*Shemot* 26:5-6). Who brings you curtains thirty cubits long? From here you learn in accordance with the words of Rabbi Nechemya that it was miraculous work.

Say not [only] the curtains, but even the boards were miraculous work.

From where were the boards?

Yaakov our father planted them at the time he descended to Egypt.

He said to his children: My sons, ultimately you will be redeemed from this place, and the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to you: When you are redeemed, make for Me a *Mishkan*.

Go plant *arazim*, so that when He commands you to erect the *Mishkan*, the *arazim* will be in your hands.

Immediately they went and planted *arazim* as their father had commanded them to do.

Our Rabbis said:  
The middle bar went down to Egypt with Yaakov, for it was difficult to bolt the boards from end to end.

Furthermore, these *arazim* intoned a song.

This is what David said: "Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy" (*Tehillim* 96:12). The word "then" is employed in reference to a song intoned to the Holy One, blessed be He, [as it is stated: "Then sang Moshe" (*Shemot* 15:1)].

And they said: When will the *Mishkan* be erected?

When the Holy One, blessed be he, commanded Moshe to build the *Mishkan*, what did He say to him?

"And you shall make the boards for the *Mishkan* [of *atzei shittim*, standing up]" (*Shemot* 26:15).

Let them use what their father prepared for them.(*Midrash Tanchuma* [Buber], *Teruma* 9)

We will deal first with the matter of the *tachash*, and then we will consider the matter of the *atzei shittim*.

We do not find a Tannaitic dispute regarding the *tachash* in Rabbinic literature before the *Tanchuma.* The Gemara in *Shabbat* records a different version of this tradition in the name of the Tanna Rabbi Meir:

Rabbi Ila’a said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish: Rabbi Meir used to say: The *tachash* in the days of Moshe was a separate species, and the Sages could not decide whether it belonged to the category of wild beasts or it belonged to the category of domestic animals. It had one horn on its forehead, and it came to Moshe's hand [providentially] just for the occasion, and he made from it the [covering of the] *Mishkan*, and then it was hidden away.[[5]](#footnote-5) (*Shabbat* 28b)

A comparison between the two versions indicates that the *Tanchuma* highlights the miraculous element in the *tachash.* So too, it decides immediately in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Nechemya:

Know this, for it is written: “And you shall make curtains… the length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits.” Who brings you curtains thirty cubits long? From here you learn in accordance with the words of Rabbi Nechemya that it came from miraculous work.

This goes against the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda who offers an explanation that does not go beyond the framework of nature. In similar fashion, the *Tanchuma* continues to focus on the miraculous dimension: "Say not [only] the curtains, but even the boards were miraculous work."

The tradition brought in the *Tanchuma* regarding the boards of the *Mishkan* and the middle bar links them to the *arazim* planted by Ya’akov and his sons when they go down to Egypt. This idea appears first in *Midrash Shir Ha-shirim*:[[6]](#footnote-6)

"And Yisrael took his journey with all that he had, and came to Be’er Sheva" (*Bereishit* 46:1).

Where did he go?

Rav Nachman said: He went to cut down the *arazim* that Avraham our forefather planted in Beer-Sheva.

This is what is stated: "And Avraham planted an *eshel* in Beer-Sheva" (*Bereishit* 21:33).

It is written: "And the middle bar in the midst of the boards" (*Shemot* 26:28).

Rabbi Levi said: The middle bar was thirty-two cubits long.

Where did they find it at that time?

This teaches that is was hidden away by them from the days of Ya’akov our forefather.

This is what is stated: "And every man, with whom was found *atzei shittim*" (*Shemot* 35:24).

It is not written here: "with whom will be found," but rather: "with whom was found." (*Midrash Shir Ha-shirim Rabba* 1, 12)

In *Shir Ha-shirim Rabba,* Avraham is engaged in planting *arazim*, though the purpose for which the *arazim* are being planted is not explicitly stated. In the *Tanchuma,* Yaakov instructs his sons to plant trees so that they will be available for the building of the *Mishkan.* Another difference between the two sources is that what appears in *Shir Ha-shirim Rabba* is a *derasha*, in contrast to the more developed narrative element in the *Tanchuma*, which gives expression to the involvement and mobilization of the members of Yaakov's family in the preparations made for the building of the *Mishkan* in days of old. The miraculous element in the *arazim* appears in the continuation, in the song intoned by the boards waiting for the *Mishkan* to be built: "Furthermore, these *arazim* intoned a song… And they said: When will the *Mishkan* be erected?" The song of the *arazim* gives voice to the yearning implanted in nature for the reality of a Temple.

The miraculous dimension of the *techashim* and the *atzei shittim* is not related to the role they play in the *Mishkan*, as we saw above regarding the ten miracles of the Temple, but to the raw materials themselves. We may summarize by saying that the theme of the miracles in the *Mishkan* expands and takes on a more general meaning in the late Midrash.

This trend continues in the printed *Midrash Tanchuma*, where we find a miracle of a different type:

Rabbi Yehuda bar Shalom said:

Moshe said before the Holy One, blessed be He:

Master of the world, You told me to build an altar of *atzei shittim* and plate it with copper.

And you said to me: "Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually" (*Vayikra* 6:6).

Will not the fire melt the plating and burn the wood?

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: Moshe, these qualities are found by you [mortals].

[You think] perhaps [also] by Me?

Look at the angels who are flaming fire, yet I have many treasuries of snow and hail.

As it is stated: "Have you entered the treasuries of the snow, or have you seen the treasuries of the hail" (*Iyov* 38:22).

And similarly it is stated: "Who lays the beams of Your upper chambers in the waters" (*Tehillim* 104:3).

And so too the beasts are of fire, and the firmament above their heads is of water.

As it is stated: "As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like coals of fire, burning like the appearance of torches; it flashed up and down among the living creatures" (*Yechezkel* 1:13). And it is written: "And over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, like the color of the terrible ice, stretched forth over their heads above" (*Yechezkel* 1:22). And they stand bearing that entire body of water, the thickness of the firmament being a journey of five hundred years, and they too are a great body of fire, and they stand from firmament to firmament, and between firmament and firmament is a journey of five hundred years.

Rabbi Berekhya said in the name of Rabbi Chelbo who said in the name of Rabbi Abba:

Even the hooves of the beasts were a journey of four hundred years, and they all bear fire in a firmament that is entirely of water.

And the fire burns not the water, nor does the water extinguish the fire.

Why? “He makes peace in His heights” (*Iyov* 25:2).

And because I said to you: "Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually," you are afraid that the wood will be burnt?

The dead enter before Me, and emerge alive. This is the rod of Aharon: "And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moshe went into the tent of the testimony; and, behold, the rod of Aharon for the house of Levi was budded, and put forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and bore ripe almonds" (*Bamidbar* 17:23).

The *arazim* that King Chiram of Tzor sent to Shelomo for the work of the Temple sensed the Life of the World and thrived.

Rabbi Levi said:  
When Shelomo brought the Ark inside the Temple, all the trees and the *arazim* that were there thrived and gave fruit, as it is stated: "Planted in the house of the Lord, they shall flourish in the courts of our God" (*Tehillim* 92:14).

And they went and produced fruit, and they provided a great livelihood to the young priests.

Until Menasheh brought the image into the Holy of Holies, and the *Shekhina* departed, and the fruit dried up. As it is stated: "And the flower of Lebanon languishes" (*Nachum* 1:4).

And here the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: The staves that you fashioned for the Ark will lengthen after eighty-four years. As it is stated: "And the staves were so long that the ends of the staves were seen from the holy place" (I *Melakhim* 8:8).

The dead enter before Me and emerge alive, and you are afraid that the wood of the altar will be burnt?

They are made for My glory.

Who commanded the fire to burn?

Learn from yourself. When you entered within the barricades of fire and walked among the troops [of angels], you should have burned. And even more so when you approached Me. As it is stated: "But Moshe drew near to the thick darkness where God was" (*Shemot* 20:17). And I am a devouring fire, as it is stated: "For the Lord your God is a devouring fire" (*Devarim* 4:24). You should have been burnt. Why so? Because you came up to Me.

And similarly the whole burnt-offering Altar, even though it is written about it: "Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually," neither the copper will melt, nor will the wood burn. (*Midrash Tanchuma*, *Teruma* 11)

The Midrash presents Moshe as one who fears that the copper plating on the Altar will not stand up to fire. God teaches Moshe that the laws governing the Temple are the heavenly laws and that the ordinary laws of nature do not apply. Moshe himself became aware of this reality when he ascended on high to receive the Torah.

Three of the sources discussed here refer to miraculous work associated with the plant world: the *Bavli* — the flowers of gold that produce fruit; *Tanchuma* (Buber) — trees that intone song and wait for the time of the building of the *Mishkan*; *Tanchuma* (printed) — production of fruit and lengthening of the staves.

Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary…Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof. Let the field exult; and all that is therein; then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy. (*Tehillim* 96:6-12)

In the world of the Temple, nature is not closed within itself, nor is it mute. The connection to the Life of the World brings all of reality to new levels of living.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. The Ramban sees the erection of the *Mishkan* as a continuation of the revelation at Mount Sinai. See his comments at the beginning of *Parashat Teruma*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We discussed the framework of ten matters in this chapter of the Mishna in our *shiur* for *Parashat Va'era*. For an explanation of each of the ten things brought in this Mishna, see the *Mirkevet Ha-mishneh* commentary of Rabbi Yosef Alashkar (ad loc.). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, Version 1, Chapter 35:

   Ten miracles were performed for our forefathers in Jerusalem: No woman miscarried from the odor of the holy [sacrificial] flesh; no one was injured in Jerusalem; no one ever stumbled in Jerusalem; a fire never broke out in Jerusalem; a building never collapsed in Jerusalem; no one ever said to his fellow: I did not find an oven in which to roast my paschal offering in Jerusalem; no one ever said to his fellow: I did not find a bed on which to sleep in Jerusalem; no one ever said to his fellow: The place is too crowded for me to lodge overnight in Jerusalem.

   The miracles expand beyond the confines of the Temple to the pilgrims arriving in Jerusalem. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The same applies to the Garden of Eden; see, for example, the interpretation given to the garments of skins in which God clothes Adam and Chava (*Bereishit* 3:21) in *Bereishit Rabba* 20, 13. Compare this with the passage from *Yoma* cited above, where the world of the Temple is described as a unit contained within itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Another version of this controversy appears in *Kohelet Rabba* (1, 1), where the word *techashim* appears as a description of the skins, and not as a type of beast. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This Midrash is generally dated prior to the *Tanchuma* literature. In a Yemenite manuscript and in the first edition of *Bereishit Rabba*, we find a parallel *derasha*. It would appear that it was copied at some later stage from the *Tanchuma* under discussion to *Bereishit Rabba* on the verse: "And Yisrael took his journey with all that he had, and came to Be’er Sheva" (46:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)