YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #258: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (LXVIII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (XLV)**

We have seen that in the days of David, after he brought the ark up to Jerusalem, there were two centers of sanctity – the ark in the tent in the City of David manned by Asaf and his brothers the Levites, and the great *bama* in Giv'on where the *Mishkan* was found, and where the fixed service of the *Mishkan* was conducted. We wish to examine here what was David's attitude regarding these two centers of sanctity.

### The *Mishkan* – the site of the resting of the *Shekhina* and the site of the Service

We demonstrated in the past that in general there are two main focal points in the structure of the *Mishkan.* The first, more internal center is the ark in the Holy of Holies, which more than any other vessel expresses the site of the resting of the *Shekhina*. The second, more external center is the copper altar located in the courtyard, which more than any other vessel expresses the primary service of God, the sacrificial service, man's desire to serve God in His house.

### What is more important - THE SITE OF THE RESTING OF the *sHEKHINA* OR THE SITE OF THE SERVICE?

There is room to discuss the question whether or not one of the two focal points enjoys primacy over the other. Without a doubt, the Ramban sees the resting of the *Mishkan* as the objective of the *Mishkan*. He writes as follows:

The primary purpose of the *Mishkan* is [to serve as] the site of the resting of the *Shekhina* which is the ark, as it is stated: "And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the *kaporet*, from between the two *keruvim* which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel" (*Shemot* 25:22). Therefore the ark and the *kaporet* are discussed here first, as they enjoy the highest sanctity. (Ramban, *Shemot*  25:10)

For Moshe was first commanded about the *Mishkan* and its vessels, and the first *mitzva* was: "And you shall make an ark of Shittim wood" (*Shemot* 25:10), because it is the primary objective of the entire *Mishkan*, that God should sit upon the *keruvim*. (*Devarim* 10:11)

In contrast to the Ramban, the Rambam defines the *mitzva* of building a house for God, both in his *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* and in *Hilkhot Beit ha-Bechira*, as follows:

It is a positive commandment to construct a house for God, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within. We [must] celebrate there three times a year, as it is stated: "And you shall make Me a sanctuary" (*Hilkhot Beit ha-Bechira* 1:1).

The ark does not play a significant role in *Hilkhot Beit ha-Bekhira.* On the other hand, the altar is one of the most important vessels that the Rambam relates to. He writes as follows:

The altar is [to be constructed] in a very precise location, which may never be changed… (*Hilkhot Beit ha-Bechira* 2:1)

In *halakha* 2 he spells out the historical connection to Mount Moriya, through the building of altars on that site, from Adam, to Kayin and Hevel, to Noach, to Avraham, to the building of the Temple at that location.

Both the Ramban and the Rambam agree that the house of God contains within it the site of the resting of the *Shekhina* and also the site of the sacrificial service. The question is what we identify as the primary objective of the Temple.

### The absence of any connection between DAVID AND the GREAT *bAMA* IN GIV'ON

In the accounts of David's actions from the beginning of his reign over the tribe of Yehuda and until his death, there is not a single mention of David's going to the great public *bama* in Giv'on.

The only reference to the great *bama* is made after the offering of a sacrifice on the altar at the Yevusi threshing floor:

But the *Mishkan* of the Lord, which Moshe made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt-offering, were at that time in the high place at Giv'on. And David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was terrified because of the sword of the angel of the Lord. (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 21:29-30)

The verses speak of "inquiring God" and apparently refer in this context to the offering of sacrifices in the *Mishkan* on the burnt-offering altar at Giv'on. At that time, David was unable to go because he was terrified of the sword of the angel of God. But, as stated, at no other time do we find in the verses any mention whatsoever of David in Giv'on, offering there communal sacrifices. In all the years of his reign in Jerusalem, did David never go to offer sacrifices in Giv'on?

After bringing the ark up to City of David, David offers sacrifices in the City of David, next to the tent in which the ark was housed. But afterwards God tells David that he will not build the Temple, and thus the altar remained in Giv'on his entire life. This being the case, we might have expected that David would have gone to Giv'on at some point to offer sacrifices. Was he not able to go to Giv'on and offer sacrifices to God for his great victories? In any event there is no mention of him having done so.

### david's attitude toward the ark

I wish to suggest that from a spiritual perspective, David's world, a world of intense closeness to God and desire for Divine revelation,[[1]](#footnote-1) found expression in his attitude toward the ark, and not in his relationship with the burnt-offering altar in Giv'on and the offering of sacrifices there.

### 1. Bringing the ark up from Kiryat-Ye'arim to jerusalem

The timing of the transfer of the ark from Kiryat-Ye'arim to Jerusalem, immediately after David's consolidation of his power in Jerusalem and his victory over the Pelishtim in Emek Refa'im,[[2]](#footnote-2) indicates how significant this issue was for David. In essence this was David's first royal act following the consolidation of his kingdom in Jerusalem.

Another point, beyond the question of the timing, is the fact that neither the prophet Shemuel nor king Shaul showed particular interest in the ark before him:

And let us bring back the ark of our God to us: for we did not inquire at it in the days of Shaul. (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 13:3)

The first king who saw fit to initiate this move and formalize the relationship between the most important vessel for the resting of the *Shekhina* and the royal city was David. Therefore, this action and its timing attest to the supreme importance that David attached to it.

David's harsh reaction, while transporting the ark, to the death of Uzza, testifies to his great expectation to complete the task:

And David was displeased, because the Lord had burst out against Uzza: and he called the name of the place Peretz-Uzza to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? (II *Shemuel* 6:8-9)

### 2. the ark of God rests within a curtain

After transporting the ark to the City of David, David asks God for permission to build the Temple:

The king said to Natan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within curtain. (II *Shemuel* 7:2)

Beyond the correspondence between David's permanent palace and the temporary situation of the ark sitting within the curtain, David relates here to the ark as representing the entire Temple.

Since from David's perspective the ark was the most important vessel for the resting of the *Shekhina*, the ark sitting within the curtain represents the Temple's temporary state in contrast to David's permanent palace.

The simplest yet strongest proof from Scripture that David had set his eyes on building the entire Temple may be brought from God's words to Natan:

Go and tell My servant David, Thus says the Lord, shall you build Me a house for Me to dwell in? (II *Shemuel* 7:5)

The Divine understanding is that David sought to build a house for God to dwell in. At the same time, David formulates his request to build a Temple as follows: "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within curtain" (II *Shemuel* 7:2), because the ark is the most important part of the house.

### 3. Leaving the ark in the city of David during Avshalom's revolt

During Avshalom's revolt, David runs away from Jerusalem because he does not want to fight Avshalom at all, and certainly not in Jerusalem. Scripture describes the discussion between Tzadok and David whether the ark should go with David or remain in Jerusalem:

And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the wadi Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness. And lo Tzadok also came, and all the Levites with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God, and Evyatar went up, until all the people had finished passing out of the city. And the king said to Tzadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back, and show me both it, and His habitation: but if he thus says, I have no delight in you; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seems good in His eyes. (II *Shemuel* 15:23-26)

David refuses to allow the ark to continue with him. In that way, the ark would be, in a certain sense, subservient to the king; it would serve him, and help him in his flight.

Furthermore, David understands that the ark should be located in the royal city of Jerusalem, and that he must make it possible for the king ruling in Jerusalem to join his kingdom to the holy by way of the presence of the ark. He, therefore, leaves the ark in Jerusalem to express, on the one hand, the subjugation of human kingship to the kingship of God, and on the other hand, the eternal selection of Jerusalem.

David does not seize the kingship by force, and his decision with respect to the ark does not depend on his kingship, but on the city of the kingship of Israel, where it is fitting for the ark to be found.

### 4. "a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God"

In the chapters dealing with the Temple in *Divrei ha-Yamim*, David gathers together all the captains of Israel, the captains of the tribes and courses, the captains of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the captains of all royal property and livestock. He encourages and strengthens them with respect to the building of the Temple, while emphasizing the Divine selection of Shelomo. Afterwards he gives Shelomo all the details of the plan, the weights of the vessels, and the various patterns: "All this, said he, is put in writing by the hand of the Lord who instructed me, all the works of this pattern" (*I Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:19). He says as follows:

Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had it in my heart to build **a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God** (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:2)

The entire *Mikdash* is fundamentally designed to serve as a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

After the ark went out with Israel's journeys and battles, the time has come for it to reach its house of rest:[[3]](#footnote-3)

Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of tranquility; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Shelomo, and I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name; and he shall be My son, and I will be his father, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever. (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 22:9-10)

He who will build the house of God must be a man of peace, and the Temple itself, both the structure and the people who serve there, must be connected in their very essence to peace. Those who serve God do not fight wars, nor do they take a portion of the spoils, for God is their inheritance, and a priest who killed somebody is forbidden to raise his hands and recite the priestly blessing. Peace-offerings bring peace to the priests, to the owners of the offering, to the altar, and to the entire world.

Therefore, there is a deep connection between rest, stability, peace, and the possibility of building a house for God. This being the case, the great amount of blood that David shed made him ineligible to build it.

In David's statement that he is interested in building a house of rest for the ark, he defines the primary purpose of building such a house – that the entire house comes to provide rest to the ark. This understanding is reinforced by what David states later in the chapter:

Take heed now; for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it. (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:10)

"A house for the sanctuary" means a house for the ark. The purpose of the house is connected to bringing the ark inside it.[[4]](#footnote-4)

### 5. Bringing the ark into the holy of Holies in the days of Shelomo by the merit of his father David – according to *Chazal*

*Chazal* describe how the ark was brought up and into the Temple in the days of Shelomo:

What is meant by: "Show me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed" (*Tehilim* 86:17)? David prayed before the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the Universe! Forgive me for that sin! He said to him: It is forgiven to you. He said to Him: Show me a token in my lifetime. He answered: In your lifetime I will not make it known, but I will make it known in the lifetime of your son Shelomo. For when Shelomo built the Temple, he desired to take the ark into the Holy of Holies, whereupon the gates clave to each other. Shelomo uttered twenty-four prayers, yet he was not answered. He opened [his mouth] and exclaimed: "Lift up your heads, O gates; and be lifted up, everlasting doors: And the King of glory shall come in" (*Tehilim* 24:7). They rushed upon him to swallow him up, crying: "Who is the king of glory?" (*Tehilim* 24:8). He answered: "The Lord, strong and mighty" (*Tehilim* 24:8). Then he repeated: "Lift up your heads, O gates; lift them up, everlasting doors: and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. Sela" (*Tehilim* 24:9-10).

But as soon as he prayed: "O Lord God, turn not away the face of Your anointed, remember the good deeds of David Your servant" (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 6:42), he was immediately answered. In that hour the faces of all David's enemies turned [black] like the bottom of a pot, and all Israel knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, had forgiven him that sin. (*Shabbat* 30a)

It turns out that not only during his lifetime was David connected to the ark by every fiber of his body and soul, seeing in it the most important vessel for the resting of the *Shekhina*, but so too was this the case after his death. When Shelomo tries to bring the ark into the Holy of Holies, the gates cleave to each other. Shelomo prays, but is not answered, and he requires the help of David. As soon as he says: "Remember the good deeds of David Your servant," he is answered. *Chazal* attribute the bringing of the ark into the Holy of Holies to the merits of the good deeds of David.

### 6. "because the places to which the ark of the Lord has come are holy"

We have tried to show in this *shiur* that David chose to express his closeness to God primarily through his close and significant connection to the ark, when he brought the ark up from Kiryat-Yea'arim to the City of David at the beginning of his reign over all of Israel, and when he requested permission to build a house of rest for the ark.[[5]](#footnote-5)

From the way he fled from Avshalom and from the fact that he was not prepared to make use of the ark to strengthen his kingship, we learn that David saw an essential connection between the kingdom and the resting of the *Shekhina*.

To complete the picture, it should be noted that bringing the ark to the City of David impacted upon the way people related to the city itself. A verse in *Divrei ha-Yamim* relating to the actions of Shelomo states as follows:

And Shelomo brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the City of David to the house that he had built for her, for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David, king of Israel, because the places to which the ark of the Lord has come are holy. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 8:11)

The Radak (ad loc.) comments:

Even though the ark was only in one of the houses[[6]](#footnote-6) that was sanctified for it, nevertheless he considered all of the houses as holy, once the ark was brought in there.

And he said: My wife shall not dwell [there] from today, now that I have built her a house. And it was for this that he built her a house, so that she not dwell in a holy place. Nevertheless she dwelt there until the work on his house was finished. (Radak, II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 8:11, s.v. *ki kodesh hema*)

The implication is that in the days of Shelomo the City of David was considered as having greater sanctity, and that all the houses surrounding the place where the ark was found were considered holy owing to the presence of the ark. For this reason, from the moment that Shelomo built a house for the daughter of Pharoah in the Milo (the area of the king's house), he removed her from there.

The transfer of the ark to the City of David, over and beyond the singing and guarding of the Levites that was carried out there every day, impacted upon the entire area, which was now considered as holy. This action deeply expressed David's close connection to the resting of the *Shekhina*, and his consistent and fundamental treatment of the ark as the most important vessel expressing that resting of the *Shekhina.*

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Which finds expression the entire length of the book of *Tehilim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to the order of the verses in *Divrei ha-Yamim*, this was even part of David's initial consolidation of power. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. We expanded in the past upon the essential connection between building the Temple and rest, both with respect to the time – the Temple can only be built after Israel has rested from its wars with its enemies – and with respect to the builder. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In *Bemidbar* 10:21, the Kehati family who carried the ark and the other holy vessels are referred to as "bearing the sanctuary." [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. According to our understanding, David saw the entire Temple as a house for the ark. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As we know, the ark was located in a tent under curtains, and not in a real house. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)