YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #270: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (LXXX) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LVII)**

After having discussed in the previous *shiur* Shelomo's attitude toward *bamot* prior to the construction of the Temple, we wish to discuss the *bamot* built by Shelomo for idol worship in his later years. In order to understand the background to the building of these *bamot*, we will deal in this *shiur* with Shelomo's marriages to non-Jewish women.

It should be noted that the Temple was built over the course of seven years starting with the fourth year of Shelomo's reign. Following the completion of the building of the Temple, the house of the king was built over a period of thirteen years. According to our understanding, the dedication of the Temple took place following the completion of the two buildings in the twenty-fourth year of Shelomo's rule.

Scripture describes the background for the erection of the *bamot* for idol worship as follows:

Now king Shelomo loved many foreign women, besides the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moavites, Ammonites, Edomites, Tzidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, You shall not go among them, neither shall they come among you; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods; Shelomo did cleave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Shelomo was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not whole with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Shelomo went after Ashtoret the goddess of the Tzidonians, and after Milkom the detestation of the Ammonites. And Shelomo did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father…

Therefore the Lord said unto Shelomo, Since this has been in your mind, and You have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely rend the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. (I *Melakhim* 11:1-11)

In the previous *shiur* we saw how I *Melakhim* 3:14 describes Shelomo's love of God and how he walked in His ways, as did David his father. The love of God in chapter 3 is replaced in chapter 11 with the love of many foreign women which is explicitly mentioned as the background for the building of the *bamot.*

### Shelomo's taking many Foreign wives

Ostensibly Shelomo's building *bamot* for idol worship was a direct result of his love of foreign women. Turning to a foreign god is the total opposite of loving the God of Israel; idolatry is like turning to another woman. It is not by chance that the Torah itself uses the term *zenut*, "going astray, harlotry," when it describes idolatry:

And that you go not about after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you use to go astray. (*Bemidbar* 15:39)

The second point is these women's place of origin: the daughter of Pharaoh from Egypt, Moavites, Ammonites, Tzidonians, and Hittites. Scripture emphasizes: "Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, You shall not go among them, neither shall they come among you; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods; Shelomo did cleave unto these in love" (I *Melakhim* 11:2). It would seem that the reference is to the nations that surround Israel from all sides, as we see in practice: Egypt in the south-west, Moav and Ammon in the east, and the Tzidon and Het in the north.[[1]](#footnote-1)

What brought King Shelomo, the wisest of all men, to be drawn to foreign women, and from there come to build *bamot* for idol worship?

The Tanna'im disagree about this in a Baraita in the *Yerushalmi*:

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said: He loved to stray literally… Rabbi Yose said: To draw them to the words of the Torah and bring them under the wings of the *Shekhina*. (*Yerushalmi*, *Sanhedrin* 2:6)

According to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Shelomo stumbled into sin: In the end, taking many wives causes even the wisest of men to go astray. There is no guarding against inchastity, and the direct result of taking many wives is going astray. According to Rabbi Yose, Shelomo's taking many wives had a spiritual objective. He specifically wanted to take many wives hailing from different backgrounds in order to bring them under the wings of the *Shekhina* and draw them closer to the Torah.

In this sense, this was part of Shelomo's larger spiritual objective. He saw himself and his monarchy as an opportunity to realize God's will, to bring the entire world to recognize God's kingship, and he viewed his marriages as a means to bring this about.

### The Temple was intended for all of Mankind

Several proofs support this assertion. First of all, the dedication of the Temple took place in the month of Tishrei. On the assumption that it took place following the twenty years of building the Temple and the house of the king, it would appear that Shelomo deliberately chose to dedicate the Temple in the month of Tishrei.

One might have expected that the Temple would be dedicated, in the wake of the dedication of the *Mishkan* in the wilderness, in the month of Nisan, a special month for Israel, the first month of the year, in which the natural world as well undergoes renewal. We would like to suggest that Shelomo chose the month of Tishrei in order to express his perception that the Temple was intended for all of humanity, as nothing expresses the connection of the entire world to the Temple more so than the festival of Sukkot(seventy bulls are sacrificed corresponding to the seventy nations of the world, and in the future all of the nations will go up to Jerusalem on Sukkot and prostrate themselves before God).

Shelomo expressed this understanding that the Temple was meant for all of mankind in the prayer that he offered at the Temple's dedication:

Moreover concerning the stranger that is not of Your people Israel, when he shall come out of a far country for Your name's sake - for they shall hear of Your great name, and of Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm, when he shall come and pray toward this house; hear You in heaven Your dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calls to You for; that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that Your name is called upon this house which I have built. (I *Melakhim* 8:41-43)

Shelomo tries to realize in concrete fashion the vision of the prophets that all the nations will go up to Jerusalem (*Yeshaya* 2, *Mikha* 2, *Zekharya* 4).[[2]](#footnote-2) It would appear that Shelomo thought that the transition from the *Mishkan* to the *Mikdash* meant a transition from God's *Shekhina* dwelling among Israel to His *Shekhina* dwelling among all of humanity.

This outlook was well-suited for the international political and economic situation in the time of Shelomo: The kingdom of Israel ruled over extensive territories and was at peace with its neighbors; Shelomo married the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; he entered into a covenant with Chiram, king of Tzor, and developed broad economic and political connections with the surrounding nations; rulers of distant lands, such as the queen of Sheba, are aware of his wisdom, his wealth, and his greatness.

And all the earth sought the presence of Shelomo, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and raiment, and armor, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year… And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty; and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Aram, did they bring them out by their means. (I *Melakhim* 10:24-29)

### Shelomo's marriage to the Daughter of Pharaoh

According to Rabbi Yose, Shelomo's marriage to foreign women should be seen as part of that same objective of uniting the entire world under the kingdom of God. Among the foreign women, a special place is reserved for Shelomo's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh.

The book of *Melakhim* relates to Shelomo's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh in several places:

And Shelomo became allied to Pharaoh king of Egypt by marriage, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall of Jerusalem round about. (I *Melakhim* 3:1)

He made also a house for Pharaoh's daughter, whom Shelomo had taken to wife, like unto this porch.  (I *Melakhim* 7:8)[[3]](#footnote-3)

Several points should be noted. First of all, Shelomo's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh is presented at first as a political marriage: "And Shelomo became allied to Pharaoh king of Egypt by marriage." In this sense, there is no other marriage like this in history: This is only documented case of a marriage of a daughter of a king of Egypt – one of the great powers of the ancient world – to a foreign ruler!

After they are married, Shelomo takes the daughter of Pharaoh to the City of David, and it seems from Scripture that it was his intention to set her up at some later stage in a house of her own, that would be one of the buildings comprising the king's house. The importance of the daughter of Pharaoh in Shelomo's kingdom is evident from the fact that she is the only woman who is designated "the wife of Shelomo." Take note: at this point, Scripture expresses no explicit criticism of this marriage. Ultimately, however, Pharaoh's daughter is included among the woman mentioned at the beginning of chapter 11 to whom Shlomo attached himself in love despite the fact that they were idol-worshippers.

### The TIming

According to *Seder Olam Rabba* (chapter 15), Shelomo married the daughter of Pharaoh at the beginning of the fourth year of his reign; that is to say, at the time that he began to build the Temple.

According to another opinion in *Chazal*, he married her at the time of the dedication of the Temple (*Vayikra Rabba* 12:5)[[4]](#footnote-4) which took place much later.

We lack the tools to decide between these two positions,[[5]](#footnote-5) but the plain sense of Scripture supports the first possibility.

### The Halakhic standing of the daughter of Pharaoh and the rest of Shelomo's foreign wives

The Gemara in *Yevamot* (76a-76b) takes it for granted that Shelomo converted the daughter of Pharaoh to Judaism.[[6]](#footnote-6) So too writes the Abravanel:

It is clear from all this and from the plain meaning of Scripture that Shelomo did not violate the law or sin when he took Pharaoh's daughter as his wife, for he converted her, had her undergo immersion, and brought her under the wings of the *Shekhina.*All the more so that he took her [as a wife] in order to make an alliance with Pharaoh her father. Owing to the fact that when he married her, his intentions were desirable and his actions were for the sake of Heaven, it says immediately afterwards: "And Shlomo loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father" (*Melakhim* I 3:3).

The Rambam as well addresses this issue:

One should not think that Shimshon who saved the Jewish people, and Shelomo king of Israel, who is called "the friend of God," married gentile woman who did not convert. Instead, the matter can be explained as follows: The proper way of performing the *mitzva* is when a male or a female prospective convert comes, we inspect his motives for conversion. Perhaps he is coming for the sake of financial gain, in order to receive a position of authority, or he desires to enter our faith because of fear. For a man, we check whether he focused his attention on a Jewish woman. For a woman, we check whether she focused her attention on a Jewish youth…

For this reason, the court did not accept converts throughout the reign of David and Shelomo. In David's time, [they feared] that they sought to convert because of fear and in Shelomo's time, [they feared] that they were motivated by the sovereignty, prosperity, and eminence which Israel enjoyed. [They refrained from accepting such converts, because] a gentile who seeks to convert because of the vanities of this [material] world is not a righteous convert. Nevertheless, there were many people who converted in the presence of ordinary people during the era of David and Shelomo. The Supreme Sanhedrin would view them with skepticism. Since they immersed themselves, they would not reject them, but they would not draw them close until they saw what the outcome would be.

Shelomo converted women and married them and similarly, Shimshon converted [women] and married [them]. It is well known that they converted only because of an ulterior motive and that their conversion was not under the guidance of the court. Hence Scripture considered it as if they were gentiles and remained forbidden. Moreover, their conduct ultimately revealed their initial intent. For they would worship their false deities and build *bamot* for them. Therefore Scripture considered it as if [Shelomo] built them, as it is stated (I *Melakhim* 11:7): "And then, Shelomo built a *bama*." (*Hilkhot Issurei Bi'a* 13:14-16)

That is to say, Shelomo's foreign wives had formally converted. Nevertheless, since their conversion was not for the sake of heaven, and since they continued to serve idols, Scripture relates to them as if they had remained Gentiles, and even attributes their actions to Shelomo himself.

### The spiritual significance of Shelomo's marriages

The prophet states:

For this city has been to Me a provocation of My anger and of My fury from the day that they built it even unto this day, that I should remove it from before My face (*Yirmeyahu* 32:31)

The Radak explains (ad loc.):

"From the day that they built it" – For in the days of Shelomo who built the city and the Temple, they began to build the *bamot*, and Shelomo's wives worshipped foreign gods – from that day it was a provocation of My anger and of My fury, for in My anger I wished to remove it, but I was patient until this day, but I will not be patient any more. And in the Midrash: On the day that the Temple was founded, Shelomo married the daughter of Pharaoh.

The Radak's explanation is based on a passage in tractate *Nida* (70b):

One verse says: "For the Lord has chosen Zion" (*Tehilim* 132:13), but another verse says: "For this city has been to me a provocation of My anger and of My fury from the day that they built it even unto this day." The former applied to the time before Shelomo married the daughter of Pharaoh, while the latter applied to the time after Shelomo married the daughter of Pharaoh.

According to the Gemara, from the time of Shelomo's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, God wanted to destroy Jerusalem (which negates His choice of the city).

*Vayikra Rabba*,according to which Shlomo's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter took place at the time of the dedication of the Temple, has exceedingly harsh things to say about their wedding night:

Rabbi Yudan said: All those seven years that Shlomo built the Temple, he did not drink any wine. Once he built it and married Batya, daughter of Pharaoh - that night he drank wine. Two celebrations took place, one over the construction of the Temple and one over the daughter of Pharaoh. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Which one shall I accept, of these or of these? It then entered His mind to destroy Jerusalem. This is what is stated: "For this has been to Me as a provocation of My anger and of My fury, etc." Rabbi Hillel bar Helene said: Like one who passes through a filthy place and turns up his nose.

Rabbi Chunya said: That night, the daughter of Pharaoh danced eighty kinds of dances, and Shlomo slept until the fourth hour of the day, and the keys to the Temple were under his head. This is what we have learned regarding the daily morning offering that it is offered at the fourth hour ([*Eduyot* 6:1](https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Eduyot.6.1?lang=he-en)). His mother went in and rebuked him. And some say that Yarov'am ben Nevat went in and rebuked him.

      And in tractate *Shabbat* it says:

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel: When Shlomo married the daughter of Pharaoh, she brought into the marriage a thousand kinds of musical instruments, and said to him: Thus we do for this idol, and thus we do for that idol. And he did not raise any objections.

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel: When Shlomo married Pharaoh's daughter, Gavriel went down and stuck a reed into the sea, and it gathered a bank around it, on which the great city of Rome was built. (*Shabbat* *56b)*

According to this harsh statement of Shmuel, Shlomo's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter heralded the beginning of the building of Rome, which, according to *Chazal*,represents the people of Israel's greatest enemy.

Let us try to summarize what emerges from all of the aforementioned *midrashim*. According to these *midrashim*, Scripture points out in various places the far-reaching consequences of Shlomo's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, with respect to the fate of the people in general and the destruction of Jerusalem in particular.

Our working assumption is that of Rabbi Yose, that when he married the foreign women, Shlomo's intentions were for the sake of Heaven, "to draw them to the words of the Torah, and bring them under the wings of the *Shekhina*" (*Yerushalmi*, [*Sanhedrin* 2:6](https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Sanhedrin.2.6?lang=he-en)). The decision (according to the *midrash*) to hold the wedding at the same time as the dedication of the Temple stems apparently from the very same objective. By marrying Pharaoh's daughter and bringing her into his house at the very moment of Israel's greatest intimacy with God, the day of the dedication of the permanent Temple, Shlomo tried to bring her as well under the wings of the *Shekhina.* (We have already noted that Shlomo understood that the Temple was meant for the entire world.) Therefore, Shlomo fixed the day of his wedding - his personal day of rejoicing – on the day of the dedication of the Temple (see [*Ta'anit* 4:8](https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Taanit.4.8?lang=he-en)). According to this understanding, not only is there no contradiction between the two, but rather they parallel and complement each other.

In reality, however, things turned out in an entirely different manner. The wedding celebration blurred the celebration over the dedication of the Temple, and in certain senses this indicates a misunderstanding of the relationship between the resting of God's kingdom in its permanent place in the Temple and the building of the king's private house with the daughter of Pharaoh. Shlomo's interpretation of his sitting on God's throne as king (I *Divrei Ha-yamim*29:23) went too far – as if the kingdom of flesh and blood and the kingdom of God are one and the same – and led to inappropriate violations of boundaries, because of which Shlomo's marriage that night was viewed as the very opposite of the building of God's Temple.

In this *shiur* we brought the background for the building of the *bamot* for idol worship, namely, Shelomo's marriage to foreign women and to the daughter of Pharaoh, and to his marring many women in general. In the next *shiur* we will deal with the actual building of the *bamot* for idol worship and its spiritual significance.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Though Scripture states: " And so did he for all his foreign wives, who offered and sacrificed unto their gods," (I *Melakhim* 11:8), it spells out this service only with respect to Tzidon, Ammon and Moav.

   This matter is mentioned also in Nechemya's speech: "In those days also saw I the Jews that had married women of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moav…. Did not Shelomo king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, and he was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless even him did the foreign women cause to sin" (*Nechemya* 13:23-26). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. And similarly *Yeshaya* 56:7: "For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. And similarly I *Melakhim* 9:16, and as we saw above in I Kings 11:1-2). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For a discussion of this Midrash and its significance, see below. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. It might be possible to reconcile these two midrashim: Shelomo allied himself with the king of Egypt in the fourth year of his reign, and at that time the daughter of Pharaoh was brought to the City of David. But the marriage itself took place only at the time of the completing of the two buildings and her entering her house. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Gemara there discusses whether a female Egyptian convert is immediately fit for marriage to a born Jew or only after the third generation. The Gemara also raises the possibility that Shelomo never actually married the daughter of Pharaoh or the other foreign women; rather, "his intentions were fornication" (Rashi, ad loc.), but because of the excessive love that he had for Pharaoh's daughter, Scripture regards him as if he had married her. We shall stick to the plain meaning of the text, according to which it is clear that Shelomo married these women, as understood by the Rambam cited below.

   In connection with the conversion of Pharaoh's daughter, it should be noted that some argue that this is alluded to in [*Tehilim 45*](https://www.sefaria.org/Psalms.45?lang=he-en) (see summary of the psalm in the *Da'at Mikra* commentary to Tehillim, p. 263). The psalm, which is addressed to the king, states: "Kings' daughters are among your favorites; upon your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ofir. Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear; forget also your own beauty; for he is your lord, and do homage to him" ([Tehillim 45:10-12](https://www.sefaria.org/Psalms.45.10-12?lang=he-en)). The psalm refers to a marriage with the daughter of a foreign king, and the psalmist turns to the queen/bride and admonishes her to forget her nation, its customs, and the idolatry that she had learned in her father's house and be loyal to the king. It is possible that the expression "*shir yedidot*" (ibid. v. 1) in the psalm's heading alludes to the name of Shelomo – Yedidya. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)