

Parashat Terumah 5777, 2017:

The Purpose of the Mishkan

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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, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka and 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.

Our *parasha* contains the commandment to construct a holy place for the Master of the Universe, in this instance, the *Mishkan* (Portable Desert Sanctuary): “And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst.” (*Sefer Shemot* 25:8, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) formulated this *mitzvah* in the following fashion:

The 20th *mitzvah* that we are commanded is to build a House of *Avodah* (the Temple Service). In it we offer sacrifices, burn the eternal flame, offer our prayers, and congregate for the festivals each year...The source of this *mitzvah* is G-d's statement (exalted be He), “Make a Sanctuary for Me.” (*Sefer HaMitzvot*, translation, Rabbi Berel Bell)

Maimonides followed this approach, as well, in his *Mishneh Torah*: “It is a positive commandment to construct a House for G-d, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within...as the text states: ‘And you shall make Me a sanctuary.’” (*Hilchot Beit Habechirah* I:1, this and all *Mishneh Torah* translations, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger) In light of these two sources, it is evident that Maimonides viewed this *mitzvah* in practical and utilitarian terms; namely, to provide a designated location wherein the *Avodah* could properly take place.

In his introduction to our *parasha*, as found in his *Commentary on the Torah*, the Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) took a decidedly different tact and presented us with a spiritual rationale for constructing the *Mishkan*. In his view, the Revelation at Mount Sinai transformed us into a holy nation that was uniquely dedicated to Hashem's service, and therefore, "it was fitting and proper that there should be a sanctuary among them [the Jewish people] wherein Hashem's Divine Presence could dwell." Little wonder, then, that according to the Ramban's understanding of the Torah's chronology, the first post-Sinai commandment was the construction of the *Mishkan*. Its objective was to engender the continuation of the dialogical encounter between Hashem and Moshe that took place at Mount Sinai. Hence, the Ramban explicitly stated, "the secret understanding (*sod*) of the *Mishkan* was to enable the Glory [of G-d] that had dwelt upon Mount Sinai to dwell therein in a hidden manner." Moreover, "within the *Mishkan*, that would forever be with the Jewish people, would be found the Glory [of G-d] that had appeared to them on *Har Sinai*." Thus, for the Ramban, we are met with the following formula: *Mishkan* = Mount Sinai = Continuous Presence of Hashem.

The Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel, 1809-1879), like the Ramban, adopted a far more spiritual approach than that of the Rambam. As we have noted, the Ramban viewed the *Mishkan* as a transportable Mount Sinai wherein Hashem's presence continued to ever be manifest. For the Malbim, however, continuous mystical encounter was the essence of the *Mishkan*, and the *Beit Hamikdash* that would follow thereafter:

And this was the intention [i.e. the rationale] inherent in the construction of the *Mishkan* and the *Beit Hamikdash* that was built afterwards in Jerusalem – in the city where it was joined in permanent union. For there, all of the members of the Jewish people united together as if they were one being that contained within its [collective] soul all of the enlightening splendor and spirituality found within the G-dly illuminations that bring

light to the entire world in His glory. (This, and the following quote, *Ramzai HaMishkan*, s.v. *v'zot hyitah hakavannah*, translation and brackets my own)

At this juncture, the Malbim describes the longing of our people to reunite with Hashem in His holy precincts:

And unto this place, [the entire nation] would turn and flock from all of the dispersed places of the world, and all of their prayers and actions would be infused with holiness as they turned their faces toward [this holy place.] As our Sages taught us in the Talmud, “If one finds himself standing in the East [and he wishes to pray,] he must turn toward the West [that will then be the direction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple]. If one finds himself standing in the West [and he wishes to pray,] he must turn toward the East [that will then be the direction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple]...we thereby find that the entire Jewish people will focus their hearts and minds upon one [manifestly sacred] place.” (*Talmud Bavli, Berachot 30a*, translation my own)

In sum, for the Malbim, the *Mishkan* and the *Beit Hamikdash* offered the ultimate venue for the Jewish people to encounter Hashem in mystical union. Therefore, even the *makom haMikdash* (the location of the *Beit Hamikdash*) remains the place unto this day “[where] the entire Jewish people focus their hearts and minds.”

Closer to our own time, my rebbi and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), offered a different rationale for the *mitzvah* of the *Mishkan* than those presented by the Rambam, the Ramban and the Malbim. The Rav explained that the Holy One blessed be He “created the world to reside in it, rather than to reside in transcendence.” If this is the case, why, then, did He alter His mode of interacting with the world and mankind? In other words, why did He become the Transcendent One and abandon His persona of the Immanent One? The Rav opined that this change occurred when Adam withdrew from communicating with Hashem after failing to keep his one and only commandment:

But in the wake of the original sin by Adam and Eve, He [G-d] retreated. “And they heard the voice of the L-rd G-d going in the garden to the direction of the sun, and the man and his wife hid from before the L-rd God in the midst of the trees of the garden.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 3:8) These “footsteps” were those of G-d leaving the garden and departing into infinity. Had they not sinned, G-d would always have been close. As a result of Adam’s hiding and fear of communicating with G-d in the wake of his sin, G-d removed His Divine Presence. (Quoted in, *Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Shemos*: with Commentary Based Upon the Teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Dr. Arnold Lustiger, editor, page 236, underlining my own)

Given the Rav’s analysis, we are now in a much better position to understand exactly why Hashem commanded us, “And they shall make Me a sanctuary...” In a word, G-d wanted to reestablish the pattern of closeness that He had shared with mankind prior to the sin of Adam and Eve when they ate of the *pri eitz hada’at* (Tree of Knowledge). As the Rav stated: “The purpose of the tabernacle was to restore the relationship between man and G-d. [As the Torah writes:] ‘And I will dwell in their midst.’”

No matter which rationale for the construction of the *Mishkan* speaks to you, let us continue to hope and pray that, with the Almighty’s help and bountiful mercy, the moment will come soon and in our days when the *Mashiach* (Messiah) will arrive and

...urge all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance...**build the Temple in its place**, and gather the dispersed of Israel... (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim* 11:4)

V’chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha’s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Megillat Esther* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.