YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #266: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (LXXVI) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LIII)**

At one point we began to examine King David's attitude toward the worship of God as it finds expression in the book of *Tehilim*. In the last few *shiurim* we dealt at length with the issue of prostration. It was first noted that this action is mentioned many times in the book of *Tehilim*. After examining prostration in the rest of the Bible, we tried to understand its spiritual meaning, we studied the prohibition against prostration on a figured stone, and we considered the place of prostration in the Temple service.

A comprehensive examination of prostration accounts for the fact that it is mentioned so often in connection with David, as it gives profound expression to David's attitude as he stood before God.

In this *shiur* we will go back to the book of *Tehilim* and describe additional expressions of David's service of God.

### The yearnings for A house of God in the book of *Shemuel*

In our *shiurim* on Jerusalem,[[1]](#footnote-1) we discussed at length David's aspiration and yearnings to build a house for God already from the beginning of his reign.

The book of *Shemuel* describes the order of events after David was crowned as king over all of Israel and after his conquest of Jerusalem as follows:

Transporting the ark to Jerusalem, an act that clearly symbolized King David's desire from the very beginning of his reign that the primary vessel for the resting of the *Shekhina* should be in Jerusalem, in order to give expression to the deep connection between the kingdom and the Temple.

When David leaves the city during Avshalom's rebellion, his leaving the ark in Jerusalem expressed his determination that the location of the ark is in Jerusalem.

After moving the ark to Jerusalem, David seeks permission to actually build the Temple, but God answers him in the negative.

### In the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim*

I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 28 describes at length how the site of the *Mikdash* was located. After the census and the acquisition of the site from Aravna the Yevusi, David made all the possible preparations for the building of the Temple.

David prepared the building materials, the building plans, the craftsmen who would actually build the Temple, and even the *mishmarot* and *ma'amadot* of priests and Levites who were to serve in the Temple following its construction.

*Chazal* note that in the "Psalm and song of the dedication of the house of David" (*Tehilim* 30), there is no mention of Shelomo, but only of David, who devoted his life to the matter, and therefore the finished product is called by his name.

### In the book of *Tehilim*

Let us now consider David's yearnings to build the Temple as they find expression in many of the psalms in the book of *Tehilim*:

Psalm 84:

How lovely are your dwelling places, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed, it faints for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God… Happy are they who dwell in Your house; they are ever praising You. (Sela)… For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand, I had rather be at the threshold in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness. (*Tehilim* 84)

The yearnings are both for the courts of God and also to sit and dwell in His house. This is the supreme expression of David's desire for the closeness of God.

It would appear that Psalm 5 was originally meant to be recited as a morning prayer by those who came to pray in the Temple, corresponding to the daily offering brought in the morning.[[2]](#footnote-2)

At this time, the God-fearing man accepts upon himself the yoke of God's kingdom, thanks God for his lot, that he merited to be among those who have come to God's house, and asks God to strengthen him so that he continue to follow in the good path. About this the psalm states:

Hearken to the voice of my cry, my king, and my God: for to You I will pray. My voice shall You hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct my prayer to You, and will wait expectantly… But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your love; and in the fear of You I will prostrate myself towards Your holy Temple. (*Tehilim* 5)

It is interesting that it is the customary practice today to recite the last verse upon entering a synagogue. A very interesting parallelism is created here between the synagogue and the Temple. King David who asks to come to the house of God sees Himself arriving at God's house and praying toward the Temple.

### "WHo shall abide in your tent? WHo shall dwell in YOur Holy Hill?" "And I will dwell in the House of the Lord"

According to some, *Tehilim* 15 was meant to be recited by those arriving at the Temple on the pilgrim festivals. When the pilgrims reach the limits of the Holy City and of the Temple they ask the priests or the Torah sages: Who is the man who is eligible to dwell in the holy place?

According to this understanding, the words, "Who shall abide in your tent? Who shall dwell in Your holy hill" (*Tehilim* 15:1), refer to the time during which those arriving in Jerusalem for the pilgrim festivals are found in the city.

The verse might have a broader meaning. The Torah in the book of *Devarim* says in connection to the offering of sacrifices: "And you shall turn in the morning, and go to your tents" (*Devarim* 16:7).

The *Sifre* (ad loc.) explains that one who offers a sacrifice is obligated to spend the night in Jerusalem after offering his sacrifice and may only return home the next morning. Based on this it may be suggested that those arriving in Jerusalem on Sukkot and on Pesach would remain in Jerusalem for the duration of the festival and only afterwards would they return home.

According to this understanding, the terms "Your tent" and "Your holy mountain" refer not to the Temple itself, but to the entire city of Jerusalem.

Twice in the words of *Chazal* (and so too the view of the Rambam in his commentary to the Mishna, *Rosh Hashana* 4:1), all of Jerusalem is referred to as the Temple. The aforementioned psalm sets a number of conditions on going up to the Temple: walking uprightly, acting justly, speaking the truth in his heart, and not slandering with his tongue. These are all elementary moral behaviors that are required of anyone who wishes to come to the house of God.

When David asks the question, "Who shall abide in your tent? Who shall dwell in Your holy hill," he sees before him people whose moral state allows them to come to the house of God.

There is also another understanding. It is difficult to assume that the terms "abide" and "dwell" refer only to the period of the festivals themselves, but rather they must have a broader meaning.

From the words "abide" and "dwell" we might have understood that a person does not intend to abide, literally, in the tent of the Lord for an extended period of time, or to dwell, literally, in the Temple. What is more, we find expressions with similar meanings in other psalms in the book of *Tehilim*. Thus in Psalm 61 where the speaker turns to God in prayer and asks Him to be his shelter. There he continues: "I will abide in Your tent forever; I will trust in the covert of Your wings. Sela." (*Tehilim* 61:5).

It would appear that here too the psalmist is not asking to dwell in God's tent forever, but rather that he should merit God's closeness and protection, as if he were in the house of God, encountering His face at all times, and being concealed in His shade from all his enemies.

Psalm 23 describes in general terms the happiness of a man who feels that God is with him, protecting him from all evil, and that he is being supported at God's table as if he were a guest in His house. Expression is given here to special closeness to God, and the words, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord," allude to God's special protection of the God-fearing man, as if he were at all times in the house of God and His *Shekhina* were resting upon him.

Another explanation is that the psalmist is asking to come frequently to the Temple or to be one of those serving all their days in the Temple.

### "To behold the beauty of the Lord" "As I have seen you in the sanctuary"

In Psalm 27 King David says:

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His Temple. (*Tehilim* 27:4)

Does this mean that he is praying that he should be allowed all the days of his life to visit the house of the Lord or to serve there? If so, the term *yeshiva* should not be understood literally, but rather that he should be granted the possibility of spending an extended period of time in the Temple or that he merit being sheltered by God all the days of his life, being close to Him and clinging to Him.

The expression, "to behold the beauty of the Lord," means to go up to the Temple and see the face of God.

According to this understanding, "the beauty of the Lord," refers to the beauty, the splendor, the majesty, the glory that issue from the Lord when He shines His face upon those who fear Him.

The matter of seeing the face of the Lord appears in other psalms as well. In Psalm 63 reference is made to a thirst to see God, "To see Your power and Your glory, as I have seen You in the sanctuary" (*Tehilim* 63:3). So too in Psalm 16: "You will make known to me the path of life: in Your presence is fullness of joy: at Your right hand are pleasures for evermore" (*Tehilim* 16:11) and in Psalm 17: "As for me, I will behold Your face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I am awake, with beholding Your likeness" (*Tehilim* 17:15).[[3]](#footnote-3)

### "And to inquire in his temple"

Let us go back to the psalm mentioned earlier: "To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire (*levaker*) in His Temple" (*Tehilim* 27:4). What is the meaning of "inquiring in His Temple"? The word *levaker* does not seem to mean "to visit," its meaning in Modern Hebrew.

Rashi (ad loc.) explains as follows:

"And to inquire (*le-vaker*) in His Temple" – to be seen there every morning; so explains Dunash. And Menachem connects it to: "He shall not search (*yevaker*) whether it be good or bad" (*Vayikra* 27:33), but Dunash explains it in the sense of morning (*boker*). (*Tehilim* 27:4)

According to Menachem ben Saruk, the meaning of the verse in *Vayikra* is that one shall not distinguish between a good animal and a bad one. From here, *levaker be-heikhalo* is derived from the root *bet-kuf-resh*, meaning distinguish, search, as in *Vayikra* 19:20:

And whoever lies carnally with a woman, that is a bondmaid, designated to a man, and not wholly redeemed, nor freedom given her; inquiry (*bikoret*) shall be made; they shall not be put to death, because she was not free.

There the word is derived from the root *bet-kuf-resh*, which in the *pi'el* conjugation denotes searching.

Thus we find again in *Vayikra* 13:36: "The priest shall not seek (*yevaker*) for yellow hair; he is unclean." Here once again the word denotes searching and inquiring.

We find this also in *Yechezkel* 34:11: "For thus says the Lord God; Behold, I will both search My sheep, and seek them out (*u-vikartim*)." This is an expression of loving and positive concern for the fate of the sheep. Therefore the prophet continues:

As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are strayed; so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been dispersed in the cloudy and dark day. (*Yechezkel* 34:12)

Like the good shepherd who searches for his sheep and worries about the animals that have strayed from the flock.

According to this King David is asking to inquire at the Temple and to seek there the closeness of God.

Another point: The term *bikkur cholim*, generally translated as "visiting the sick," denotes inquiring about and showing concern for the needs of the patient.

### "in the covert of His tent He shall hide me"

Psalm 27 continues:

For in the day of evil he shall hide me in His pavilion (*be-sukko*): in the covert of His tent (*ohalo*) He shall hide me; He shall set me up upon a rock. (*Tehilim* 27:5)

Here too there is a request to find shelter in God's shade, that God should protect him from his enemies in His tent and pavilion.

The word *sukka* sometimes alludes to the Temple, as we find in *Tehilim* 76:3: "In Shalem also is His tabernacle (*sukko*), and His dwelling place is in Zion"; and in *Eikha* 2:6: "And He has stripped His tabernacle (*sukko*), as if it were a garden: He has destroyed his place of assembly."

The term *ohel* also alludes to the Temple, as we saw above in *Tehilim* 15: "Who shall abide in your tent? Who shall dwell in Your holy hill?"

### "Sacrifices of Joy"

Psalm 27 continues:

And now shall my head be lifted up above my enemies round about me; therefore I will offer in His tabernacle sacrifices of joy (*zivchei teru'a*); I will sing, and I will make melody to the Lord. (*Tehilim* 27:6)

The Malbim explains:

That is to say, one who fights against and defeats his enemies will sacrifice sacrifices of joy, that is, offerings of thanksgiving for the alarm of war and the victory, as it is stated: "And if you go to war in your land… you shall blow an alarm with the trumpets" (*Bemidbar* 10:9). But I will emerge victorious by being in the tabernacle of God, so that sitting in the tabernacle is sounding the alarm of war and the victory, and for this I myself will sing and make melody to the Lord who has made my enemies fall before me. (*Tehilim* 27:6)

### Seeking the face of God

Psalm 27 continues:

Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice; be gracious to me, and answer me. Of You my heart has said, Seek my face. Your face, O Lord, I seek. Hide not your face from me; put not your servant away in anger: You have been my help; abandon me not, nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. (*Tehilim* 27:7-9)

The idea of seeking the face of God is mentioned also in Psalm 24, which, according to some commentators, describes the festive and joyous procession by which the ark of the covenant was brought to its place in the Temple.

### "Those that are planted in the House of the Lord"

Another expression appears in Psalm 92:

Those that are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. (*Tehilim* 92:14)

The righteous who flourish like a date palm are planted in the house of God, and cleave to Him, and His providence is upon them.

The Radak explains (ad loc.):

"Those that are planted in the house of the Lord" – Since he compared the righteous to trees, he says that they are planted in a good and moist place, "in the house of the Lord; in the courts of our God" – that is, that they dwell there at all times, for the Sages and teachers are there. And then in the days of the Messiah the wicked will be destroyed and the righteous will remain… And he said: "in the house of the Lord," and he said: "in the courts," for the priests and the Levites are in the house, and the Israelites are in the courts. (*Tehilim* 92:14)

We see that according to the Radak, "the house" refers to the priests and Levites, while "the courts" refers to all of Israel.

### "Who stand by Night in the house of the Lord"

Another psalm that relates to presence in the house of God is Psalm 134:

A *Ma'alot* poem. Behold, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord. May the Lord who made heaven and earth bless you out of Zion. (*Tehilim* 134:1-3)

To whom do these words refer? To the permanent servants of God who stand and serve before God? To the priests and the Levites who stand watch in the Temple at night? Or to those arriving for the pilgrim festivals?

It is possible that the people would gather in the Temple on the nights of the festivals and rejoice, as is mentioned in *Yeshaya* 30:29:

You shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goes with a flute to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel.

It is also possible that the reference is to the *Simchat Beit ha-Sho'eva* that was conducted at night in the Temple and to the *Ma'alot* songs that were sung there on that occasion.

Another possibility is that the psalm refers to those who would come early to the Temple on Yom Kippur and on the Festivals, while it was still night, or that these are the farewell blessings recited by pilgrims taking leave from the priests who serve in the house of God and stand there even at night, and therefore are deserving of God's blessing.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In this *shiur* we have demonstrated David's deep connection to the house of God, His yearnings to come to the house of God in order to dwell there, to seek God's face and to inquire in His Temple.

Some of the expressions listed over the course of this *shiur* clearly indicate a physical desire to reach the Temple itself and to dwell there, but it may be proposed that the manner in which David translates his great closeness to God is expressed by David with the same words that are used to describe the Temple. According to this, the Temple is perceived by David as something real, a place in which he yearns to be found, even though it does not yet actually exist.

These yearnings are described by terms that are directly connected to the house of God: "Who shall abide in your tent," "who shall dwell in Your holy hill?" "to dwell in the house of the Lord," "to inquire in His Temple," "to behold the beauty of the Lord," and "to seek the face of the Lord."

All of these images come to express David's intense yearnings for God's closeness, for seeking His face, for standing there at night, and for being physically present in the house of the Lord itself, even though it has still not been constructed.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. In our series of *shiurim* on Biblical Jerusalem offered through the Virtual Bet Midrash of Yeshivat Har Etzion in 5765-5766, we discussed at length David's fundamental aspiration to build a house for God. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. So proposes Amos Chakham in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary to this psalm. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In *Tehilim* 42:3: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear (*ve-eira'eh*) before God," the meaning according to the vocalization is that God will see the pilgrim, and not that the pilgrim will see God. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. These suggestions are brought by Amos Chakham in the conclusion to his *Da'at Mikra* commentary to Psalm 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)