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A LESSON FROM THE BEIT HaMikdash for A JEW GROWING UP IN Today's Jewish World

by Rabbi Chaim Poupko

Most Haftarat are chosen to amplify a theme found in the Torah reading, particularly that of Parashat Terumah. After reading the instructions for building the Mishkan in the Torah reading, we read a section of Sefer Melachim that describes Shlomo's building of the Beit HaMikdash. This Haftarah is a perfect choice; the Mishkan of the desert and the Beit HaMikdash in Yerushalayim are functionally the same, albeit one temporary and one permanent. And since we are studying Sefer Melachim at Torah Academy of Bergen County this year, the Haftarah feels even more relevant to us.

Yet, some observe that this close connection between the Torah reading and the Haftarah also highlights some critical differences. In a well-known Derashah, Rav Dr. Norman Lamm highlights some of these differences:

The construction of the Mishkan is a popular project to which virtually the entire nation contributes enthusiastically. Men and women contribute everything from the materials to the necessary skills and labor. The construction of the Beit HaMikdash, however, is not done by the Jewish people themselves; rather, laborers are hired from Tyre.

The initiation of the project to build the Mishkan elicits unbridled generosity from the Jewish people in the desert. Hashem instructs Moshe to collect donations from anyone, "Asher Yidevenu Libo," "who feels generous of spirit" (Shemot 25:2). We discover later that this call for donations is met so well that Moshe has to tell the people to stop bringing them in. The funding of the construction of the Beit HaMikdash, however, requires Shlomo to levy heavy taxes upon the people.

Why were these two construction efforts so different in character? Why was there more enthusiasm and participation for the Mishkan than for the Beit HaMikdash?

I'd like to suggest that the differences between these construction projects can be understood with the following observation: the building of the Mishkan yields a direct, immediate result, while the building of the Beit HaMikdash does not. With the completion of the Mishkan in the middle of the Jewish camp in the desert, each Jewish person is within the

imminence of Hashem. Each Jewish person finds him or herself within the immediate orbit of the Divine presence. They have close, intimate access to the influence of Hashem as a camp that encircles the Mishkan. Seeing this reality naturally brings out more enthusiasm and participation from the people knowing the immediate reward for their efforts.

On the other hand, although Hashem immediately dwells in the Beit HaMikdash upon its completion and is found in the midst of the people, individual Jews must engage in Aliyah to Yerushalayim to be within the immediate presence of Hashem. When the Jewish people were not firmly ensconced in the close proximity of a camp but were dispersed throughout the land of Israel, the building of the Beit HaMikdash was not the end of the process as in the desert. A Jewish person still needed to make the effort to journey to Har Hashem to feel a more immediate sense of being within the Divine presence. Perhaps it was harder for the people in the time of Shlomo HaMelech to feel a greater sense of enthusiasm, generosity, and participation for a project situated far away whose impact would not be felt as immediately.

Clearly, the building of the Mishkan in the desert is a one-time project that will never be replicated. This is why the Beit HaMikdash instead, a project we hope to embark on very soon, serves as a better model for the challenges we face right now. Jews my age and younger who grew up in New Jersey and New York were born into a community that has many of the institutions critical for Jewish life already built—Shuls, Yeshivot, Eiruvim, Mikvaot, and the like. Our parents and grandparents struggled to rebuild in this country, while we simply stand on their shoulders. What we learn from the model of the Beit HaMikdash is that because we did not build these institutions ourselves, we need to make an extra effort to find a way to bring ourselves closer to them. Just as the Jewish people in the time of Shlomo are challenged to bring themselves closer to the Beit HaMikdash, we too must find ways to maximize our connection to the institutions around us and not take them for granted. Our own TABC offers so many ways to learn and connect with Rebbeim and teachers outside of the classroom. Our Shul Rabbis are eager to find more ways to connect with their congregants. It's up to each and every one of us to not waste our gifts but rather utilize them to bring us closer to the Divine presence.

ESTER AND THE MISHKAN: THE TRUTH HURTS

by Leiby Deutsch ('15)

This week's Parashah begins the transformative endeavor of allowing God into the world that He created. While the pieces seem to be falling into place for those who are actually building the Mishkan, the narrative is puzzling for those reading it generations later. Firstly, why must the initial sponsors of the Mishkan be, "*Yidevenu Libo*," "those whose hearts are dedicated to the cause" (Shemot 25:2)? Did Hashem not expect everyone to donate towards the Mishkan? Secondly, (a more global question about the narrative as a whole) according to Rashi (Shemot 31:18 s.v. *VaYitein El Moshe*), who says that the Cheit HaEigel takes place before this week's Parashah, why would the Torah choose to place that section in Parashat Ki Tisa, thereby dividing the construction of the Mishkan into two parts with a seemingly unrelated intermission?

In two weeks, we will read about another improbable and illogical juxtaposition between two episodes in Megillat Ester: at the end of Perek Bet, Mordechai uncovers and foils Bigtan and Teresh's plot to take Achashveirosh's life. At the beginning of Perek Gimmel, Achashveirosh appoints Haman as his second in command. The two episodes are linked with the words, "*Achar HaDevarim HaEileh*," "after these things" (Ester 3:1), implying a chronological connection between Mordechai saving Achashveirosh and Achashveirosh appointing Haman, the man who almost destroys the Jewish people. How could these two events be related? Why would Mordechai doing something brave for the king result in the king lending to the rise of Mordechai's enemies? Rav Moshe Weinberger answers that this presentation and the connection of these two events in the Megillah strongly resembles the struggle within a person's mind related to his growth. A person who does something brave or unprecedented is often forced to reevaluate his current life circumstance. In this reflection, he may decide to do something brave for the "king," whether it be HaMelech Achashveirosh or Melech Malchei HaMelachim, HaKadosh Baruch Hu. It is during the moments after that brave act that the "Hamans" begin to surface in that person's mind and bother him: "What did I do?" "What was I thinking?" "Why did I not see the truth sooner?" In other words: "Am I seriously capable of moving forward along the road of spiritual heights, or am I already a lost cause?"

This is the plight of Bnei Yisrael as they embark on their relatively new journey towards greatness. They leave Mitzrayim on the lowest level possible, and they do not have any reason to believe that they are entitled to redemption. The opportunity falls into their laps and they seize it, even if it is an opportunity against the unknown. Hashem carries them the entire way to Har Sinai, whether they deserve it or not. Now, in Parashat Terumah, during a very significant chapter of their brave journey towards spiritual heights, they dedicate a part of themselves to Hashem and his "home." For the first time they are acting on their own—their personal strengths and weaknesses acting as a guide. The Torah's placement of Cheit HaEigel shows that even Bnei Yisrael in the Dor HaMidbar, the generation of the largest and most convincing Giluy Shechinah (divine revelation) in history, have their "Hamans." They know that as long as Hashem is doing everything for them, their worthiness should go unquestioned, as otherwise Hashem would not have taken them so far. However, once Bnei Yisrael can act independently, they will inevitably face the question of their worthiness and will not only need to contend with the challenges of building a sanctuary for Hashem, but with the challenges of their own internal doubts as well.

How does someone overcome the doubt that plagues him and threatens his progress? One solution can be found in a Pasuk in Megillat Ester (8:16): "*LaYehudim Hayita Orah VeSimchah VeSason Vikar*," "The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor." Curiously, light is the only visible element of the Pasuk. The Sefer HaLekach VeHaLibuv in its commentary on Parashat VaYigash describes the relationship between light and Simchah as that of a Mashal and a Nimshal. Just like a small amount of light can help someone escape a dark room, a small amount of Simchah can help someone overcome his sadness and his doubts about himself in the aftermath of what he does wrong. The greatest foil to potential is cynicism and resignation. A person is sad and skeptical when he realizes his mistakes, but when he is happy and content with what his resultant future may bring, he is able to climb out of the dark room truly stronger than when he ever was before.

Chazal teach, "*KeSheim SheMiShenichnas Av MeMa'atin BeSimchah Kach MiShenichnas Adar Marbim BeSimchah*," "Once Adar enters, we increase in joy; once Av enters we decrease in joy" (Ta'anit 29a). As Chodesh Adar begins and our happiness becomes plentiful, may it be not just a temporary experience, but a light that continues to drive us forward along the path of growth, even if we encounter points of lowliness and sadness.

by Simcha Wagner ('16)

Although we all know the true beauty of the Torah, it is often difficult to live a life in which we are appreciative of our daily commandments. There are many Jews who lead a pious life in public in order to impress their fellow Jews, yet are less admirable in their private dealings, convinced that they are unobserved. These people are sadly forgetting the fact that, "*Shiviti Hashem LeNegdi Tamid*," "I have set Hashem always before me" (Tehillim 16:8), regardless of whether other human

While this may explain the reason for the gold on the inside and outside of the Aron, it does not explain the need for a wooden interior. What does the wood in the center of the Aron represent? Perhaps the wood in the inside of the Aron teaches us the importance of humility. A Jew might behave properly both in public and in private, but he should never consider himself to be as glorious as gold. Just as the Aron has a humble center, so too, a Jew must remain humble, for if he does, it is a sure sign that he is covered in gold.

by Gavriel Epstein ('15)

by Rabbi Hayyim Angel

Music And Mood During The High Holy Days

One notable practice in many Sephardic communities is to sing several tunes during the High Holy Day season that are lively, exciting, and even joyous. One of the most dramatic examples is the refrain in the Selichot (penitential prayers), Chatanu Lefanecha Racheim Aleinu,

we have sinned before You, have mercy on us! Amidst our confession of sinning, this tune is rousing and upbeat. If an Ashkenazic Jew heard some of these Sephardic tunes, he or she might intuitively feel that the happiness of the music was inappropriate for Yom Kippur. If a Sephardic Jew heard some of the solemn Ashkenazic tunes, he or she might wonder why the music lacks this happiness. Yet, both sets of tunes are consistent with different aspects of the day.

Rabbi Ovadyah Yosef discusses whether one should use joyous or fearful tunes on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur (Yechaveh Da'at 2:69). Among many authorities, he quotes Rabbi Hayyim Vital, who stated that his teacher, Rabbi Yitzhak Luria (Ari), used to cry while praying on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. Rabbi Yosef also quotes Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna (Gra), who ruled that people should not cry but rather should use festive holiday melodies. Rabbi Yosef concludes that if one is overcome with emotion, one certainly may cry. However, one otherwise should try to be in a festive, happy mood.ⁱ

Not only do melodic differences elicit different emotions, but the words do, as well. To take one prominent example, a central prayer of the Ashkenazic High Holy Day liturgy is the "UNetaneh Tokef," during which the congregation contemplates the gravity of being judged. Yet, this prayer—composed during the medieval period—is not part of the liturgy in most Sephardic communities.

Rabbi Simchah Bar Yehoshua, an Ashkenazic rabbi, traveled on a ship with Sephardim to the Land of Israel. He wrote:

"On the entire voyage we prayed with the Sephardim. The Sephardim awoke prior to daybreak to say Selichot with a quorum as is their custom in the month of Elul. During the day they eat and rejoice and are happy of heart. Some of them spend their entire days in study (In J. D. Eisenstein, *Otzar HaMasa'ot*, 1969, p. 241)."

When Jews of different backgrounds live together, they have the opportunity to learn from the practices of one another, thereby appreciating other aspects of our rich tradition.

The Censored Verse in Aleinu

The Aleinu prayer is ancient, and initially was recited only during the High Holy Days. It appears to have entered the daily prayers around the year 1300. In the original text, we contrast ourselves with pagans, "Who prostrate to vanity and hollowness, and pray to a god who cannot save, Sheheim Mishtachavim LaHevel VaRik, UMitpallelim El Eil Lo Yoshi'a." This line derives from two verses in Sefer Yeshayahu:

For the help of Egypt shall be vain and empty (*Hevel VaRik*). (Yeshayahu 30:7)

No foreknowledge had they who carry their wooden images and pray to a god who cannot give success (*UMitpallelim El Eil Lo Yoshi'a*) (Yeshayahu 45:20).

Around 1400, an apostate claimed that this line in Aleinu was intended to slur Christianity. He observed that the

numerical value (Gematria) of VaRik is 316, the same as Yeshu, the Hebrew name of the Christian savior. This accusation led to the Christian censor striking this line from the Aleinu in France and Germany. In 1703, the Prussian government even placed guards in synagogues to ensure that Jews would not recite that line.

In their attempts to defend the original prayer, rabbis protested that the line is anti-pagan, and cannot be anti-Christian. Among other arguments, they noted that the verses are from Yeshayahu, who long pre-dates Christianity. Nevertheless, the censor required Ashkenazic Jews to remove that line, whereas Sephardim retained the original text. Today, several Ashkenazic communities have restored that line to their Siddurim.ⁱⁱ

Conclusion

Most aspects of the Sephardic and Ashkenazic liturgy are strikingly similar. The biblical passages, ancient rabbinic prayers, and the structure of the service, are largely the same with minor variations.

In those areas where there were choices left to later generations, such as the order of the psalms, choosing between rabbinic interpretations, Piyutim, Shabbat Haftarot, and music, we can gain a better sense of what choices different communities made to shape their prayer experience. Occasionally, we also see evidence of persecution of Jews through the censorship of ancient prayers.

This article offers a small window into how we can gain a better understanding of the distinctive features of Sephardic and Ashkenazic prayer liturgies. More importantly, a careful comparative study of prayer should help us appreciate prayer itself more, and enable us to grow in our relationship with God.

ⁱ R. David Brofsky, *Hilchot Mo'adim: Understanding the Laws of the Festivals* (Jerusalem: Maggid, 2013), pp. 93-94.

ⁱⁱ Macy Nulman, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer*, pp. 24-26.

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