YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

**PARASHAT TERUMA**

**SICHA OF HARAV MOSHEH LICHTENSTEIN**

The Source of the Temple’s Sanctity

Summarized by Binyamin Frankel

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At the center of our *parasha* is the command to build the *Mishkan*. According to Ramban, the *Mishkan* is a fundamental, essential element in the service of God. As he writes (*Shemot* 25:1):

"When God spoke with Israel face to face, conveying the Ten Commandments, and commanded them – via Moshe – some of the laws which are like main headings of the laws of the Torah, as our rabbis would teach proselytes seeking to convert to Judaism; and when Israel agreed to do all that they would be commanded via Moshe, and God forged a covenant with them over all of this, from that point onwards they would be His people and He would be their God, as He had stipulated from the outset – 'And now, if you will diligently obey Me and observe My covenant, then you will be special for Me' (19:5), and He said, 'And you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (19:6) – thus they were holy and worthy of having a Sanctuary in their midst, that His Presence might reside among them. Therefore God commanded the matter of the *Mishkan* at the outset, so that He would have a house in their midst that was sanctified to His Name, and there He would speak with Moshe and command Bnei Yisrael. And the crux of the purpose of the *Mishkan* is the place where the Divine Presence rests; this is the Ark, as it is written (25:22), 'And I shall meet with you there, and I shall speak with you from above the covering….'"

Ramban seeks to place the *Mishkan* – or, later on, the Temple – at the center of Jewish consciousness. Following the destruction of the Temple, there are two main ways of inculcating this concept. The first way, to which all authorities agree, is through national memory. This comprises both positive elements – such as reciting the order of the Kohen Gadol's service in the Temple on Yom Kippur, and negative elements – for example, the section of the Yom Kippur prayers that follows, with its mourning over the fact that the glorious and holy service can no longer be performed, or the lamentations on Tish'a be-Av, etc. Three times each day we plead, "Let our eyes behold Your return to Zion in mercy", and the Temple is mentioned very often on different occasions in Jewish life.

The second way is more complex, and this is the subject of our present discussion. Technically speaking, since the time of the Destruction, Am Yisrael follows an alternative path of Divine service – that of prayer: "We will offer [the words of] our mouths instead of calves" (*Hoshea* 14:3). Am Yisrael moves to the "miniature Temple" – the synagogue with its set prayer service – as an alternative "direct route" to God, instead of the idea of "They shall pray to God towards the city which You have chosen, and the house that I have built for Your Name" (*Melakhim* I 8:44).

During my studies at the Hebrew University, I used to pray *mincha* at the synagogue on campus. The architect, seeking to make the most of the university's location, had placed a panoramic window looking out onto the Temple Mount. It took some time before I realized what it was that disturbed me when I prayed there: in order to accommodate this impressive view, the Aron Kodesh had been located unobtrusively on the side, leaving the Temple Mount as the center of attention.

It is important that we keep in mind that in the absence of the Temple, there is little point in looking out over the "Mount." Other than the Rambam, most authorities attach no intrinsic holiness to the Temple Mount itself, where "foxes roam" (*Eikha* 5:18) and trees grow, despite the Torah prohibition (*Hilkhot Beit Ha-Bechira*, chapter 1).

The Tosafot on *Kiddushin* 31b question the opening words of chapter 79 of *Tehillim*: "A psalm (or 'song' – *mizmor*) of Asaf: God, heathen nations have entered Your inheritance…." How can this be introduced as a "song"? Should it not rather be called a "dirge of Asaf"? The answer that the Tosafot offer is that the "song" is indeed appropriate, "for He exhausted His fury on wood and stones" (such that the Temple was destroyed, but Am Yisrael was not annihilated). The Temple retains no holiness without the Divine Presence, which was exiled together with the nation.

Commenting on the verse, "Draw out and take for yourselves lambs" (*Shemot* 12:21), the *Meshekh Chokhma* comments:

"The foundation of the sanctity of the holy places does not stem from religion, but rather from the nation and from their historical roots. For example, Mount Moriah[’s significance stems from the fact that] man was created there (*Sanhedrin* 38b), and it was there that Avraham bound Yitzchak as a sacrifice (*Bereishit* 22), and it was chosen by a prophet. Religious sources [do not single out Mt. Moriah, but rather] say merely, "the place which God shall choose." Similarly, Mount Sinai is the place where the Torah itself was given – but once the Divine Presence left, even animals could ascend (*Shemot* 19). For our religious feeling should not be misled into association with any image. Jerusalem, and all of Eretz Yisrael, and Mount Moriah, are built upon their relation to our forefathers, the roots of our faith, and the unification of our faith with its source, such that all religious emotion should be solely for the unity of the nation. This is a profound idea, beyond the scope of the present discussion."

Nevertheless, the *Meshekh Chokhma* does go on to elaborate, in his commentary on *parashat Ki Tisa* (32:19), where Moshe casts down the Tablets:

"Do not imagine that the Temple and the *Mishkan* are holy in and of themselves, heaven forefend. God dwells among His children, and if ‘they, like men, have violated the covenant’ (*Hoshea* 6), then all holiness is removed from them, and they are like any profane objects – ‘Robbers have entered and profaned it’ (*Nedarim* 62a). Titus entered the Holy of Holies with a prostitute, and he emerged unharmed (*Gittin* 56b), for its holiness had been removed. Moreover, even the Tablets, ‘inscribed by God,’ are not holy in and of themselves, but rather only for you. Thus, when the bride prostituted herself under the very wedding canopy (a metaphor for Bnei Yisrael's sin with the golden calf), they [the Tablets] became nothing more than clay shards, with no holiness of their own; they are holy only for you, that you may observe what is written on them. Ultimately, there is nothing in the world that is intrinsically holy, worthy of service and submission; only God Himself, and only He is worthy of praise and worship. Everything else that is holy is so because of God's command to build a *Mishkan*, to offer sacrifices to God."

Objects have no holiness in their own right; even the Tablets themselves are holy only "for you, that you may observe what is written on them."

A similar idea is expressed by Rabbi Mordekhai Ilan *zt"l*, who writes in the introduction to his book, *Torat ha-Kodesh* (part II):

"There are two fundamental concepts that are mentioned in relation to the *Mikdash*, and they are choice and holiness… [and] they are also mentioned in relation to *Am Yisrael* and its inner core of sanctity, which together represent the power behind the nation's eternal existence… And whereas concerning the sanctity of the Temple we read, ‘Robbers have entered and profaned it’ – concerning which the *Rishonim* are divided as to whether it refers to hostile forces from without or from within *Am Yisrael*…, no invasion of the spiritual life of *Am Yisrael* will violate the nation's inner sanctuary. The resilience of its purity is revealed specifically when there are attempts to undermine its essence. Then there is a shedding of the outer shell, which casts a shadow on its true identity, and the true, genuine essence of Israel is revealed as a holy nation, precious beyond gold."

In *siman* 1:1 we find:

"It is clear from the words of the Ridbaz that the Levite camp is not considered part of the Temple … for the name ‘*Mikdash’* applies only to the Camp of the *Shekhina*. So too in *Hilkhot Beit Ha-Bechira* 7:4 with regard to awe of the Temple, it is clear that the law does not apply to the Temple Mount (which is equivalent to the Levite camp, as I explained). The Meiri (*Yevamot* 6b) said that ‘awe of the Temple’ applies to the Temple Mount only by a rabbinic ruling, for essentially the Levite camp is not included of the mitzva of ‘You shall have reverence for My Temple.’"

The synagogue is the vessel through which a Jew is meant, in our times, to build his spiritual world and his relationship with God. The importance of the Western Wall (Kotel) arises not from its architectural role as a supporting wall of the Temple structure, as some Jews who visit the Temple Mount scoff, but rather as the largest and most active synagogue in the world – a place where millions of people, over the generations, have poured out their hearts to God.

As to visiting the Temple Mount itself: aside from the halakhic problems involved, which are not in any way insignificant, I wish to mention two additional objections.

The first is the transformation of the Temple Mount into a sectorial matter. I have mentioned this problem in the past, but no one seems to be addressing the issue. As in the case of the ideal of settling Eretz Yisrael, the National-Religious public is in danger of turning "the Temple Mount" into a term almost synonymous with "settlement." The Temple Mount may, heaven forefend, come to be viewed as a messianic, lunatic, unreal place. The National-Religious public must understand that if "the Temple Mount is in our hands," the rest of the nation will stop feeling that "the Temple Mount is in our hearts," and that is a far more serious situation. The moment that the secular public in Israel feels that the Temple Mount has become something alien and threatening, the political results will not be long in coming.

There are those who argue that the secular public is alienated in any case; others will claim that the importance of maintaining the Temple Mount overrides these considerations. Nevertheless, I believe that most secular Israelis still maintain some sort of connection with their Jewish faith. The connection that they feel towards Eretz Yisrael has long dissipated, owing to the appropriation of the ideology of the "Greater Eretz Yisrael" by a small, well-delineated sector. It is therefore preferable, with all the real pain that this entails, that the Temple Mount remain in the category of those concepts pertaining to the Messianic era, rather than erasing it in the present from the hearts of Am Yisrael.

The National-Religious public must also understand the geo-political implications of any action pertaining to the Temple Mount, and re-examine its policy. Rabbi Akiva Eiger wrote to the Chatam Sofer, asking that he reinstitute the Pesach sacrifice on the Temple Mount when he visited there. The Chatam Sofer responded (Responsa Chatam Sofer, *Yoreh De'a* 136), that the "Ishmaelites" would not permit this.

Secondly, there are currently problems inherent in the experience of visiting the Temple Mount. A religious Jew who stands on the Temple Mount and, seeking to recite a chapter of *Tehillim*, is forced to mumble under his breath without moving his lips, experiences a blow to all that is dear to him. When visiting the Temple Mount demands such a heavy psychological price, "the affliction is not worth the king's damage."

In addition, and as mentioned above, the Temple Mount is not the proper path for Divine service in our time. God has chosen the alternative of prayer in our synagogues, and this is the proper way to serve Him.

(This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *parashat Teruma* 5769 [2009].