

The Mishkan – A Living Memory

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The Ramban's approach to Parshat Terumah is unique on a number of fronts. The most well-known of which is his disagreement with Rashi as to when and why the Mishkan was commissioned. Rashi believes that the Mishkan is a direct response and result of Chet HaEgel (the sin of the Golden Calf). Hashem provides the Mishkan as both a means of atonement for Bnei Yisrael, a rectification for the Chet HaEgel, as well as a vehicle to satisfy the people's need for a physical manifestation in their worship of God. The Ramban strongly disagrees. He is heavily influenced by his view that the Torah is in chronological order unless explicitly stipulated otherwise and therefore for him the fact that the parshiot of the Mishkan precede the events of Chet HaEgel is irrefutable proof that they are independent of the Chet HaEgel. If that is correct, then obviously the building of the Mishkan must have inherent value and purpose. The Ramban famously formulates the reason for the Mishkan as being "the secret of the mishkan is that the glory of God that rested upon Har Sinai, rests hiddenly upon it (the mishkan)."¹ The Ramban sees the Mishkan as a smaller scale continuation of the revelation at Har Sinai. It is Ma'amad Har Sinai in a "box" that can travel with the people and create an anchor around which God's holy nation can be built. The Mishkan allows for a seemingly once in a lifetime event to be preserved for eternity. In this week's shiur, we will see how this principle can be extended to the other utensils of the Mishkan.

Before we discuss the Mishkan, let us summarize (at least according to the Ramban) that which transpired with Bnei Yisrael from Kriyat Yam Suf until God's command to build the Mishkan. In that short period of time, Bnei Yisrael experienced being led into the desolate Desert, water shortages, food shortages, a battle with Amalek and finally the seminal event of Matan Torah. In the context of Matan Torah, what is the purpose of these other seemingly trivial events? The answer to that question lies in God's attempt to take a nation of slaves and convert them into a priestly nation subservient only to God. To build a people that are not only physically free, but are mentally and spiritually free. In order to accomplish this formidable goal, God will have to slowly quash Bnei Yisrael's slave mentality and wean them off their reliance on the Egyptians. In order to do this, God must put them through a training session to have the former slaves look to Him for all their needs rather than running back to their former masters. In Parshat B'Shalach, in incident after incident, God places the former slaves in predicaments that are overwhelming and which cause them to turn and seek salvation from their former masters. In each instance, God provides an alternative solution (rather than returning to Egypt) in an attempt to have Bnei Yisrael see God as their provider and savior. It is a crash course to educate and enlighten the people by inculcating within them the fact that God is ever present to provide for their physical and spiritual needs. The Torah tells us that God responds to the people's need for guidance, protection and the presence of God by providing Bnei Yisrael with a pillar of fire representing God that accompanied Bnei Yisrael through their travels² and encampments³ at night. Similarly, during the day, there was a cloud that led the way² for Bnei Yisrael and that was also present when they camped.³ The battle with Amalek is won by having the people look heavenward for strength and salvation.⁴ Water shortages are solved by God's directing Moshe to find or create new springs. And finally food shortages are resolved by Man (bread מן) and meat raining down from the heavens. Cumulatively, with all these events, God is teaching Bnei Yisrael that while it is detrimental to be dependent on man, it is virtuous and desirable to be dependent on God, the true provider, for not only your spiritual needs, but also your physical needs.

Now let us return to discussing the Mishkan. One of the key differentiating elements of the mishkan is the placement of the utensils of worship outside of the Parochet (Curtain Veil). In this week's parsha (26,31-37), the Torah emphasizes that the Parochet will be a divider between the Kodesh (Holies) and the Kodesh HaKodashim (Holy of Holies). Moshe is instructed to situate the Aron (Ark of the Covenant) in the Kodesh HaKodashim and to place the Shulchan and the Menorah outside the Parochet in the Kodesh. Chazal were acutely aware of this unusual setup and make note of it in the Midrashim⁵ in the beginning of Parshat Titzaveh. They contrast the Mishkan's setup with that of an earthly king. Normally, a palace would be configured for the king with a bed or couch and a table with a candelabra (to the left side) in a single location. In the Mishkan, on the other hand, the "throne" of God is found on the Aron in the Kodesh HaKodashim¹ while the Shulchan and the Menorah (on the right side) are situated outside God's inner

¹... וסוד המשכן הוא שיהיה הכבוד אשר שכן על הר סיני שוכן עליו בנסתר... (רמב"ן שמות כה,א)

² שמות יג,כא-כב ובמדבר יד,יד ודברים א,כג

³ שמות מ,לח ובמדבר ט,טו-טז

⁴ משנה ר"ה ג,ה

⁵ תנחומא תצוה סימן ז' ועוד

chamber with an intervening veil. The Midrash indicates that this is to emphasize that God does not need man's light, but rather that man is in need of God's light. The Menorah is not there to illuminate that which is inside, but rather to project light outwards. Similarly, the Lechem HaPanim are not there for God's consumption. They are there to demonstrate that God is the one that bestows the blessing of sustenance on us. That is evidenced by the fact that the Lechem HaPanim are consumed by the Kohanim and not offered as a sacrifice to God.⁶ Chazal convey this idea by saying that one who seeks riches should go north and one who is looking to acquire wisdom should go south. They are not advocating for physically moving in a direction, it is a symbolic move. The Shulchan that represents parnasa or sustenance is located on the northern side of the Kodesh and the Menorah that represents Torah and wisdom is situated on the southern side of the Kodesh. Chazal are telling us that one who is seeking sustenance and wisdom, which are represented by the Menorah and Shulchan in the Mishkan, needs to turn to God, the ultimate provider of these gifts. At the time of the building of the Mishkan, this was a revolutionary concept. Other religions saw their temples as a medium for man to provide for the particular god they were worshipping. They dedicated themselves to appeasing the god whose favor they sought. Therefore, their places of worship were structured like a king's palace where the throne, the table and the candelabra were all situated together. Judaism, in contrast, sees the worship carried out in the Tabernacle or Temple as way to elevate man, to connect him to the transcendental God. The beneficiary of the interaction is man. It is to raise his awareness and to facilitate a recognition that God is the source of everything in his life. If successful, one will come to the realization that is declared each day in the beracha of Modim in Shemonei Esreh that we are everlastingly indebted to God for everything, including our life itself. Of course, if God is giving so generously then there must be obligations and instructions associated with that gift (that is the purpose of the Torah). Privilege always comes with responsibility.

If we then overlay our discussion of the experiences of Bnei Yisrael post Kriyat Yam Suf with the description of the utensils of the Mishkan, the parallel is striking. The mitzvah of **lighting** the Menorah is from **night until morning** (מערב עד בקר)⁷ which is similar to the pillar of **fire** that accompanies Bnei Yisrael at **night** (עמוד אש לילה). The Mizbeach HaZahav (the Golden Altar מזבח הזהב), which is otherwise known as the Mizbeach HaKetoret (The Incense Altar מזבח הקטרת),⁸ has **ketoret** (incense), which is described in Parshat Acharei Mot⁹ as the **cloud** of the ketoret, burnt on it. So just like the cloud that escorts Bnei Yisrael during the **day**, the ketoret is offered twice a **day**, once in the **morning** and once in the **afternoon**. The daily burning of the **ketoret** bookends the day, but even more interestingly, it is integrally **tied** to the **lighting** of the Menorah. The morning ketoret is burnt at the time that the Menorah is cleaned from the previous night and prepared for lighting later that day (הטבת הנרות) and the afternoon ketoret is burnt when the Menorah is lit in the evening. This **overlap** reminds us of the Midrash Chazal (שבת כג:) quoted by Rashi (שמות יג, כב) that in the morning the pillar of fire would not ascend until the cloud was manifest and the cloud would not dissipate in the evening until the pillar of fire was present.¹⁰ Moving to the other utensil found in the Kodesh, the Shulchan held the Lechem HaPanim (Show **Breads**). The Lechem HaPanim were left on the Shulchan from Shabbat to Shabbat and **miraculously** remained **fresh** all week long. The Kohanim would replace the Lechem HaPanim with a new batch on **Shabbat** and then eat the previous week's Lechem HaPanim that had been removed. This reminds us of the Man (the heavenly **bread**) that **miraculously** descended from the heavens **daily**. On Friday, there was a double portion from God that was to be kept until the next day for consumption on **Shabbat**. Both the Shulchan and the Man represent the understanding and the acknowledgment of Hashem being the provider of sustenance.¹¹ If we add to all this, the Ramban's view that the Aron allows for the revelation at Sinai to continue in the Mishkan, then the Mishkan really acts as a microcosm for all that Bnei Yisrael experience post Kriyat Yam Suf. The Mishkan and later the Mikdash are the embodiment of Ma'amad Har Sinai, the Amud Anan and Esh and the Man and the water. They make these historical events into a living memory that keeps their messages eternally at the forefront of our consciousness.

Shabbat Shalom

⁶ The Gemara says that the כהנים משלחו גבוה קזכו, they are granted their food from God, but they are not eating for God

⁷ שמות כז, כ-כא With the exception of the רמב"ם, the ראשונים understand תמיד to mean daily rather than continuously.

⁸ שמות ל, א-י;

⁹ ויקרא טז, ב ו

¹⁰ תניא לא ימיש עמוד הענן יומם ועמוד האש לילה מלמד שעמוד ענן משלים לעמוד האש, ועמוד האש משלים לעמוד הענן

¹¹ It could be that the באר is just another form of sustenance provided to בני ישראל and is represented by the שלחן in the משכן. It is also possible that the באר is represented by the כיור. That would also open the possibility that the מזבח הנחשת is parallel to the בשר that הקב"ה provided each evening to בני ישראל like the meat of the קרבנות that is consumed in the evening.