

Many layers of truths are encased in the Temple, its vessels and in all of Torah. If we view these ideas as "buried treasures" only then will we find them. *(King Solomon, Proverbs 2:4)*



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JewishTimes

*Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

Volume VIII, No. 18...March 20, 2009

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Weekly Parsha

Vayakhel

RABBI BERNIE FOX

**Each Craftsman Was
Required To Grasp the Entire
Project of Fabricating the
Mishcan**

*Every talented individual among
you shall come and make all that
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Weekly Parsha

Temple

the Museum of
Jewish History & Jewish Ideas



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Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

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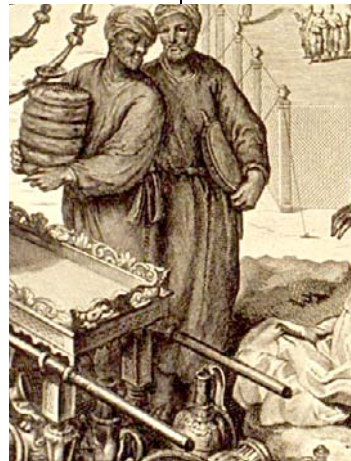
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Hashem has commanded. (Shemot 35:10)

Beginning with Parshat Terumah, the Torah deals with the construction of the Mishcan. However, Parshat VaYakhel represents a transition in the discussion. To this point, the Torah describes instructions that Hashem gave to Moshe. Now, the Torah changes the focus of the discussion. The Torah describes Moshe's presentation of the instructions to Bnai Yisrael and the actual construction and assembly of the Mishcan.

In our pasuk, Moshe addresses the nation. He calls on all the talented craftsmen to join in this endeavor. In the following passages, Moshe provides a general description of the project. He lists the components that will be created and assembled. Why does Moshe provide this inventory of the items to be created? It would seem more appropriate for Moshe to list the skills that will be required!

Nachmanides offers an interesting response. He explains that Moshe was commanded to describe the items to be fabricated. The individual craftsmen were not qualified to participate in the project until each knew the breadth of the project and its various components. Each was required to understand the entire project and perceive the manner in which it would be accomplished.[1]



This seems to be a strange requirement. Most of these participants had a specific role in the construction of the Mishcan: some craftsmen created the curtains; others fashioned the upright boards that supported the tent; the metal workers fashioned the sockets into which these boards were fitted. It is reasonable that each worker should understand his specified task. However, why should each be required to grasp the entire project?

In order to explain Nachmanides' comments, it is important to appreciate that the Mishcan was constructed as an integrated whole. The identity of Mishcan did not emerge with the assembly of the components. Instead, each component was created as part of the entity of Mishcan. This entity includes the structure of the Mishcan and the vessels within. Therefore, in creating a socket, the craftsman was not fashioning a mere insignificant item that, upon assembly, would become part of the Mishcan. At the time of creation, he was fashioning a portion of the integrated Mishcan.

We can now understand Nachmanides' observation. It is obvious that in order for a craftsman to participate in this project, he must be qualified to execute his responsibility. His responsibility was not to merely create a socket or weave a curtain. His job was to create the socket or curtain as part of the Mishcan. There is a major difference between these two responsibilities. In order to create a socket, the craftsman need only understand the design specifications of the socket. He does not need to understand or appreciate the entire project and the role of his socket within the whole. However, to create a socket that is an integrated component of a Mishcan, a far more imposing qualification is requisite. The craftsman must understand the entire project and the role of the socket within the entirety. With this broader and more comprehensive knowledge, he can execute his task with a vision of his component's significance in the overall project; he can create a socket that is part of the integrated whole. This is the reason Moshe described the entire project to the craftsmen. Only after the craftsmen had conceptualized the entire "blue-print" were they qualified to participate in the project.

Nachmanides observes that this insight explains another set of passages. In Parshat Pekudey, the Torah describes the presentation of the components of the Mishcan to Moshe. The Torah recounts, in detail, the order in which the components were presented. What is the purpose of this elaborate account? Nachmanides explains that the account of the presentation demonstrates that the craftsmen understood the relationship of the various components within the whole of the Mishcan.[2] Each component was presented in the proper order in relation to the other parts. In other words, this account demonstrates that the craftsmen succeeded in fashioning the components as part of an integrated whole.

An Exact Inventory Was Kept of the Collections for the Mishcan

And the materials were sufficient for all of the work that was to be done and there was extra. (Shemot 36:7)

The Mishcan was constructed from materials donated by the people. The exuberance of the nation was so great that the contributions exceeded

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the needs. Moshe notified the people that more than enough materials had been received. There was no need for additional donations.

The pasuk indicates that Moshe did not suspend donations when the exact amount of material required for the project had been received. Instead, allowed the donations to continue until a surplus of materials was created. It might be assumed that this was unintentional. Moshe needed to be sure that adequate supplies were available. He monitored the inventory of the collected materials but realized that his computation of the collection might not be perfectly accurate. The actual inventory of some materials might have exceeded his reckoning of the amount collected. In some instances, the inventory might have been slightly overestimated. In order to be certain that the inventory of materials was adequate, he allowed collections to continue until he felt the precise requirements were exceeded. He wanted to allow for a margin of error in the tally of the collections.

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno comments that this was not the reason for accumulating excess materials. Moshe was not uncertain of the accuracy of his accounts. He intentionally allowed supplies to be collected that he knew were in excess of the amount needed. Why did Moshe collect more than was necessary? Sforno responds that he did not want the craftsmen constructing the Mishcan to be frugal in the use of the materials. Frugality might diminish the quality of the final product.

Sforno is teaching a practical lesson. Parsimony is likely to result in a less-than-optimal product. To create something special, we must be ready to pay the price. However, there is possibly another concept implicit in Sforno's comments.

Sforno explains that the sacredness of the Mishcan was enhanced by the unique attention given to its construction. The craftsmen were totally committed to the fulfillment of Hashem's will. Therefore, every component of the Mishcan was a perfect reflection of the will of Hashem.

This concept suggests an additional meaning to Moshe's determination to avoid frugality. The command to construct the Mishcan required strict adherence to the specifications. The craftsmen were permitted to consider no other factor. Had the craftsmen given any thought to the adequacy of the supply of materials, and how he might compensate for its deficiency, the notion of "compromise" would have invariably entered into the design. Therefore, the legal requirements of the

command required that the materials exceed the actual needs.

Although the above passage indicates that Moshe did not end the collection of donations until a slight surplus was collected, the commentaries remark that an exact tally was kept of the donations. The purpose of this accounting was twofold: first, it was essential to secure sufficient materials; second, Moshe did not wish to collect more than was reasonably needed for the project. A slight surplus was necessary, but not an unjustified excess.

The importance of collecting sufficient materials is obvious. However, the Chumash emphasizes that Moshe was equally concerned with not collecting an unnecessary excess of materials. Once the needed materials were donated and the necessary surplus reserve had been created, Moshe immediately directed Bnai Yisrael to stop bringing donations. Why was this issue so crucial? Why was Moshe so deeply concerned with not accepting additional donations?

The commentaries offer various explanations. We will consider one of these responses. Gershonides explains that Moshe's concern was based on a principle found in the Talmud. In Tractate Ketubot, the Talmud explains that a person should not donate more than one-fifth of one's assets to charity.[3] Maimonides extends this principle to the performance of all mitzvot. A person should not spend more than one-fifth of his wealth on the performance of any mitzvah. For example, this limit applies in purchasing an animal for sacrifice. Maimonides' explanation for this restriction is that a person should avoid being dependent on others for support. Therefore, one should not risk impoverishing himself.[4]

Gershonides explains that Moshe's concern was based on this principle. He did not want the people to bring more than was needed. He did not want anyone to become impoverished out of zeal to contribute to the Mishcan.

Gershonides offers an important insight into the restriction against spending an excess of one-fifth of one's wealth in the performance of a mitzvah. He agrees with Maimonides' explanation of the restriction that one should not risk poverty and loss of independence in performing a mitzvah. However, Gershonides asserts that there is a more fundamental explanation of the restriction. He explains that the Torah prohibits the performance of a mitzvah in a manner that leads to evil. Becoming impoverished through contributing to

charity, or performing a mitzvah, is a negative—or evil—outcome. Gershonides further explains that such an evil outcome discourages others from performing the mitzvah.[5]

The Detailed Description of the Construction of the Mishcan

And he made the sacred oil for anointing and the pure incense using the technique of a perfumer. (Shemot 37:29)

In VaYakel and Pekuday the Torah retells the construction of the Mishcan and the vestments of Kohanim and the Kohen Gadol. Virtually every element is described in specific detail. However, there are two notable exceptions. These two items are mentioned in our pasuk.

The Shemen HaMishchah was the oil used for anointing the kohanim and the Mishcan. This anointing was part of the process of conferring sanctity on these individuals and the Mishcan. The instructions for creating the oil are outlined in Parshat Ki Tisa. There, the Torah explains that the Shemen HaMishchah was created through introducing specific fragrances into pure olive oil.[6]

The Ketoret was the incense burned in the Mishcan. In Parshat Ki Tisa, the Torah discusses the compounding of the Ketoret. The Torah lists the elements contained in the Ketoret and their proportions. The parasha also describes the preparation of the incense.[7]

In Parshat VaYakhel, the manufacture of these two items is not recounted at length. The quoted above passage contains the entire discussion. The Torah merely states that these items were created as required.

VaYakel and Pekuday discuss the manufacture of the Mishcan and the garments of the kohanim. The Torah, in previous chapters, also provides details on the construction of these items. Although VaYakel and Pekuday meticulously describe the actual manufacture of the Mishcan and the garments, the Ketoret and the Shemen HaMishchah are excluded from this intensive review! The question is obvious. Why are these items not reviewed in our Torah portion?

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam offers a fascinating response. He explains that the Shemen HaMishchah and the Ketoret differed from the other items described in the parasha.

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Weekly Parsha

They required a high level of processing and, once produced, did not resemble their original components. The Shemen HaMishchah was created through burning various fragrances. The oil then absorbed the smoke from the fragrances. The final product did not include the substance of the original aromatic elements. Only their fragrance remained in the oil. The Ketoret was created through thoroughly grinding the original elements. The individual elements could not be identified in the final compound. Rabbaynu Avraham posits that because the original elements of these two items were not identifiable in the final product, their manufacture is not described in detail.[8]

Rabbaynu Avraham's response requires analysis. He presents a fundamental distinction between the Shemen HaMishchah and the Ketoret as compared with the other elements of the Mishcan and the garments. However, a question still remains: Why is this distinction important? Why does the Torah only review the manufacture of items in which the constituent components remain evident?

It seems that the purpose of our Torah portion is to communicate a visual image of the components of the Mishcan and the garments of the Kohanim. This is accomplished through describing their manufacture. Describing the manufacture of the Ketoret and the Shemen HaMishchah would not contribute to creating a visual image of these items in their final form. Therefore, the creation of these items is not discussed in detail.

This insight helps resolve another issue. The Torah describes the construction of the Mishcan and the garments in excruciating detail. We now know that this was done to create a visual image. Why is this image necessary?

The Torah includes six-hundred thirteen mitzvot. Most apply at all times. However, the mitzvot relating to the Mishcan are an exception. The Mishcan and the Temple do not currently exist. Exile from the Land of Israel and the destruction of the Temple deprived these mitzvot of their physical expression. As a consequence of exile, an important portion of the content in the Torah does not exist in material form. These mitzvot will not be fulfilled again until the rebuilding of the Temple.

This creates a paradox. The taryag mitzvot – the six-hundred thirteen commandments – are eternal. They must be real to every generation. How can the mitzvot related to the Mishcan remain alive even when there is no Bait HaMikdash? The Torah addresses this problem. These mitzvot are

preserved through creating a detailed visualization. The Mishcan does not exist in physical form. However, it is still real to the student reading the Torah. In this manner these mitzvot are preserved for all time.

Exact Measurements in Jewish Law

Every man whose heart lifted him came forward. And every person whose heart moved him brought the offering of Hashem for the creating of the Ohel Moed, all of its components, and the sacred garments. (Shemot 35:21)

Hashem commanded Bnai Yisrael to build a Mishcan – a Tabernacle. The Mishcan was constructed from materials provided and contributed by Bnai Yisrael. Our pasuk describes the response of the nation to Moshe's request to supply these materials. In his comments on this passage, Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel explains that the craft-people who built the Mishcan were guided by the spirit of prophecy.[9] Why did they require this spirit of prophecy to perform their tasks? In order to answer this question, we must identify and understand a fundamental paradox within the commandment to build the Mishcan.

One of the interesting issues discussed repeatedly in the Talmud is whether we can rely on the accuracy of measurements. A simple case illustrates this issue. On Succot we are required to live in a succah. The most fundamental element of a succah is its roof. The roof must be composed of branches or a similar substance. We cannot use a metal poles or even wooden poles that have been manufactured to the extent that they are regarded as utensils. The Mishne discusses a succah whose sechach – roof – is composed of a combination of suitable and unsuitable material. The two materials are placed on the roof in an alternating pattern so that the quantity of the suitable material is exactly equal to that of the unsuitable material. The Mishne rules that this succah is acceptable. The Talmud observes that, according to some authorities, in order for a structure to be regarded as a succah, only half of its roof must be covered with suitable sechach. A majority of the roof need not be covered with suitable sechach. The Talmud concludes that it is apparent the Mishne supports this position. The implication of this discussion is that if we assume that we cannot rely on exact measurements of the two substances, the structure cannot be regarded decisively as a suitable succah; if we cannot be sure that the suitable sechach is exactly equal in quantity to the unsuitable

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material, then the succah whose sechach is composed of alternating suitable and unsuitable materials is not an acceptable succah.[10]

Underlying this discussion is an interesting dispute among the Sages of the Talmud. The Sages disagree as to whether we can assume that measurements are exact. Some Sages maintain that we can make this assumption. Others argue that we cannot make such an assumption. If we assume that measurements can be exact, then the structure described in the Mishne is a suitable succah, without qualification. However, if we assume that measurements cannot be regarded as exact, then the structure would not be suitable unless an additional quantity of sechach is added. This additional quantity of sechach would assure that the sechach was at least equal to the unsuitable substance.

The same dispute extends to the measurement of events as being simultaneous. The Sages who contend that measurements can be regarded as exact also assert that when two events appear to have happened simultaneously, they have, in fact, occurred at the same moment. The Sages who do not accept measurements as being exact also deny that two apparently simultaneous events can be regarded as truly having occurred at the same moment.

At first glance, this dispute seems difficult to understand. It is empirically evident that it is remarkably difficult to extract an exact measurement for any given quantity. Even if a measurement seems to be exact, more careful examination will indicate that it is not. Certainly, it is nearly impossible to conclude that two events are precisely simultaneous. Therefore, it would seem that the more reasonable position is to assume that measurements are not exact.

We can gain insight into this dispute through another discussion in the Talmud. In Tractate Bechorot, the Talmud attempts to resolve the dispute between the Sages on this issue. The Talmud suggests that the dispute can be resolved through considering the Torah's commandment to build a Mishkan. The Torah provides exact measurements for each of the elements of the Mishkan. Precise dimensions are delineated for the Aron (the ark), the Shulchan (the Table that held the Shew Bread), and every other component of the Mishkan. The builders of the Mishkan were required to build their components to these exact specifications. They could not deviate from any of the specified dimensions. The Talmud initially asserts that this proves we can rely on the precision of measurements! However, the

Talmud subsequently rejects this proof. It explains that although it is true that the Torah commands us to build the Mishkan and its components to exact dimensions, the dimensions described by the Torah were not precisely achieved. Instead, the builders did their best to construct the Mishkan and its components according to these dimensions. Despite these efforts, the innate imperfection of any human measurement prevented them from achieving success. Although the Mishkan could not be fabricated to precise specification, the product created through the best efforts of builders was acceptable. [11]

This discussion is difficult to understand. The Talmud's discussion begins by assuming that the Torah required the Mishkan to be built to precise measurements. This is offered as a proof to the opinion that measurements can be regarded as precise. However, as explained above, it is virtually impossible to make an exact measurement. How could the Talmud initially assume that the commandment to create the Mishkan required fabrication of the components to their exact specified dimensions? How can the Torah command us to perform the impossible?

This question suggests an important insight into the Sages' dispute regarding the precision of measurements. As previously indicated, the Mishkan presents a paradox: We were required to build the Mishkan according to exact specifications, yet, precise measurement is virtually impossible! There are two obvious approaches to resolving this paradox.

One possibility is that the dimensions outlined in the Torah represent targets. They are impossible to precisely achieve, but in constructing the Mishkan, the builders were provided with a model towards which they were required to strive. The actual Mishkan was not an exact embodiment of this model. It is the closest possible actualization of the model.

The second possible resolution of this paradox is that the specifications must be achieved. An approximation is not adequate. However, the Torah accepts an empirical standard for all measurements. In other words, if a measurement is empirically met, the Torah regards the measurement as precise.

Let us now return to the discussion in the Talmud. The Talmud initially asserts that the requirement to build the Mishkan and its components to exact specifications indicates that we can rely on the precision of measurements. This proof can now be understood. The proof is based upon

the assumption that the Torah's standard of measurement is empirical. If the builders of the Mishkan carefully measured their work and all of their empirical measurements indicated that the design specifications had been met, then the standard of measurement was satisfied. In other words, if empirical measurement indicated that the Mishkan had been built exactly to specification, then according to the Torah's standards the Mishkan was regarded as built exactly according to its specifications.

However, the Talmud rejects this argument. It suggests that empirical measurements are not regarded as precise. Instead, in providing exact specifications for the Mishkan, the Torah created design targets. The Torah recognizes that these targets cannot be precisely achieved. The Mishkan was acceptable because it was the closest possible embodiment of the required dimensions.

This analysis provides an explanation of the dispute between the Sages. The Sages recognize that it is virtually impossible to achieve precise measurements. The Sages who contend that measurements can be regarded as exact do not dispute this issue. However, they contend that in establishing measurements, the Torah only requires that the measurements be held to an empirical level of precision. When the measurement has been empirically achieved, the Torah's requirement is satisfied. However, the Sages who maintain that precision is impossible argue that the measurements of the Torah are exact requirements that cannot be satisfied at an empirical level of precision. If this is the case, they must assume that Torah's specifications for the Mishkan are intended as design targets but not absolute standards.

The Talmud offers another resolution of the paradox of the Mishkan. The resolution is quite enigmatic. It consists of a passage from Divrei HaYamim—Chronicles. King David instructed his son Shlomo to build the Bait HaMikdash—the Temple. He provided Shlomo with precise instructions. He explained to Shlomo that he was providing him with precise written instructions that he (David) had received from Hashem through prophecy. [12], [13]

The Talmud does not comment on the passage or explain its relevance to the paradox. However, Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik—the GR"Z—offers an interesting explanation of the Talmud's comments. He suggests that although it is virtually impossible to make a measurement with exact precision, it is not innately impossible. In attempting to make a precise measurement, we are

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typically defeated by the imprecision of our measuring tools and the limitations of the human senses. However, if these limitations can be overcome, a precise measurement is possible. Based on this assertion, the GRI"Z explains the Talmud's comments. David told Shlomo that he had received through prophecy exact specifications for the Bait HaMikdash. He assured Shlomo that the building of the Bait HaMikdash would be guided by the same Divine inspiration. Through this inspiration, they would achieve a level of precision not normally possible.

According to the GRI"Z, the Talmud is suggesting that even the Sages who maintain that exact precision is normally impossible to achieve would acknowledge that the Mishcan and its components were built with exact precision. The builders were guided in their efforts by divine inspiration. This guidance enabled them to achieve a level of precision that is normally not attainable.

We can now understand Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel's comments on our passage. The craftspeople who built the Mishcan required the spirit of prophecy in order to complete their task. This spirit of prophecy guided them and assured their success in achieving the precise specifications required for the Mishcan and its components.[14] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 36:8.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 36:8.

[3] Mesechet Ketubot 50a.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Erchin VeCharamin 8:13.

[5] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p. 444.

[6] Sefer Shemot 30:22-33.

[7] Sefer Shemot 30:34-36.

[8] Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam, Commentary on Sefer Shemot 37:29.

[9] Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel, Targum on Sefer Shemot 35:21.

[10] Mesechet Succah 15a – 15b.

[11] Mesechet Bechorot 17b.

[12] Sefer Divrei HaYamim I, 28:19.

[13] Mesechet Bechorot 17b.

[14] Rav Y. Hershkowitz, Netivit Rabotaynu (Jerusalem 5762), Volume 1, pp. 415-416.

Weekly Parsha



The Mishcan Communicates that Bnai Yisrael Were Forgiven for the Sin of the Egel

And these are the accounts of the Mishcan – the Tabernacle of the Testimony – that were calculated by Moshe. It was the service of the Leveyim under the authority of Itamar the son of Aharon the Kohen. (Shemot 38:21)

This pasuk introduces Parshat Pekudey. The parasha provides an account of the materials donated for the Mishcan and a description of the manner in which these materials were used in the fabrication of the Mishcan, its utensils, and the garments of the kohanim.

The pasuk refers to the Mishcan as the Tabernacle of the Testimony. The simple meaning of this term is that the Mishcan housed the Luchot – the Tablets of the Decalogue. These Luchot provided testimony. They evidenced the authenticity of the Torah and the relationship between Hashem and His nation.

Rashi, based on Midrash Rabbah, offers another suggestion regarding the testimony

identified with the Mishcan. He explains that the Tabernacle indicated that Hashem had forgiven Bnai Yisrael for the sin of the Egel HaZahav – the Golden Calf. Upon the completion of the Mishcan, the Divine Presence descended upon the Tabernacle. This indicated that the relationship with Hashem was re-established.

The midrash's position regarding the testimony provided by the Mishcan creates an interesting difficulty. The end of the pasuk explains that the service in the Mishcan was entrusted to the Leveyim and Kohanim. This was not Hashem's original intention. Initially, service was entrusted to the Firstborn. However, the Firstborn involved themselves in the sin of the Egel. In contrast, the Leveyim and Kohanim withstood temptation and opposed the Egel. As a consequence, the responsibility for service in the Mishcan was transferred from the first-born to the Leveyim and Kohanim. The end of the pasuk acknowledges this change from the original plan.

According to the midrash's position regarding the testimony provided by the Mishcan, the pasuk communicates a confusing message. The first part of the pasuk indicates that the Mishcan testified to Hashem's forgiveness. The second part of the pasuk seems to indicate the opposite: the service was not restored to the Firstborn. This seems to imply that the sin of the Egel had not been completely forgiven.

Meshech Chachmah offers an interesting answer to this question. Maimonides explains that a kohen who practices or endorses idolatry may not serve in the Temple. This law applies even if the kohen repents fully for his sin. Why can the repentant kohen not return to service? Presumably, Hashem has forgiven him! The answer seems to be that once the kohen becomes associated with idolatry, he is permanently unfit for service in the Mishcan. Repentance and forgiveness can be achieved, but they do not remove this association with idolatry. In other words, once a kohen tarnishes himself through associating with idolatry, even repentance and forgiveness cannot restore his fitness to serve in the Temple.

Based on this law, the Meshech Chachmah explains the message of the pasuk: Bnai Yisrael had indeed been forgiven for the sin of the Egel. Nonetheless, the Firstborn were no longer qualified to serve. They were identified with the idolatry of the Egel. Therefore, they were permanently disqualified from service in the Mishcan.

The Manufacture of Gold Thread

And they beat the gold into thin plates and cut them into threads, which they included in the blue, dark red and crimson wool and fine linen as patterned brocade. (Shemot 39:3)

The garments of the Kohen Gadol contain a number of materials. The basic threads are blue wool, dark red wool, crimson wool, and fine linen. The vestments also contain gold threads. However, the gold threads are interwoven with the other threads. How is this accomplished? Each thread of blue, dark red and crimson wool and fine linen is composed of seven interwoven strands: six are made up of the colored wool or fine linen, and the seventh, gold. For example, a thread of blue wool is composed of seven individual strands woven together to create a single thread. Six of these strands are blue wool. The seventh strand is gold. In this manner, gold is included in each of the threads of the garment.

Our pasuk describes the process through which these gold threads are created. A quantity of gold is beaten into a thin plate, or foil. Then, this foil is cut into fine threads.

The Torah does not provide many details regarding the manufacturing processes used in creating the Mishcan and the vestments of the kohanim. This lack of detail is exemplified in the narrative of the silver sockets. The Torah does not go beyond explaining that the boards supporting the curtains of the Mishcan were inserted into these silver sockets. There is no discussion of the process by which these sockets were fabricated.

The only details regarding manufacturing methods that the Torah does provide are the means by which these gold threads were fashioned. It is odd that these details should be mentioned. Why does this method of craftsmanship deserve special attention?

Nachmanides offers an answer to this question. He explains that the reason the Torah does not generally describe the means used to manufacture the Mishcan and its components is because the Torah did not dictate the specific manufacturing processes. In other words, the commandments to construct the Mishcan and the garments delineate the objects which must be manufactured. The commandments do not dictate the means of manufacture. This aspect of the project was left to the craftsmen. They were responsible to determine the best means for manufacturing the objects. For this reason, the specific manufacturing processes are not included in the commandment of regarding the

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construction and they are not included in the account of the actual process that ensued.

This presented the craftsmen with a dilemma. They understood the description of the Kohen Gadol's garments. They realized that the individual threads of the garments must contain a gold strand. However, they were not familiar with a process through which gold thread could be manufactured. This challenge exceeded their experience and their collective store of knowledge. They were required to invent some novel process for manufacturing these gold strands. The Torah is describing a manufacturing process that was invented by the craftsmen of the Mishkan. This process is described in order to demonstrate the wisdom of these craftsmen who invented a completely new process.[1]

The Curtain in front of the Ark

And you should place there the Ark of Testimony. And you should shield the Aron with the curtain. (Shemot 40:3)

Our pasuk discusses the Parochet. This was a curtain suspended in the Mishkan, in front of the Aron. According to our pasuk, the function of the Parochet was to shield the Aron.

The Mishkan was composed of two areas. These two areas were the Kodesh – the Holy – and the Kodesh HaKadashim – the Holy of the Holy. The Aron was placed in the Kodesh HaKadashim. The Parochet separated these two areas. The Chumash, in Parshat Terumah, indicates that the purpose of the Parochet was to separate the Kodesh from the Kodesh HaKadashim.

It seems that the Chumash is offering two different characterizations of the function of the Parochet. Our parasha indicates that the function of the Parochet was to shield the Aron. In Parshat Terumah, the Chumash indicates that the function of the Parochet was to separate the Kodesh from the Kodesh HaKadashim. How can we reconcile the two conflicting characterizations?

In reality, these two sources are not contradictory. The Parochet was essentially a shield in front of the Aron. The Chumash, in Parshat Terumah, does not contradict this function. The Chumash is merely requiring that this shield be extended beyond the dimensions of the Aron, in order to create two areas within the Mishkan. In

other words, the shielding function defines the Parochet. Once the Parochet meets this essential qualification, it can be extended to create a separation between the Kodesh and the Kodesh HaKadashim.

There are various laws that support this understanding of the Parochet. The Talmud, in Tractate Yoma, comments that the staves of the Aron actually protruded into the Parochet. One who observed the Parochet from the Kodesh saw two projections pushing out the curtain. This strange requirement can be understood based upon our knowledge of the Parochet. The essential function of the Parochet was to shield the Aron. In order to demonstrate this function – that the Parochet was a shield for the Aron – the staves protruded into the Parochet.

This also explains another interesting halachah. The Parochet played a role in the service associated with certain sacrifices. A portion of the blood of these sacrifices was sprinkled, by the kohen, in the direction of the Parochet. This law is expressly stated in the Chumash. The midrash Torat Kohanim comments that the blood could not be sprinkled toward any portion of the Parochet. The sprinkling must be directed specifically towards the portion of the Parochet into which the staves of the Aron protruded. Why was this portion of the Parochet special? Based on the above discussion, this halachah can be appreciated. The Parochet was, in essence, a shield for the Aron. Therefore, the essential portion of the Parochet was the portion directly in front of the staves. The blood was to be sprinkled on this portion of the Parochet.

This role of the Parochet is evident in today's synagogues. It is customary to hang a curtain in front of the Aron. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt"l explained that this practice is based upon the halachah in our pasuk. We are duplicating the practice in the Mishkan. Our Ark represents the Aron of the Mishkan. Therefore, our Ark requires a curtain. It is fitting that we call this curtain a Parochet.

Moshe's Service in the Mishkan

And it was that in the first month of the second year, on the first day of that month the Mishkan was erected. (Shemot 40:17)

The Mishkan was completed and brought to Moshe. Moshe erected the Mishkan on the first day of Nisan, in the second year of the sojourn in the wilderness.

This was the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan. On this day, the service in the Mishkan was performed by Moshe together with the kohanim. After this day, all service would be performed by the kohanim alone. Moshe would no longer serve in the Mishkan.

Moshe was not a kohen. Yet, during the eight days of the inauguration, Moshe served as a priest. Why was Moshe appointed for this task? The service was assigned to Aharon and his sons. How could Moshe serve in the place of the kohanim?

The commentaries offer various answers to this question. One of the most interesting solutions is provided by Gershonides. He explains that Moshe was selected and qualified to serve on these days because he was "the father of the priesthood and had given birth to it".[2] What is Gershonides telling us? Moshe was not Aharon's father! He was Aharon's brother. He had not given birth to the kohanim; they were not his children!

It is clear that Gershonides' statement is not to be understood literally. Instead, Gershonides is explaining an important concept underlying the selection of the kohanim to serve in the Temple. The kohanim were not chosen simply because they are the descendants of Aharon. Neither was Aharon selected purely on the basis of his own merit. Aharon was chosen because he was Moshe's brother. Similarly, Aharon's descendants are kohanim not merely because Aharon is their ancestor. They are descendants of Moshe's brother. This relationship is essential to their status as priests.

Gershonides is explaining that Moshe is the father of the institution of priesthood. Without him, Aharon would not have merited to be selected as Kohen Gadol. Neither would his children be kohanim. This explains the basis of Moshe's qualification to serve as a kohen. He was the source of the kohanim's sanctity. If the kohanim served by virtue of their relationship to Moshe, it follows that Moshe could serve.

Mishkan and Ohel Moed

And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: On the first day of the first month you shall erect Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting. (Shemot 40:1-2)

In the above passage, Moshe is commanded to assemble and erect the completed sanctuary. The passage employs two terms in referring to this sanctuary: Mishkan – Tabernacle – and Ohel

Moed – Tent of Meeting. What is the difference between these two terms? Both seem to refer to the single sanctuary! Why are both terms needed?

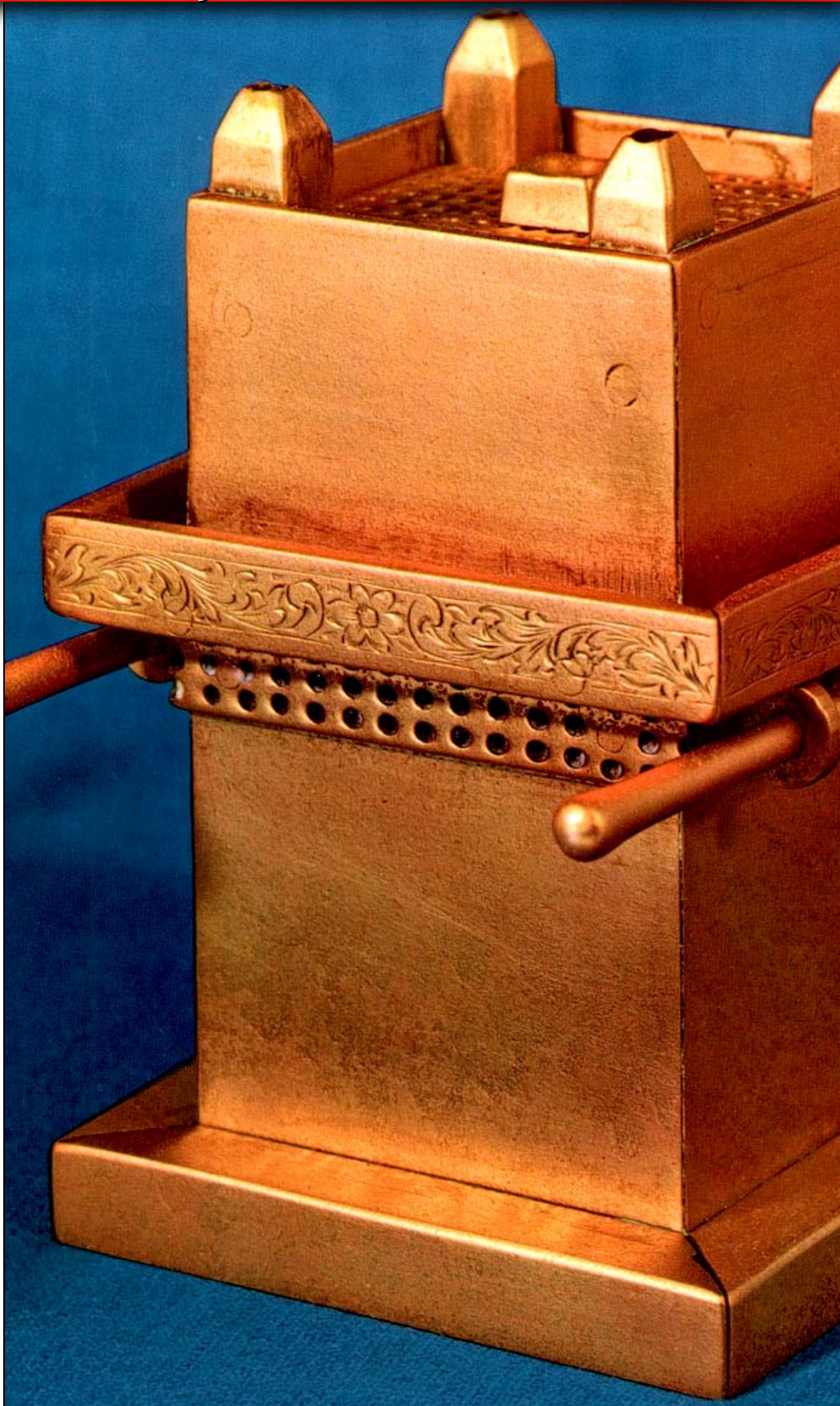
And Moshe erected the Mishcan, and laid its sockets, and set up its planks, and put in its bars, and reared up its pillars. And he spread the tent over the Mishcan, and put the covering of the tent above upon it; as Hashem commanded Moshe. (Shemot 40:18-19)

This pasuk describes Moshe's activities in erecting the sanctuary. It is clear from this passage that the Mishcan contains three sets of coverings, or curtains. The first series of curtains are spread over the skeletal structure of boards, thus creating a ceiling, or covering, over the area enclosed by the boards, and over most of the outer surface of the boards. The result is a box-like structure of curtains supported by the skeletal boards. Over these curtains, a second set of curtains is spread, covering the set of curtains. Our passage refers to this second set of curtains as a "tent." Finally, a third covering is placed over the roof of the second layer, or "tent", of curtains. According to the opinions of some, this covering is composed of two layers. Therefore, three layers of coverings are suspended over the inner area of the sanctuary. The curtains of the Mishcan are the inner surface, or ceiling. Lying atop this ceiling are the curtains of the tent. These curtains are covered by a third covering of a single (or double) layer.

Each of the layers has its own name. The innermost layer is the Mishcan. The middle layer is referred to as the "tent." The outer layer is referred to as a "covering." What is the significance of these three terms? All three of the terms seem applicable to each layer. For example: the innermost layer is part of the Mishcan. It creates a tent over the inner area, and it covers this area. The same can be said regarding the middle and outer layers. Yet, the Torah never interchanges these names. The inner layer is always referred to a Mishcan. The middle is the tent. The outer layer is the covering.

Rabbahynu Ovadia Sforno deals with this question. Before we consider his explanation, some background information is helpful. The inner curtains are woven. The design of the weave is intricate. Shapes of cherubs are interwoven into the fabric. These cherubs are visible on both sides of the curtains.

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Sforno explains that the inner curtains of the sanctuary are referred to as Mishcan because they are designed to surround with cherubs the Aron, Shulchan and Menorah – the Ark, Table, and Candelabra.[3] He further explains that the middle layer of curtains is described as a tent because its purpose is to create a tent over the inner curtains. However, the inner curtains are not referred to as a “tent.” This is because their purpose is not to serve as a tent. Their purpose is solely to impose the images of the cherubs above and surrounding the Aron, Shulchan, and Menorah.[4]

In these comments, Sforno is explaining the meaning of the term Mishcan and tent. Sforno proposes that these two terms have very different meanings: the term “tent” refers to a structure designed to create an inner space. It demarks the inner space, and separates and shields it from its surroundings. The term “Mishcan” refers to walls and a ceiling that are not designed to create a space, but are instead designed to create a specific appearance, or environment, within a space.

An analogy will be helpful. Consider a house. A house has outer walls and a roof. Its outer walls and roof are designed to separate the space within from the outside and to protect this space from the outside elements. These outer walls may be made of brick, stone, wood, or some other substance. The roof will be composed of shingles, tile or some other substance. The substances used for building these components of the house will be selected to correspond with their design and function as outer walls and a roof. They will not be composed of plaster or wood paneling as these materials are not appropriate for the functions of outer walls or a roof. However, plaster is appropriate for the inner walls and ceiling of a house. The inner walls and ceiling are not designed to protect the space from the outside. They create the living area within. Their appearance, form and texture should complement and suit the intended purpose of this space. In fact, we use different terms to refer to the overhead surface on the inside of our homes and the surface on the outside: the outside surface is a roof and the inner surface is a ceiling. These two terms, “ceiling” and “roof,” communicate their different functions. Although we do not have different terms to refer to the inside and outside walls of a house, we distinguish them by their function and design in the same manner as we do with roofs and ceilings.

Sforno is suggesting that the inner Mishcan curtains are designed to surround the essential components of the sanctuary with cherubs. The surrounding cherubs provide character to the environment in which the Aron, Shulchan, and Menorah are placed. The middle layer of curtains – the tent – is designed to separate and protect the inner space from the outer area.

In order to fully appreciate the meaning of these comments, it is important to visualize an outcome of the design of the sanctuary. The cherub figures were interwoven throughout the fabric of inner curtains – the Mishcan. However, these figures are only visible to an observer standing inside the sanctuary and looking up. The figures woven into the curtains that hang down to form walls are not visible from the inside or outside of the sanctuary. On the inside they are obscured by the boards that hold up the curtains. On the outside they are completely covered by the tent curtains. It seems odd that the essential feature of the Mishcan curtains – the cherubs – are only visible to a person inside looking up!

Sforno is suggesting that although these cherubs are not readily visible from within or without, they nonetheless are the essential feature of the environment of the Mishcan. They create an environment of surrounding cherubs. Their effect – the creation of this environment – does not depend on their visibility. Their existence as figures woven into the fabric of the curtains creates the required environment.

Now, we can understand the term used to refer to the outer curtains. These curtains are placed atop the roof of the tent. They are referred to as a covering. The term “covering” has a very literal meaning in our context. These outer curtains are not designed to create a space or to create an environment. They serve as a covering to protect the surface of the middle tent curtains.

Based on Sforno’s comments, we can appreciate the lack of interchangeability of the terms Mishcan, “tent,” and “covering.” The inner Mishcan curtains cannot be referred to as a tent. They are not designed to create an inner space and separate and protect it from the outer area. Neither are these curtains a covering. The middle curtains are a tent. They do not create the inner environment. They are not a covering. The outermost covering of curtains is not a tent. Also, they do not create an inner space and they do not create an environment.

And you shall make the planks for the Mishcan of acacia wood, upright. (Shemot 26:15)

As noted above, the Mishcan curtains are supported by a skeletal structure of planks. Our passage explains that these planks are placed upright. Each plank is placed immediately adjacent to its neighbor. In this manner, a continuous surface is created. The commentaries explain that the placement of the planks in an upright position is an absolute requirement. They cannot be positioned horizontally upon one another.[5] This is an interesting requirement. It would seem that whether placed upright to create a continual surface or placed horizontally upon one another, the same outcome is achieved. Why must the planks be placed in an upright position?

According to Sforno, we can understand this requirement. These planks are not intended to create an inner wall. The inner wall of the Mishcan is the curtains of the Mishcan. The sole function of these planks is to support the curtains. In other words, the planks support the curtains; the curtains do not cover and adorn the planks. The positioning of the planks communicates their function. Horizontally-placed planks create the impression of an inner wall. Such an inner wall contradicts the function of the Mishcan curtains. It is these curtains that create the inner environment of the Mishcan. The upright position of the planks contributes to communicating their purpose – the support of the Mishcan curtains.

Now, our original question is easily answered. The terms Mishcan and Ohel Moed both refer to the sanctuary. However, these terms refer to different aspects of the structure. Mishcan is the innermost structure. The innermost curtains create this structure. Ohel Moed – tent of meeting – refers to the middle curtains that create the tent within which the Mishcan is situated. ■

[1] Rabbahynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 39:3.

[2] Rabbahynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 457.

[3] Rabbahynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 26:1.

[4] Rabbahynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 26:7.

[5] Rabbahynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 26:15.

Weekly Parsha



Reading through the Torah sections describing the Temple, we must reflect on the Temple's design, and its uncanny parallels to certain miracles. Understanding the Temple's purpose will fuel our readings with greater interest, and even excitement.

Take for example a previous lesson. We cited Ramban's parallel of the golden Ark, to the golden flames at Sinai's summit, from where God gave the Ten Commands. Ramban stated that the golden Ark resembles the golden flames. We deduce that the Ark is to act as a constant replica of that event. Certainly, as the Ark houses the two sapphire Tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments, the parallel is more clearly drawn. It is obvious that the singular event of Revelation at Sinai was to act as a perpetual lesson, as God tells Moses, "Behold, I come to you in thick cloud in order that the people hear when I speak with you, and also in you they will believe forever". (Exod. 19:9) But Ramban hints to other parallels, which also must also have fundamental lessons as they are also permanently fixed in Temple worship. We took our own steps, and drew these parallels:

1. The external, copper animal altar parallels Egypt's animal deification: through slaughter we reject animal deification, in service of the one, true God.
2. The washing laver parallels Miriam's well.
3. The Incense Altar used to create cloud, parallels God's pillar of cloud.
4. The pillar of fire is paralleled by the Menora
5. The Manna is paralleled by the Table's Showbread.
6. The barrier roping of Sinai to would-be ascenders is paralleled by the Paroches curtain.
7. And Sinai ablaze is paralleled as we said, by the golden Ark.

The Jews encountered many miracles in Egypt, and en route to Sinai. Temple appears to possess parallels to those miracles. Those ancient miracles must therefore be understood, in order that we might 1) fully appreciate why they required perpetuity in Temple, and 2) understand for what Temple stands.

As part of our study of these miracles, we must consider why certain miracles required Moses' involvement, such as raising his staff in connection with the 10 Plagues and the Red Sea, while others God performed without Moses' involvement, such as the Manna, and the pillars of cloud and fire. What might we learn from God's determination that Moses be involved, and be excluded? And it is quite intriguing that those very events where Moses was excluded, exactly parallel the vessels

found in the Holi'es! (Numbers 3,4, and 5 above.) Let us first understand the significance of the miracles, and their counterparts in Temple.

Incense / Pillar of Cloud

Entry to the Tabernacle is met first with the Incense Altar and its fumes: the Incense Altar being closest to the Temple's opening. And we suggested the altar replicated God's pillar of cloud. But when do we first see the Divine pillar of cloud? Exod. 13:21 reads: "And God went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them, and at night in a pillar of fire to illuminate for them..." We understand that a cloud can travel before the Jews to lead them, but we don't understand the commencing words, "And God went before them". Clearly, God does not travel, and He is not "in" the cloud: being metaphysical, He cannot occupy space. We are forced to derive another idea from these words.

My understanding is that God intended the two pillars to display His "relationship" with us. Ramban on this verse says so clearly, as he quotes Moses' later plea that God not destroy the Jews after the spies rejected entrance to Israel. Moses pleaded that if God would kill the Jews for this sin, a catastrophe would follow: the ruin of God's reputation. Moses anticipated the response of the nations at God's destruction of the Jews: "God was incapable of bringing the Jews to the Promised Land, and He slaughtered them in the desert". (Num. 14:16) And earlier, Moses said why the nations would conclude this: "For your clouds stand by them, and in a pillar of cloud You go before them by day, and in a pillar of fire by night". (ibid 14:14) Moses means to say that God's intimate relationship with the Jews is undeniably seen in the miracles of these pillars. This proves the Jews' fate is due to God. "And when You kill them", Moses says to God, "it will ruin your reputation." This substantiates the earlier verse "And God went before them by day in a pillar of cloud..."

We learn that with the two miraculous pillars, God demonstrated His constant providence over the Jews. But as we said in a previous article, cloud represents the veil that separates us from God: "...for man cannot know Me [God] while alive" as this week's parsha Ki Sisa teaches. (Exod. 33:20)

Manna / Table & Showbread

For what reason did God include a Sabbath law in the Manna? For example, laws governing ritual slaughter or affixing mezuzah contain no integral Sabbath prohibitions: we know not to perform these commands on the Sabbath, based on "Sabbath" prohibitions. But the Manna's very laws

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contained a prohibition not to collect it on the Sabbath. This could have been easily understood once laws prohibiting carrying on Sabbath were given, and need not be an additional "Manna" law. Why this superfluous law?

Furthermore, Manna miraculously doubled on Friday. All other days, whatever amount was collected of the Manna, naturally remained that amount unless diminished by household consumption. But when the Jews collected Manna on Friday, they found that it doubled its volume when they measured it at home. This was to cover their needs for both Friday and the Sabbath so they need not gather it on Saturday when it did not rain Manna. We must say that Sabbath is integral to Manna. The question is how? I believe the answer is as follows.

Knowledge of God as "Creator" gives us the conviction that since God created everything, He is in control of everything. And with Manna, God intended to raise the Jews to the level where they were reliant upon God for their very sustenance; "They shall need Me every day". (Ibn Ezra, Exod. 16:4) The lesson that God created everything – the Sabbath's message – plays a primary role in Manna. The Jews were forced each week to ponder why they could not collect the Manna, and why it miraculously doubled. They contemplated God as Creator, and also, as Provider. This is an essential lesson, one that even today's orthodox communities have yet to learn. People feel they risk their income if they give the proper 20% tzedaka, or if they work less and learn more as stated in Pirkei Avos. But both, tzedaka's optimum amount, and Pirkei Avos are rejected, lest Jews have less money...an error.

The realization that God "has many messengers" to sustain us, is not accepted. The forfeiture of time at the office is so difficult, and the need for security so strong, that the lesson of Manna was institutionalized in Temple, in the form of the Table displaying the twelve loaves of Showbread. Manna was even commanded to be placed in a jar for future viewing as evidence of God's abilities to provide. It would teach doubting Jews that just as God provided Manna, He can provide you with your necessary income. And in relation to tzedaka, again the Torah says, "And test Me with this". God promises to "open the storehouses of heaven (providence) and empty out a blessing more than enough". (Malachi 3:10)

Just as the Manna was presented daily encased in upper and lower layers of protective dew, so too the Table presented the Manna in a well-laid out presentation. This is to drive home the point of just how easy it was/is for God to provide the millions of Jews with their daily sustenance. We have no grounds for abandoning Torah study, just to earn

more. Again, Pirkei Avos teaches that we are to minimize our work, and maximize our study. And God does not say to do so, if this will cause starvation. God's blessing in Malachi is secured for all those who dedicate themselves to true study. (See also Maimonides' last law in Shmitta and Yovale)

A further embellishment of the Sabbath in the Manna/Showbread, is seen in the law that the Menora was placed directly against the Table...a spatial parallel. Thereby, the idea of the Mesora – 7 branches indicating creation – imbued the onlooker with the idea of the Creator, as Menora literally shone upon the Table. In other words, our security in God's provided sustenance (Table/Showbread) is derived from the fact that God created all (Menora).

Why is this lesson of "God the Provider" so fundamental that God taught it through Manna, and in Temple through the Table and Showbread? It is because the perfection of man is based on his convictions, not only his theories. One who gives charity far surpasses one who praises it, but doesn't give. A human's convictions are only true when man acts upon them. And as it is God's wish that every person reach perfection, God deemed it essential that the one area of life most difficult – parting with our wealth – be institutionalized in the "Museum of God's Providence", the Temple. It is when man can part with his wealth and truly is convinced God will care for him, that man has reached the level God desires.

Menora / Pillar of Fire

Its seven branches clearly allude to the seven days of Genesis. Menora is integrally tied to the Incense Altar. As we said, man must accept that he has no knowledge of what God is. So both Menora activities of lighting and cleaning the ashes are joined with the services of fumigating an incense cloud: demonstrating conviction in our blindness. But although blind to "what" God is, we do know He is the Creator, and the source of our lives and sustenance.

We might summarize these lessons as follows: Menora defines our God as the God of Creation, the 7 branches parallel 7 days of Creation. The Table and Showbread teach us of God's omnipotence; that He is powerful enough to sustain us. And the Incense Altar conveys the idea as the verse said, that God "goes before us by day and night". God is cognizant of us, or omniscient.

We see these ideas are so vital, they form our High Holiday prayers of Malchys and Zichronos: God is king (omnipotent) and knows man's actions (omniscient). If you ponder for a moment, don't all God's action fall under one of these two headings? Yes, these two truths are the defining categories of

all that man can know about God. Menora is essential, as is Baruch Sh'Amar, our daily blessing's commencing prayer. We must always be reminded of the defining idea of God – Creator. But once we recognize this truth, we must also recognize the attributes of God, and they are that He is all powerful, and all knowing. Everything else will be subsumed under one of these two categories. Knowledge of God is essential...not just for the Jews who exited Egypt, but for all generations. Therefore, we have Temple for all time. Now we come to a final amazing idea...

God vs. Moses

Earlier, we noted a highly fundamental distinction. God performed many miracles: some with, and some without Moses' involvement. And we said it is quite intriguing that those very miracles where Moses was excluded, exactly parallel those vessels found in the Holies. God alone created the pillars of fire, cloud, and the Manna. And these parallel Menora, the Incense Altar, and the Table respectively. Why is this?

Perhaps, as Temple is to teach us of truths regarding God, there must not be any involvement of man in those miracles. So God did not instruct Moses to do any act to bring the pillars, or the Manna. These miracles relate fundamental ideas of God. Knowing truths about God requires no action: we must simply study until the idea resonates with complete clarity in our souls. But perhaps with regard to the 10 Plagues, the bitter waters of Marah, and the splitting of the sea when the Jews cried for their lives seeing Egypt race towards them, an example of the correct "human" reaction was required. Therefore, Moses was instructed by God to partake in all those miracles. The onlooker must recognize that a Moses is unaffected by these calamities, thereby teaching that those who are affected, should aspire to be as Moses.

A "model" (Moses) was required when it comes to teaching Egyptians that their "acts" of idolatry are false; that the Jews "cries" at the red sea were not warranted; and that the bitter waters were not intended to parch the Jews...but to instruct them that "God is their healer". The rule is that when man's "actions" are flawed, God sets up an example of the proper human response, using Moses. But when God wishes to imbue the Jews with correct "ideas about God", Moses must be absent. the focus is God alone, as the lesson is concerning God, not man.

Therefore, only those miracles aiming to teach us about God, are the miracles referred to in Temple...the "Museum of God's Providence". In such a place, reference to man is antithetical. ■

Weekly Parsha



The form of the Tabernacle is rectangular, 30 cubits long by 10 cubits wide. A cubit measuring approximately 1.5 feet. It's only entrance is on the eastern side. The first ten cubits upon entering are called the Ulam. No articles are placed in this area. In the next ten cubits are found the Candelabrum, the Table and the Inner Altar. Together the Ulam and these additional ten cubits form the Kodesh, the Holies. The remaining ten cubits are separated from the Kodesh and is called the Kodesh Kodashim, the Holy of Holies, separated by a curtain called the Paroches. In this Kodesh Kodashim is placed the Ark, which contains the Tablets of the Law (the Ten Commandments), the staff of Aaron, the canister of oil used for anointing the kings of Israel, and the jar of the Manna - the food with which God fed the Jewish people in the desert forty years.

What is the idea behind these laws?

There is one command with regard to the High Priest which I believe begins to shed some light. The High Priest, and certainly other priests can never enter into the Kodesh Kodashim, except for one day of the year-Yom Kippur. On this day, the Jews are forgiven for their transgressions. The High Priest only enters on this day into the Kodesh Kodashim and brings in the incense from the inner altar, places it in front of the Ark, and causes it to cloud that room. He leaves and enters only one more time to remove the fire pan with its ashes. What objective is there that none should enter into this room?

Interestingly, a peculiarity of this room is that God says that He causes a voice to emanate from this room from between the two cherubs which are above the ark. This implies that God is commanding us not to approach the point from which He causes this voice to project. This demonstrates the idea that one cannot approach God with one's limited understanding. As God had told Moses, "You cannot understand Me while alive". We can only "go so far". Therefore, abstaining from entering this room demonstrates that we cannot understand God in our present, human state.

This explains the relevance of the vessels in this room. The Ark contains the Divine Law which man could have never developed on his own; ideas which must be of Divine origin – thus belonging to God's realm. The oil was used to anoint the kings of Israel who were chosen only by God – man has no knowledge as to who will be king. When Samuel thought to select

King Saul's successor, Samuel said of Eliav (David's brother), "This is God's anointed", whereby God replied to Samuel (Sam. 1.XV, 1:7) "Look not on his countenance nor on the height of his stature because I have refused him". Thereby teaching Samuel that he had the flaw of assuming God's Knowledge, and therefore he had to be corrected. Perhaps this is precisely why God did not originally instruct Samuel on which son was to be king. God wished Samuel's error be brought out into the open so Samuel might perfect this flaw.

The staff of Aaron was placed in this room as well. This was the staff which miraculously blossomed into almonds during the revolt of Korach. Korach was claiming the Priesthood for his family, assuming that Aaron (already chosen by God) had erred in acting as the priest. Thus, Korach was suggesting that he knew better than Divine Wisdom. This staff was also placed in this Holy of Holies, as it too testifies to God's supreme, unapproachable, and unknowable wisdom. The Manna is also a demonstration of Divine Wisdom: while it is food, it does not produce human waste. Its appearance was miraculous, which the Jews wondered "what is it?"

All of the articles found in the Kodesh Kodashim share a common distinction: they epitomize that which man cannot approach. In Samuel I, 1:19, a passage occurs which concurs with this idea: "And God had smote the men of Bet Shemesh because they had looked into the Ark of the Lord". The sin of these people was that they were expressing the heretical notion that they could 'see' something (about God) by looking into the Ark. Their error was generated by a need to make God tangible somehow, which is the worst of philosophical crimes. We must – above all else – possess the correct ideas concerning God. We must know that our proximity (in terms of perfection) to God is directly proportional to our understanding of His Laws, not to the proximity of physical creations. Rambam states that "proportional to our knowledge is our love of God."

Now that we have posited that the Kodesh Kodashim – the room behind the curtain – is to remind us of that which we cannot approach, we may suggest that the Kodesh deals with the concepts that are understandable. We need not guess what those concepts are, for they are already familiar to us.

If we look at the prayers which we recite on

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the Museum of Jewish Ideas

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

the High Holidays, we see that there are 2 praises to God. 1) He is Omnipotent 2) He is Omniscient. That is, God is all-powerful and all-knowing. There are only these two categories, for all acts which God performs are understood by us to be a display of either His Power or His Knowledge. In order for us to be constantly aware of this, God commanded Moses to create the Table, upon which there was always to exist the twelve loaves of bread. Twelve signifying the twelve tribes, and bread to signify God's ability to provide sustenance. God also commanded Moses to build the inner altar. Upon the Altar the priests would offer the incense, a man-initiated relationship between man and God, demonstrating that God is aware of man's actions. The Table reminds us of God's Omnipotence, while the Altar reminds us of God's Omniscience.

What then is the purpose of the Candleabrum? If we look at the daily prayers, we begin every morning with "Blessed be the One Who spoke and the world came into being, blessed be He." In Daniel's blessing of God after God had granted his request to be informed of Nevuchadnetzar's dream and its interpretation, (Dan. II:19, 20) Daniel said "To the One Whose name is Eloka, blessed is He forever and ever". In both of these cases God is defined first, before any praise is made. This is to say that when one relates to God, it is essential that he is aware of Whom he is directing his thoughts. Therefore, we first define to Whom we direct our praises each day. Daniel did the same, and perhaps the Candleabrum serves this very purpose. Namely, to define (not God forbid to embody, which is impossible) that the God which we are relating to in the Tabernacle is the God Who created the world and rested on the seventh day. We are reminded of this by seeing the Candleabrum which is composed of seven branches, six branches emanating from the seventh, as there were six days of creation and a seventh of rest. The six branches pay homage to the seventh as their wicks must all be directed to the center seventh. The seventh, center branch displays the seventh day as the purpose of creation. Contrary to the popular view that creation was an ends in itself for the physical, Judaism claims that the six days of creation target a goal: a day of physical abstention, enabling man time for pondering the world of wisdom. Finally, the command to create the Candleabrum from one solid block of gold (not made through soldering segments) might serve to remind us of the concept of the Unity of this Creator.

Thus, we have three main concepts derived from the Kodesh:

1) We must understand before all, that we are relating to the God who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. We define Who we are praising. This is the Candleabrum, the Menora.

2) This God is Omnipotent-all powerful. This is represented by the Table.

3) This God is Omniscient - all knowing. This is represented by the Inner Altar. An altar only makes sense if the Recipient – God – is aware of human beings and their attempts to draw near to Him.

These are the categories knowable to man, and therefore: what we are reminded of by the Temple's vessels.

However, if we cannot approach God directly, how is it that the High Priest can enter the Kodesh Kodashim, the Holy of Holies, and why with incense? Why is he commanded to cloud the room (as the Torah states, Leviticus XVI:13) "that he die not", and why on Yom Kippur? The answer is that as we have said, the incense represents our approach to God. The High Priest's entrance into the Holy of Holies shows us that there is a "closer relation" to God on this day due to God's act of forgiving our sins. He therefore brings in that which represents our approach to him. That which represent our prayer (incense) is figuratively brought closer to God. The same idea is represented with the levels of restriction upon man at Sinai: Moses alone drew to the top of the mountain, Joshua lower, and others still lower. The purpose of the priest smoking up the room is to remind him while he is there, that his understanding of God is still blocked, represented by the smoke. God knows that even a person who is on the highest level enters into the Holy of Holies, he is still in danger of forming erroneous ideas about God. Smoking up the room physically demonstrates that there is a 'veil' between him and God...even in this room. Similarly, when God revealed Himself to the Jews on Mount Sinai, the Torah tells us that there was "darkness, cloud, and thick darkness (fog)." This again was all done for the purpose of demonstrating that there is a constant veil between man and God.

In regards to why there is a specific arrangement to the vessels in the Kodesh, the following reason may be given: Both the Candleabrum and the Table are placed close to the dividing curtain to represent that these two concepts are

closer to perfection (closer to the Holy of Holies) than is the altar. The altar, being man's approach, is not always perfect, and is thus removed further from the Paroches than are the Table which represents God's Power and the Candleabrum which defines the God to Whom we relate. These two being undoubtedly perfect as they emanate from God.

In summary, the Tabernacle is a structure which represents our limited understanding of God, but also informs us of truths. It is a vehicle for us to be aware of our relationship to God on the different days of the year, as we see differences in the sacrifices on different days. And conversely, when we witness the absence of the Tabernacle, we are made aware of a severed relationship.

Addendum

The priest wore 8 special garments as part of his dress. Two of which point to interesting ideas: The gold headplate, the "Tzitz", had "Holy to God" inscribed upon it. He also wore a breastplate which had 12 stones, corresponding to the 12 tribes. I believe these are to relate two aspects of a person living on the highest level: The headplate denotes that one's thoughts, his intellect, should be used primarily for understanding God. This is why it is placed on the head, the figurative location of the soul. The breastplate is placed upon the heart, the seat of the emotions, should be devoted to his brethren, the 12 tribes. Thus, both aspects of man, his intellect and his emotions are subjugated to the correct areas. Our tefilin demonstrate the same. ■



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