YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

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Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Leon Brum for the Refua Sheleima of

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**Lecture 364: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(174) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (150)**

In the previous two *shiurim,* we dealt with the description of the Divine chariot and the removal of the *Shekhina* from the Temple toward the Mount of Oilves and the wilderness*,* as was revealed to the prophet Yechezkel in his prophetic journey to Jerusalem.

In this *shiur* we wish to deal with the first appearance of the Divine chariot during the time of the First Temple and its significance.

**The Divine Chariot Among the Copper Vessels During the First Temple Period**

In the account of the copper vessels in Shelomo's Temple, Scripture describes the wheels which bore the borders, and it notes: "And the work of the wheels was like the work of a chariot wheel; their axletrees, and their felloes, and their spokes, and their naves, were all molten" (I *Melakhim* 7:33). Rashi (ad loc.) explains: "Yonatan translates: like the work of the wheels of the chariot, one wheel inside another, lengthwise and crosswise, as Yechezkel said about the heavenly chariot" (see *Yechezkel* 1:16). The Radak (ad loc., s.v. *ofan hamerkava*) explains: "The holy chariot which appeared in a prophetic vision to Yechezkel (*Yechezkel* 1), and so translated Yonatan, chariot of honor. Shelomo saw in his wisdom what Yechezkel ben Buzi saw in his prophecy."

The Ralbag in his commentary explains the matter of the bases. Scripture notes that on the borders were engraved lions, oxen and *keruvim*, The Ralbag comments: "Lions, forms of oxen, and forms of *keruvim*, which are human forms only that they have wings. These are the forms that Yechezkel saw on the chariot, only that here no mention is made of the form of an eagle (I *Melakhim* 7:23; see *Yechezkel* 1:10)."

That is to say, all three commentators, Rashi, the Radak and the Ralbag, see a direct connection between the detailed account of the Divine chariot in *Yechezkel* 1 and the description of Shelomo's Temple. The fact that on the borders there are figures of oxen, lions and *keruvim*, just as these figures appear in Yechezkel'saccount of the Divine chariot, suggests that we are not dealing only with the external similarity of the forms. Rather, it comes to allude about their meaning and about the connection between these vessels in Shelomo's Temple and God's chariot.

It is very interesting to see that in the *Mishkan* at the entrance to the *Ohel Mo'ed* stood the laver and its base. We are dealing here with two parts, the base and the laver itself which rested upon it. In the First Temple, on the other hand, there were ten bases upon which rested ten lavers.

A very detailed description of the bases is found in I *Melakhim* 7:27-33. Scripture gives us the dimensions: length, width and height. It describes the borders between the stays on which there were lions, oxen and *keruvim*. Every base had four brass wheels, and brass axles, with feet and brass undersetters.

Scripture emphasizes: "And on the plates of the stays, and on their borders, he engraved *keruvim*, lions, and palm trees, according to the space of each, with wreaths round about" (I *Melakhim* 7:36). Already in the account of the base, Scripture notes that below the lions and oxen there were wreaths of hanging work; and similarly in the continuation, on the outer side of the undersetters there were wreaths. This is all part of the description of the bases on which rested the lavers. The term *loyot,* according to Rashi, means: "Like a male and a female connected to each other" (I *Melakhim* 7:29), and the phrase, "*ke-ma'ar ish ve-loyot saviv*," is explained as follows in the Gemara in *Yoma* (54a): "Even as a man embracing his companion," and as Rashi (ad loc.) writes "who cleaves and embraces his wife in his arms."

The great detail regarding the measurements, the materials, and the form of the bases suggests that we are not dealing solely with a functional account. According to the plain understanding, these bases serve as sort of wagons that make it possible to move the lavers resting upon them. The lengthy description comes to emphasize that we are dealing with exceedingly significant and important vessels. Scripture's likening them to the Divine chariot comes to allude to their essence and purpose. The forms on the *keruvim* – lions, palm-trees, according to the space of each, with wreaths – alludes to the covenant and affection between God and Israel which is likened in many verses to the love between husband and wife.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In addition to the bases and the lavers, Scripture describes in great detail the dimensions and form of the sea, which stands on twelve oxen, three facing north, three west, three south and three east.

The sea was in essence an exceedingly large *mikve* that rested on the twelve oxen. The verse in II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 4:6 explains that the role of the lavers was to wash in them such things as belonged to the burnt-offering, but the sea was for the priests to wash in.

It is interesting to note that both of these two vessels, the bases and the lavers on the one hand, and the twelve oxen and the sea on the other, have two parts, the part that moves and bears the vessel resting upon it, here the bases and there the twelve oxen, and that which rests upon them, the laver for sanctifying the hands and feet, and the sea for immersing the priests. These two vessels allude to the Divine chariot that is described in *Yechezkel* 1 and 10.

**The Meaning of the Chariot’s Connection to Water – In the Creation of the World**

On the face of it, the creation of the world began with water. The Torah states: "Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters" (*Bereishit* 1:2). The Torah does not relate at all to the creation of water. It is if the water preceded the creation of the world.

The continuation of the creation on the second day involves the formation of the firmament which divides between the waters which were above the firmament and the waters which were under the firmament. On the third day the waters are commanded to gather into one place and let the dry land appear. The water is a primal creation and God reveals Himself and appears in various activities in the water. The Midrash states: "From the beginning of the creation of the world, the praises of the Holy One, blessed be He, arose only from the water. This is what is written: 'Above the voices of many waters, the mighty breakers of the sea' (*Tehilim* 93:4). And what do they say today: 'The Lord on high is mighty' (ibid.)" (*Bereishit Rabba* 5).

Water has enormous power and can appear in the world in a most destructive manner, and therefore God put limits on it. Thus says Yirmeyahu: "Fear you not Me? says the Lord; will you not tremble at My presence? who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, an everlasting ordinance, which it cannot pass; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it" (*Yirmeyahu* 5:22); and thus says Yeshayahu: "Why, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish become foul, because there is no water, and die for thirst" (*Yeshayahu* 50:2).[[2]](#footnote-2)

In all the quotations we have brought, God, as it were, limits the destructive power of water. Therefore God's absolute rule and kingdom finds clearest expression precisely over the water.

**The Splitting of the Sea of Suf**

The Song of the Sea describes how "Pharaoh's chariots and his host has He cast into the sea, and his chosen captains are sunk in the Sea of Suf…And with the blast of Your nostrils the waters were piled up, the floods stood upright as a heap; the deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea… For the horses of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel walked on dry land in the midst of the sea" (*Shemot* 15:4-19). The wondrous revelation of God at the Sea of Suf, the chariots of Pharaoh who sees himself as king of the world sink in the sea, when in fact the Egyptian are drowning, while the people of Israel succeed in crossing over dry land in the midst of the sea.

It is here that the terms temple and kingdom appear for the first time in the Torah. At that time, it became clear to everyone, to the Egyptians and to the Israelites alike, who is the king of the world. Therefore: "And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord; and they believed in the Lord, and in His servant Moshe" (*Shemot* 14:31). The Midrash states: "A maidservant saw at the sea what Yechezkel ben Buzi did not see" (*Mekhilta de-Shira* 3, s.v. *zeh Eli*). It would appear that the Midrash wishes to say that even a simple-minded maidservant succeeded in seeing at the sea more than the prophet Yechezkel saw in his prophecies.

*Tehilim* 93 relates to the splitting of the sea with expressions that parallel the wording of the Song at the Sea:

The Lord reigns; He is clothed in majesty; the Lord is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength; the world is established, that it cannot be moved. Your throne is established of old; You are from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring. Above the voices of many waters, the mighty breakers of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty. Your testimonies are very sure, holiness becomes Your house, O Lord, for evermore. (*Tehilim* 93)

Here, too, God's kingdom is revealed over the water. *Midrash Shemot Rabba* states as follows: "'Your throne is established of old [lit., from then]' – Before You created Your world You were You. Since You created it, You are He, but as it were You stand… but since You stood at the sea and we uttered song before You, then Your kingdom became settled and Your throne became established. 'Your throne is established from then' with 'Then sang Moshe'" (*Shemot Rabba* 23). That is to say, God's kingdom was revealed to the entire world through the splitting of the Sea of Suf.

The kingdom of God was revealed to the people of Israel who willingly accepted the kingdom (and as we say in our prayers: "And His kingdom they willingly accepted upon themselves"). His kingdom was revealed with God's victory over His enemies and Israel's deliverance from the Egyptians.

But in addition to the explicit mention of God's kingdom, also the term temple appears for the first time. According to our approach, and as we demonstrated in the previous *shiur*, the Temple is the place in which God's kingdom is revealed. The Temple itself is God's royal palace. It is therefore no coincidence that within the structure of the Temple there is a permanent royal throne which expresses God's permanent kingdom in the world, and in the courtyard there is the king's chariot. If also at the splitting of the sea there was a revelation of the chariot of God which drowned Pharaoh and his army in the sea, we can well understand why that maidservant at the sea saw there more than what Yechezkel ben Buzi saw in his prophecies.

**Why Was the Matter of the Chariot of Introduced by Shelomo?**

Our simple premise is that everything that Shelomo did in the Temple he did in accordance with God's instructions, including the additions and changes that he introduced into the Temple.

In I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:11-19 Scripture describes in detail everything that David handed over to Shelomo – the details of the structure and the details of the vessels and their weights, "All this do I give you in writing, as the Lord has made me wise by His hand upon me, even all the work of this pattern." That is to say, all the details of the building were handed over in writing from God: the bases, the vessels, and all the additions in the Temple which were not found in the *Mishkan*. On the face of it we did not find in the *MIshkan* even a hint to the chariot. In the courtyard there is the laver and its base, and every time that mention is made of the laver, the base is also mentioned, but there is no explicit reference to the chariot.

Why were allusions to the chariot made only in the structure of the Temple, and not in the *Mishkan*?

It may be suggested that the entire existence and construction of the *Mishkan* is an expression of a Divine command that seeks to rest God's *Shekhina* among the people of Israel, whereas the Temple expresses in sharper fashion Israel's desire to build a house for God. The resting of the *Shekhina* in the *Mishkan* and its construction are from the top downward, whereas the building of the First Temple is from the bottom upward.[[3]](#footnote-3) The people of Israel who build a house for God wish to fully express God's kingdom in the world, not only in the structure of the Temple, but also in the chariot which rests in the courtyard and can at any moment go out and move anywhere in the world. This fact hints to the rule of God throughout the world and therefore Israel builds a house for God for this purpose, with the chariot expressing this dimension.

Another possibility, as we demonstrated in the previous *shiur*, is that the addition of new *keruvim* in the Holy of Holies that constitute part of the structure can be understood as sort of a fixing of the *Shekhina*. From now on, with Israel's arrival at a permanent place, the fixed *keruvim* can express the permanence of the *Shekhina's* presence in the world. It may be possible to explain the lengthening of the staves of the ark in this manner as well.

It may be suggested that if there are allusions to the chariot in the copper vessels located in the courtyard, there is here a statement that beyond the expression of the presence of the *Shekhina* in the Holy of Hollies as part of the permanent structure of the Temple, outside, in the courtyard of the king's palace there is parked the royal chariot, which at any moment can express its rule and governance over the entire world even beyond the courtyard. But in addition it may be argued that specifically in Eretz Israel the revelation of God's permanent kingdom, with its hosts, angels and wheels, is more understandable and more manifest. Therefore it is specifically in the permanent Temple in Jerusalem that the chariot first appears in the courtyard of God's Temple.

It may also be suggested that the heavenly kingdom is like an earthly kingdom, and just as with a king of flesh and blood, a royal chariot is parked in the courtyard of his palace, so too, as it were, in the courtyard of the palace of the King, the king of kings.

It should be remembered that while, on the one hand, the chariot in the courtyard of the palace attests to the king's presence in the palace, on the other hand, the chariot can, if necessary, leave the palace from the courtyard.

King Achaz cut off the borders of the bases and removed the laver from off them, and took down the sea from off the copper oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stone (according to II *Melakhim* 16:17), as an expression of the removal of the *Shekhina* and as part of his actions in the Temple aimed at closing it down and cancelling it.

It was our intention in this *shiur* to show the close connection between the chariot of Yechezkel and the chariot in the courtyard in the house of God, the Temple of Shelomo, and to understand the meaning of its location and function specifically in the days of the First Temple which was fixed in Jerusalem.

In the next *shiur* we will complete our examination of Yechezkel's prophetic journey to Jerusalem.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. It is interesting that the Torah describes the fashioning of the copper laver "of the mirrors of the serving women that did service at the door of the Tent of Meeting" (*Shemot* 38:8), as it was wondrously explained by Rashi (ad loc.): "The women of Israel possessed copper mirrors into which they used to look when they adorned themselves. Even these they did not hesitate to bring as a contribution toward the *Mishkan.* Now Moshe was about to reject them since they were made to pander toward their vanity, but the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Accept them; these are dearer to Me than all the other contributions, because through them the women reared those huge hosts in Egypt. For when their husbands were tired through their crushing labor, they used to bring them food and drink and induced them to eat. Then they would take the mirrors, and each gazed at herself in the mirror together with her husband, saying endearingly to him: See, I am handsomer than you. Thus they awakened their husbands' affection and subsequently became the mothers of many children, as it is stated: 'I awakened your love under the apple tree' (*Shir ha-Shirim Rabba* 8:5). This is what is stated: 'the mirrors of the women who reared the hosts.' And it was for this reason that the laver was made of them, because it served the purpose of promoting peace between man and wife, by giving of its waters to be drunk by a woman whose husband had shown himself jealous of her and who nevertheless had associated with another, thus affording her an opportunity to prove her innocence. You may know that the mirrors mentioned in the text were really mirrors, as it is stated: 'And the copper of the wave-offering was seventy talents… and therewith he made the sockets' – the laver, however, and its base are not mentioned there among the articles made from that copper. Hence you may learn that the copper of which the laver was made was not a part of the wave-offering. Thus did Rabbi Tanchuma explain the mirrors. And so does Onkelos also render it."

   The laver and the base which were made of the mirrors allude to the connection between a man and his wife. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. So too in the psalms of *Tehilim*: *Tehilim* 24:1-2; 104:6-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This idea was suggested in an oral conversation with Rav Menachem Makover. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)