

Parashat Naso 5775, 2015:

*Moshe and the Mishkan*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world..

There is a famous *machloket* (argument) that obtains between Rashi (1040-1105) and the Ramban (1194-1270) as to whether the *Mishkan* (Portable Sanctuary) was created before or after the incident of the *Chet Haegel Hazahav* (the Sin of the Golden Calf). Rashi consistently upheld the exegetical principle, *ain mukdam umeuchar b'Torah* (there is no chronology in the Torah). As such, he maintained that the order of the *parshiot* in the Torah does not reflect their chronology. Thus, he suggested that the *mitzvah* of building the Portable Sanctuary (*Sefer Shemot* 25:8) came after, and as a direct response to, the Sin of the Golden Calf – even though this commandment appears prior to this heinous sin. According to this interpretation, the *Mishkan's* purpose was to serve as a bridge of renewed communication between G-d and man, and thereby rebuild the relationship that had been nearly irrevocably torn asunder.

In stark contrast, the Ramban maintained *yaish mukdam umeuchar b'Torah* (there is chronology in the Torah). Therefore, according to his view, the commandment to build the *Mishkan* had nothing whatsoever to do with the *Egel Hazahav*, as it was stipulated before, and was not in response to, this egregious failure on the part of our forefathers. This is the case since, in his view, the order of the *parshiot* does, in fact, represent their

chronological order. As a result, the commandment to construct the *Mishkan* was like Tefillin or Lulav, or any other *mitzvah* – a beautiful way to serve Hashem, rather than a Divine response to the Sin of the Golden Calf.

The final topic addressed in our *parasha* centers on the dedication of the *Mishkan*, marked by the offerings of the princes of each tribe of the Jewish nation. Directly after this transpires, the concluding *pasuk* (verse) of our Torah portion states:

When Moses would come into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, he would hear the voice speaking to him from the two cherubim above the covering which was over the Ark of Testimony, and He spoke to him. (*Sefer Bamidbar* 7:89, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Even a cursory reading of our *pasuk* reveals the singular emphasis placed upon speaking:

1. “Moses would come into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him” (Moshe to Hashem)
2. “He would hear the voice speaking to him from the two cherubim above the covering which was over the Ark of Testimony” (Hashem to Moshe)
3. “And He spoke to him” (Hashem to Moshe)

Why all the emphasis on “speaking?” What message is the Torah revealing to us through the use of these expressions? I believe these are some of the questions that the great Italian exegete, Rabbi Obadiah ben Jacob Seforno (1475 - 1550, known as the “Seforno” after the name of his Italian city,) addressed in his commentary on our *pasuk*:

Even though the matter [of the dedication of the *Mishkan*] was very small in every sense, when measured against the dedication [of the First Temple] by [King] Solomon, nonetheless, when Moshe entered the Tent of Meeting, he heard the very Voice he had heard prior to the incident of the Golden Calf. This [immediacy of communication with the Almighty] did not take place in the First Temple, and all the more so, in the Second Temple. [Quite simply,] there was no prophet who walked into the Temple to prophesize in such a manner as to apprehend the prophecy immediately. This [immediacy of communication] was precisely the desire [and rationale] for the dedication [of the *Mishkan*] and of those who offered *korbanot* (offerings) [in its establishment].

(Translation, brackets and parentheses my own)

The Seforno advocates Rashi's Torah-wide application of the principle "*ain mukdam umeuchar b'Torah*." Therefore he states: "He [Moshe] heard the very Voice he had heard prior to the incident of the Golden Calf." Based on this statement, we can readily surmise that the Seforno maintained that Moshe had not heard Hashem's voice in this manner since the time of the *Chet Haegel Hazahav*. In other words, during that period, Hashem's communications with Moshe were mere shadows of what they had once been. As such, the *Mishkan* was far more than the sum of its parts – as beautiful and as awe-inspiring as they surely were. Instead, the *Mishkan*'s entire rationale was to establish a rapprochement and reconciliation between Hashem and the Jewish people, and thereby reestablish depth-level and heartfelt communication between them. Clearly, Hashem accepted the dedication of the *Mishkan*, and, as a result, reinstated the immediate and transparent communication that was the hallmark of His ongoing dialogical encounter with Moshe. Little wonder, then, that the Torah teaches us: "And there was no other prophet who arose in Israel like Moses, whom the L-rd knew face to face." (*Sefer Devarim* 34:10) With Hashem's blessing, the purpose of the *Mishkan* had been realized – to bridge the infinite distance that separates the Heavens and the earth.

Unfortunately we live in a spiritually truncated age that continues to be denied the intimate communication we so long for with our Creator, our *Yedid Nefesh* (the Beloved of our Soul). Therefore, may we witness the fulfillment of the passage we recite at the conclusion of each and every recitation of the *Amidah*:

May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days. Grant us our share in Your Torah, and may we serve You there with reverence, as in says of old and in former years. Then the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to Hashem, as in days of old and in former years. (Translation, *The Artscroll Siddur*)

*V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah and Analysis*,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

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