**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 BARUCH GIGI SHLIT”A**

“I Shall Build a *Mishkan* in My Heart”

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Rashi and Ramban disagree as to the role of the *Mishkan* and the sacrifices. Their respective views appeared earlier in the midrash on this week's *parasha*.

"The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: I have given over My Torah to you; it is as though I Myself have been given over together with it, as it is written, 'Let them take Me a contribution…'.

This may be compared to a king who had an only daughter. A foreign monarch came and asked her hand in marriage. When he sought to return to his own country, taking his wife with him, the king said to him: My daughter, whom I have given to you, is my only one. I cannot part from her; at the same time, I cannot tell you not to take her, for she is your wife. Do me this favor, then: wherever you go, make a small cabin for me, that I may live with you, for I cannot surrender my daughter.

In the same way, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: I have given you the Torah. I cannot part from it, nor can I tell you not to take it. So wherever you go, make Me a house, that I may dwell in it – as it is written, 'Let them make Me a *Mikdash*…'" (*Shemot* *Rabba*, Teruma, *parasha* 33.)

According to this view, the *Mishkan* serves a positive purpose: God seeks a place where He can cause His Name to rest, somewhere close to the Torah and *Am Yisrael*. Ramban, who maintains that the *parashot* here follow the chronological order, likewise understands the command concerning the *Mishkan* as having followed directly after the giving of the Torah and the "covenant of the basins,” as recorded in the *parashot* of Yitro and Mishpatim.

Assuming this perspective, what are we to make of God's command to construct a *Mishkan* at this particular point in time? The answer would seem to lie in the profound transition that came about at the Revelation at Sinai. Prior to that point, God had appeared in the clearest and most manifest way, in the miracles of the ten plagues and the splitting of the Reed Sea. At Sinai, however, the relationship between God and Israel moves to a different level. The bond becomes more personal, more intimate, and as such God's revelation accordingly shifts to a more private, concealed place.

Rashi adopts a different view. He maintains that the *parashot* do not record the events in their chronological order, and that the entire issue of the *Mishkan* arose only after the sin of the golden calf, and as a direct result of it. Had it not been for that sin, it is quite possible that there never would have been a *Mishkan* at all. Its entire essence and purpose, according to Rashi, is an atonement for the golden calf. Rashi's view, too, has its roots in the midrash cited above, which continues as follows:

"A different opinion:… 'Even from the rebellious ones' (*Tehillim* 68:19) – the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: Concerning that which the idolaters claim – that I will not return to be with *Bnei Yisrael* because they worshipped idolatry, as it is written (*Devarim* 9), 'They have turned away quickly…' – even though they are rebellious, I will not abandon them, and I will dwell with them, as it is written, 'Even the rebellious ones, that the Lord God might dwell [there].'"[[1]](#footnote-1)

This does not depict the *Mishkan* as "*lekhat'chila*" – i.e., the original ideal; rather, the situation is altogether "*bedi'avad*" – an "after the fact" acceptance of reality. This midrash suggests that God would have preferred for there to be no *Mishkan*; we might even say that the *Mishkan* was not part of His original plan. The sins of *Bnei Yisrael* brought about a certain reality, with a need for "*tikkun*" (repair) that included also a *Mishkan*.

Personal expression in the service of God

Ramban's interpretation seems simpler and more likely. Beyond the logic indicating that the Mishkan is indeed what God wants, his view also sits better with the plain reading of the text, with no need to rearrange the *parashot*.

Why, then, does Rashi adopt his own view? Why does he feel the need to interpret the situation in a way that does not conform with the plain reading, and thereby to turn the entire phenomenon of the *Mishkan* into an accommodation of reality rather than an ideal?

Like Rashi, the Rambam in his *Moreh Nevukhim* argues that the sacrifices are commanded as a result of the sin of the golden calf. His view is based on the gap between the ideal reality and the real world. The original, supreme aim had been that *Bnei Yisrael* would attain faith in God through purely spiritual means and activity. This is what the Revelation at Sinai should have brought about. But in the real world it became apparent that the nation needed some tangible, material guideposts. This need caused them to create the golden calf – the same calf that returns in the form of the molten image of Mikha, and in the two golden statues set up by Yerav'am. This gap between the original spiritual ideal and the actual need for physicality, produced a sort of compromise: Divine service in the form of sacrifice. The *Mishkan* is a tangible expression of God, in accordance with His command.

However, it would seem that this is not what Rashi means. Even Rashi agrees that the verses at the end of *parashat Yitro*, concerning the altar of stones, were uttered immediately after the giving of the Torah, prior to the sin of the golden calf:

"God said to Moshe, So shall you say to *Bnei Yisrael*: You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make with Me gods of silver, neither shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. An altar of earth shall you make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings, your sheep and your oxen, in all places where I cause My Name to be pronounced, I will come to you and I will bless you. And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone, for it you lift up your sword over it, you have defiled it. Neither shall you go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness shall not be exposed on it." (*Shemot* 20:19-22)

This prompts the question: if the altar and sacrifices were commanded already prior to the sin of the golden calf, then what changed as a result of that episode, necessitating a *Mishkan* which (in Rashi's view) had not been necessary previously?

To answer this question we must take a closer look at the above verses, from the end of *parashat Yitro*, which are formulated in the singular. In Rashi's view, the ideal reality is one where individuals build *'bamot'* – private altars, built wherever and however a person chooses. Each individual would be free to express himself freely in his Divine service, building altars of any shape and size and in any location, and offering sacrifices in accordance with his own desire. It is this sort of reality that is described by the prophet Malakhi, with regard to the relationship of the other nations to God:

"For from the rising of the sun until it goes down, My Name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is burned to My Name and pure offerings, for My Name is great among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts." (*Malakhi* 1:11)

This was meant to be the reality amongst Bnei Yisrael, too, until the sin of the golden calf. This sin showed that personal expression may lead to sin – bordering even on idolatry. Hence it became necessary to unify all the *bamot* and focus Divine service in one central location, with a fixed schedule of clearly-defined public sacrifices, and detailed laws concerning private offerings.

Although the personal style of expression in Divine service was for all practical purposes set aside, there is still importance to self-expression and there are still commandments in which this aspect is manifest. Perhaps the clearest example is the mitzva of the *sukka*.

The Gemara (*Sukka* 9a) discusses the sanctity of the wood of the *sukka*. Other than Torah scrolls, *tefillin*, and *mezuzot*, this is the only other mitzva I know of where the object has its own intrinsic sanctity. And yet the form of the *sukka*, and the amount one uses it, are decided upon by each individual. Every person has his own experiences, different from those of his fellow, and in the mitzva of *sukka* this individuality has a chance to be expressed in the strongest possible way.

Prayer is another area in which there is personal expression. Reviewing the prayer text one is struck by how the words of *Chazal*, formulated so many generations ago, remain so vitally relevant. Nevertheless, there are elements that are relevant specifically to our times, and a person may mention these in his personal prayers. I once heard a rabbi talking about expressing personally relevant aspects of the various blessings in one's *Amida* prayer. His suggestion was that all such personal additions be inserted together, right at the end of the Amida, just before the concluding "*yehi ratzon*,” so as not to interrupt or change in any way the prayer formula as set forth by *Chazal*.

This troubled me. From his words it would seem that one's prayer consists of two parts: an antiquated, no-longer-relevant section which, out of excessive conservatism, we leave printed in the prayer book and part of our service; and a contemporary prayer, relevant to our lives here and now, where a person means every word that he says.

This cannot be. The entire *tefilla* must be relevant to us and connected to our lives. In each and every blessing we must voice those aspects of it that resound within us. Each of us has personal issues that occupy us: when we reach the blessing of wisdom, we are thinking about an exam in which we hope to succeed; when we recite the blessing of healing, we mention those we know who are ill, etc. Our own lives and our reality must be part of each blessing.

There is also another level – the communal or national level. I heard recently that Rav Medan adds, in his blessing for redemption, a prayer for deliverance from the Iranian threat. This is a personal prayer for a public good, or a public outcome. This represents a continuation of the *Mishkan* through prayer, as the verse teaches, "In my heart I shall build a *Mishkan*….”

The Midrash describes Moshe questioning how God can confine Himself within the four walls of the *Mishkan*. God replies that He will look to the world, and to man, for the model. The world, and man himself, express the confinement of God. God confines himself within physical dimensions – the human body, the size of the universe. This is the whole basis of *Kabbala*.

Another midrash talks about the parallel between the basic elements of the *Mishkan* – including the dyed threads of *tekhelet* and *argaman*, and the goat skins – and the human body. God constricts himself within the *Mishkan*, and within man. Similarly, Nechama Leibowitz offers a fascinating analysis of the precise parallel between the order of the building of the *Mishkan*, and the order of the creation of the world.

What emerges from these parallels is that God's Name finds its place in the *Mishkan*, in the world, and in man. The Divine Name that rests within man should find expression in the *sukka*, in prayer, and in every commandment that we perform.

(This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat parashat Teruma 5772 [2012].)

1. The same message is conveyed in other *midrashim*, some even more explicit in this regard. This particular midrash is cited here because of its juxtaposition to the one cited above. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)