

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In the portion of Pekude a reckoning of the work done in the Tabernacle is recorded. Interesting, is the Hebrew word for reckoning-pekude. (Exodus 38:21) As I have often pointed out in these weekly Torah discussions, one key to understanding the meaning of a word in the Torah is by analyzing the first time it is found.

In the story of Avraham (Abraham) and Sarah we first come across the term p-k-d. The Torah tells us that for many years, Avraham and Sarah could not have children. Finally Sarah does give birth. In the words of the Torah, "and the Lord remembered Sarah as He had spoken...and Sarah conceived and bore a son to Avraham." (Genesis 21:1) The word "remembered" is pakad. Somehow then pekude is interwoven with birth as the text indicates that G-d had remembered Sarah.

It follows therefore, that pekude, the accounting of the Tabernacle, is associated with birth. Perhaps it can be suggested that just as a mother plays the crucial role in the development of the fetus and the nurturing of its well being, so too does G-d serve as a Mother in His protection of the Tabernacle. The Hebrew word for mercy is rachum, from the word rechem that means womb. G-d's love is the love of the womb. It is a mother's love that is infinite and unconditional, much like the love displayed by G-d in protecting the Tabernacle.

Another parallel comes to mind. By definition birth involves a sense of history. When a child is born there is recognition of historic continuity, of the infant being part of a continuum of the family's past history. So too, the Mishkan. In many ways, the building of the Tabernacle was the crescendo of Israel's past, the culmination of a dream that Israel as a nation would have a place in which to worship G-d.

Although the birth of a child is often the end of a time of feelings of joy and anticipation, it is also a beginning. It is the start of hopes and wishes that the child grow to full maturity and impact powerfully on the Jewish people and all humankind. This is also the case with the Mishkan. In many cases of buildings, many involved see the beauty of the actual structure to be an end in itself. But buildings are not ends, they are rather the means to reach higher, to feel more powerfully the

deeper presence of G-d. The Mishkan is associated with birth for it reminds us that even as a tabernacle or any synagogue is dedicated, our responsibility is to go beyond the bricks and mortar to make sure that the space is infused with spirituality.

The birth of a child is a time to re-evaluate our priorities and look ahead toward the dream of years of growth. The Mishkan, and in the same way our individual structures of worship, should, in the same way, make us reflect on our values and aspire to higher spiritual levels of holiness. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The reading of the book of Shemot concludes this Shabat. The entire drama of the birth of the Jewish family as a nation is contained in the narrative portion of this book. In a series of almost unimaginable events, the Jews begin a golden exile in Egypt, which eventually turns into a nightmare of persecution and slavery. At great cost and staggering losses, the Jews are miraculously redeemed and a great leader, Moshe, appears to deliver them from Egyptian bondage. Once again miraculously saved from annihilation at Yam Suf the Jews come into the desert of Sinai. There they are sustained by heavenly manna and the waters of the well of Miriam. With great drama, the Torah is given to them at Mount Sinai. But with equal fanfare, the people worship a golden calf, a sin that affects all of the balance of Jewish history. Finally, the Jews construct an elaborate structure - a mishkan - that is to be the center of spiritual revelation to them. Aharon and his sons are chosen to be the kohanim - the priests - who are to serve in the mishkan and special garments are created for them to wear during their service in the mishkan. The book of Shemot ends with the spirit of the Lord, so to speak, descending into the confines of the mishkan and thereby challenging Israel to become a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. Well, what are we to make of all of this series of bewildering and momentous events? How does this narrative affect us and guide our present and future course of action and behavior?

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I think that we have here a pattern and outline of Jewish life throughout the ages. Just as the stories regarding our patriarchs and matriarchs that appeared in the book of Bereshith were seen by our rabbis as being the guideposts to all future Jewish history, so too the events of the book of Shemot are a further lesson as to the future of Israel throughout the ages. The illusion of "golden exiles," the impatience of the people of Israel with obstacles and challenges, the easy willingness to pursue golden calves and false ideals and currently popular G-ds, are all clearly outlined in the book of Shemot. The challenge of building a painfully difficult and intricately detailed house of spirituality is laid before us. Being the chosen people is to be seen as a constant challenge fraught with enmity from outside and weakness of spirit from within. The goal of having the presence of G-d's spirit, so to speak, within us individually, within our families and communities is clearly stated. The book of Shemot therefore becomes the book of all of us in all of our ages and climes, in all of our difficulties and triumphs. It is no wonder therefore that at the conclusion of our reading this book we invoke the blessing and challenge to ourselves *chazak chazak v'nitzazeik* - be strong, be strong and strengthen others with us. Only in our inner strength and steadfast devotion to the Torah and its ideals will we see again the spirit of G-d, so to speak, resting within our camp and our hearts. © 2006 Rabbi Beryl Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA GUEST SICHA BY RAV YOEL BIN-NUN SHLIT" A

Adapted by Shaul Barth

Translated by Kaeren Fish

In this week's parasha, we read about the conclusion of the construction of the Mishkan. The Torah provides a tally of the silver that was collected and a description of what it was used for; inter alia, we are told:

"The money of the counting of the congregation was a hundred talents and a thousand seven hundred and seventy-five shekels, by the shekel of the Sanctuary; a 'beka' per person-a half shekel-by the shekel of the Sanctuary, for all who passed among those who were counted, from the age of twenty years and upwards, for six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty. And the hundred talents of silver were used to cast the sockets of the Sanctuary, and the sockets of the curtain: a hundred sockets corresponding to the hundred talents; a talent per socket." (Shemot 38:25-27)

In other words, the half-shekels donated by Bnei Yisrael were used for building the basis of the Mishkan-the sockets. But we know that Bnei Yisrael donated more than what was necessary; hence, the remainder was used for other construction needs related to the Mishkan.

A contribution is usually given out of goodwill on the part of the donor; hence, he is able to bring as much as he wants, and to direct it to whichever cause he chooses. In the case of the contributions to the Mishkan, though, the situation is quite different: the Torah stipulates exactly how much every individual is to donate, and for what exact purpose the contribution is to be used. This may be a hint to us that the basis and foundation of every building, every endeavor, must start with a layer of obligation. The people involved cannot be left to do as they wish; first there must be certain rules, regulations and limitations, in order that the proposed project can be realized. It is for this reason that the contributions collected from every individual in Bnei Yisrael are used to build the sockets of the Mishkan- in other words, the basis upon which everything else stands.

This does not mean to say that there is no room for personal freedom of expression: all of the contributions beyond that which was needed for building the sockets, were used for the other components of the Mishkan. This tells us that there is certainly room for individual, personal involvement and creativity-but their turn comes after the layer of obligation, with which the work begins.

Often, people complain about the set prayers, claiming that they do not reflect the worshipper's true emotions and intentions; there are voices that question our obligation to pray three times every day just because that is what Chazal decided. But it should be noted that throughout the Amida there is room for personal expression: a person may add into any of the blessings whatever he wants to say on the subject of that blessing. In the blessing "Shome'a Tefilla," one may add requests about any subject. In truth, there is plenty of room for personal expression in prayer. So what is all the dissatisfaction about?

Apparently, the problem is the very existence of eighteen blessings that everyone must recite. But, as

we have said-this is our obligation. Prayer, too-like the Mishkan-starts with a certain layer of obligation. Beyond that, every individual may express himself to his heart's content within this framework, which indeed facilitates such self-expression.

It is important to understand that the layer of obligation is necessary not only for the purposes of establishing a framework for action; it also lends the action a dimension of equality. If every individual were left to contribute whatever he wanted to the Mishkan or Temple, a situation would arise whereby a group of wealthy Jerusalemites would end up financing all the building materials and all the sacrifices-and they would do so happily and willingly. After all, what would motivate the simple folk to contribute towards the Mishkan, if there were others who were more capable of doing so-and happy to do it? Everyone else would become distanced- psychologically-from the Temple, eventually ceasing even to visit.

Thus, by obligating everyone to give a contribution, rather than leaving it all to personal initiative and generosity, the Torah establishes the principle of equality in relation to the establishment of the Mishkan. The Mishkan belongs to everyone, and everyone can and should feel personally involved in its construction and operations.

Purim presents an idea that may be related to this: we read that Haman's proposal of genocide begins with his assertion that "There is one nation, which that is scattered and divided among all of the king's provinces." In other words, the fact that the Jews are a single nation-a fact that was immediately apparent to Haman-is what makes Am Yisrael special, and it is this that preserves us in difficult times. It is precisely this concept that the Mishkan represents, by means of the principle that every person brings a contribution, such that it is built-first and foremost-upon a basis of obligation. (*This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat Parashat Pekudei 5763 [2003].*)

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The bulk of the last two Parashos of Sefer Shemos, where Moshe commanded the Children of Israel regarding the Mishkan, are almost a mirror image of the Parashos where G-d commanded Moshe to build it, including the details of its structure, vessels and clothing. One cannot help but wonder why the intricate details needed to be repeated when it was built. Wouldn't it have been enough to just give us the details during the original commandment, and then tell us that it was built exactly to specification? What is added by repeating the dimensions and features by the actual building of the Mishkan?

The Ramban (36:8) tells us that the building of the Mishkan and its vessels are mentioned five times, while the Vilna Gaon (in Aderes Eliyahu) says it is

seven times. Most of the Mishkan's structure and vessels (M1a) are described in extreme detail in Parashas Terumah (25:10-27:19), while the clothing that the Kohanim wore are listed (C1; 28:2-4) as an introduction to their detailed description (C2; 28:6-43) and then mentioned again (C3) regarding the initiation of Aharon and his sons becoming Kohanim (29:5-9). The last two of the Mishkan's vessels are mentioned (M1b) at the end of Parashas Tetzaveh (30:1-6) and towards the beginning of Parashas Ki Sisa (30:17-21) before mentioning all of them (M2) needing to be anointed with the special "anointing oil" (30:26-28). When Betzalel and Ahaliyav were designated as the master craftsman to be in charge of the project (31:1-11), the Mishkan and its vessels are listed again (M3), while the clothing is only referred to (but not mentioned specifically). Moshe tells the nation which vessels will be made from their donations (M4; 35:10-19), with the clothing again only mentioned in general terms. When the Mishkan/vessels were actually made (36:8-38:20), they are again described in full detail (M5), as are the clothing (C4; 39:2-31). Upon their completion, the Mishkan/vessels were brought to Moshe (M6; 39:33-41), including the clothing-which again was not listed individually. G-d then commands Moshe when to put it together (40:1-16), mentioning the Mishkan and the vessels (M7) and referring to the clothing. Finally, they are listed again when Moshe put it together (M8;

40:17-33), for a total of 8 mentions of the Mishkan and its vessels and 4 of each item of clothing.

Our question has now been expanded to: (1) why is there so much repetition;

(2) why are the vessels listed individually twice as much as the clothing; (3) how do the Ramban and Vilna Gaon come up with different numbers (7 vs.5); (4) why are both of their numbers different than the actual amount of repetition; and (5) why are the full details given twice.

The Ramban explains that when G-d first commanded Moshe about the Mishkan, He had to give him the full details (M1). When G-d designated who would be in charge, He only listed the vessels without giving the full details (M3) because Betzalel and Ahaliyav didn't need to be given the details; once told what was needed (i.e. just a list), they would be able to figure what exact measurements and details G-d wanted. The Torah wanted to show us that this was all Moshe actually told them, so it listed them-without the details- in Moshe's command to the nation (M4). Providing the full details during the description of how they were actually made (M5) proved that they did in fact follow G-d's instruction exactly, even though it was never relayed to them specifically. They are listed individually again when brought to Moshe (M6) in order to show that they weren't brought to him until all the work was done (not as each one was finished), yet was brought in the appropriate order.

Although the Ramban does not discuss it, this can be applied to the garments as well. The first list (C1) is to be told to the "wise of heart, whom I have filled with a spirit of wisdom," i.e. the list without the details is to be told to those making it. Moshe is then told the details (C2). The third mention (C3) may list the garments individually to indicate that all of them must be worn at the initiation, or to indicate which order they are to be put on. They are given in full detail when they are made (C4) to show that despite not being given the full details (there was no need to since G-d had given them such wisdom), they made them exactly as Moshe had been commanded.

The Ramban only refers to the 5 times the "making of the Mishkan" is mentioned, so does not include the two lists given after it was made, i.e. when G-d commanded Moshe to put it together (M7) and when he actually did (M8). The list given when anointing them with oil (M2) may have been excluded (from the amount of lists) because it also does not refer to the "making" of the vessels. He is not referring to how many times the garments are mentioned (only the vessels). We have therefore been able to answer all of our above questions according to the Ramban, with the exception of why the Torah had to list the vessels individually by those other 3 lists (M2, 7 and 8) rather than just referring to them as a category. The Ramban adds (at the end of his piece on 36:8) that the volume of discussion of the Mishkan is an indicator of how important it is to G-d, similar to the repetition of Eliezer's quest to find a wife for Yitzchok indicating how much G-d values the conversation emanating from the house of our forefathers.

The Vilna Gaon says that the 7 separate lists of the Mishkan and its vessels were necessary to "bring the Mishkan down from the seventh heaven to the earth," and therefore also includes the two lists given when it was put together. It is likely that the list given when the vessels were anointed (M2) does not count because it is not part of their being made (or commanded to be made) or put together. Rather, something is done to them. He is also not referring to the number of times the garments were listed (only the Mishkan itself and its vessels), and does not address why all the details need to be given twice.

The Abarbanel (at the end of Parashas Vayakhel) and the Ralbag (in his second approach at the end of Parashas Pekuday) suggest that the details had to be repeated when everything was made to show that they did not differ in any way from what was commanded. Even though they changed the order in which they were made (see Rashi on 38:22), every other aspect was exactly as Moshe had been commanded.

I would like to suggest another possible reason why the details were repeated (and not just the names of the vessels). Obviously, G-d had to tell Moshe every

last detail, and so they were taught in Parashos Terumah and Tetzaveh. But they may have been repeated specifically by the making of the vessels and garments to show G-d's appreciation (as the Ramban indicated) of each individual item made, and the effort that went into it.

After having enjoyed a scrumptious meal, it is common courtesy to thank the host and to compliment the cook. But there is no comparison between saying "thank you for the meal, it was delicious" and mentioning (and appreciating) each individual item that tastes yummy. We must appreciate not just the meal in its entirety, but the thought and effort that went into every kugel, every kind of salad, etc. Therefore, when describing the work done to build the Mishkan and its vessels, G-d described each one in great detail, again, thereby showing how important each piece of work—each vessel and each garment—was to Him, and how much He valued and appreciated it in its own right.

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah which we read in conjunction with Parshas Hachodesh portrays the upcoming month of Nissan in a brilliant light. It begins with an elaborate description of the special sacrifices which will introduce the Messianic era. The prophet Yechezkel focuses on the dedication of the third Bais Hamikdash and says, "On the first day of the first month (Nissan) take a perfect bullock and purify the Bais Hamikdash." (45:18) The Radak (ad loc.) notes that the Jewish nation will return to Eretz Yisroel long before this. During that time most of the construction of the Bais Hamikdash will be completed leaving only final stages for the month of Nissan. Radak suggests that the inaugural services will begin seven days prior to the month of Nissan and will conclude on Rosh Chodesh itself. He offers with this an interpretation to the classic saying of Chazal "In Nissan we were redeemed and in Nissan we are destined to be redeemed." These words, in his opinion, refer to the events of our Haftorah wherein we are informed that the service in the Bais Hamikdash will begin in the month of Nissan.

As we follow these dates closely, we discover a striking similarity between the dedication of the final Bais Hamikdash and of the Mishkan. Historically speaking, each of them revolves around the month of Nissan. In fact, as we have discovered, they are both completed on the exact same date, Rosh Chodesh Nissan. But this specific date reveals a more meaningful dimension to these dedications. The month of Nissan, as we know, has special significance to the Jewish people; it marks our redemption from Egyptian bondage. In truth, this redemption process began on the first day of Nissan. Because, as we discover in this week's Maftir reading, Hashem began preparing the

Jewish people for their redemption on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. All of this indicates a direct corollary between the Jewish people's redemption and the erection of the Sanctuary and the final Bais Hamikdash. Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the date which introduced our redemption and afterwards our service in the Mishkan will ultimately introduce the service of the final Bais Hamikdash.

In search for an understanding of this, we refer to Nachmanides' insightful overview to Sefer Shmos. In essence, the Sefer of Shmos spans the Jewish people's exile and redemption. It begins with the descent of Yaakov and his household to Egypt and concludes with the exodus of our entire nation. Yet, almost half of the sefer is devoted to the intricacies of the Sanctuary, something seemingly unrelated to redemption! Nachmanides explains that the Jewish redemption extended far beyond the physical boundaries of Egypt. Before they left the land of Israel, Yaakov and his sons enjoyed a close relationship with Hashem. The devotion of the Patriarchs had produced such an intense level of sanctity that Hashem's presence was commonplace amongst them. However with their descent to Egypt, this experience faded away and, to some degree, distance developed between themselves and Hashem. Over the hundreds of years in Egypt, this distance grew and they eventually lost all association with Him. Nachmanides explains that even after their liberation from Egyptian bondage, scars of exile remained deeply imprinted on them. Having left Egypt, they began rebuilding their relationship with Hashem and prepared for a long journey homeward to Him. Finally, with the erection of the Sanctuary, they reached their ultimate destiny and reunited with Hashem. The Sanctuary created a tangible experience of Hashem's presence amongst them, the clearest indication of His reunification with them. With this final development, the Jewish people's redemption was complete. They now returned to the status of the Patriarchs, and were totally bound to their Creator. All scars of their exile disappeared and they could now, enjoy the closest relationship with their beloved, Hashem.

This perspective is best reflected in the words of Chazal in P'sikta Rabsi. Our Chazal inform us that, in reality, all the segments of the Sanctuary were already completed in the month of Kislev. However, Hashem waited until Nissan which is called "the month of the Patriarchs", for the erection and inauguration of the Mishkan. With the insight of Nachmanides we can appreciate the message of this P'sikta. As stated, the erection of the Sanctuary represented the completion of our Jewish redemption, their reunification with Hashem. In fact, this unification was so intense that it was tantamount to the glorious relationship of the Patriarchs and Hashem. In essence this present Jewish status reflected that of the Patriarchs in whose merit this

relationship had been reinstated. It was therefore only proper to wait until Nissan for the dedication of the Sanctuary. Nissan which was the month of the Patriarchs was reserved for this dedication, because it reflected the Jewish people's parallel level to the Patriarchs themselves.

In this week's Haftorah, we discover that this concept will continue into the Messianic era and the inauguration of the final Bais Hamikdash. Our ultimate redemption, as in our previous ones, will not be considered complete until we merit the Divine Presence in our midst. Even after our return to Eretz Yisroel, which will transpire long before Nissan, we will continue to bear the scar tissue of thousands of years of exile. Only after Hashem returns to us resting His presence amongst us will we truly be redeemed. This magnificent revelation will, quite obviously, occur in the month of Nissan. Our final redemption which reflects Hashem's return to His people will join the ranks of our redemptions and be introduced on that glorious day, Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

May we learn from them to totally subjugate ourselves to our Creator, thereby meriting the final and total destruction of Amalek and his followers. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Readings the two Torah portions of Vayakhel and Pekudai together gives us an opportunity to take note of the differences between the descriptions in the two portions. One example is an apparent contradiction with respect to the construction of the Ark and inserting the rods in its rings. In Vayakhel, the Ark is mentioned as part of the description of the building of the Tabernacle and its utensils by Betzalel. "And Betzalel made the Ark... and he made rods of acacia wood and covered them with gold. And he placed the rods in the rings, at the sides of the Ark, in order to carry the Ark." [Shemot 37:1-5]. This implies that Betzalel put the rods into the rings, as part of the construction of the Ark. However, at the end of Pekudai, in the description of the erection of the Tabernacle by Moshe, it is written, "And he took it, and he placed the testimony in the Ark, and he put the rods onto the Ark" [40:20]. This clearly indicates that Moshe is the one who put the rods on the Ark, when he erected the Tabernacle. How can this contradiction be understood?

Evidently, the paradox is related to the two alternate viewpoints of the role of the rods. On one hand, the rods are similar to the other utensils, and their purpose is to show the transitory character of the Tabernacle and its utensils. As opposed to the Temple, which is the permanent site of the revelation of the Shechina, the Tabernacle is not linked to a single

geographic place. Rather, there is sanctity within the framework of the Tabernacle, and therefore each of the utensils has rods that indicate potential movement. And that explains why the description of Betzalel's actions includes an emphasis of the reason why they are needed. "... in order to carry the Ark."

On the other hand, there is another significant aspect of the rods of the Ark. They are used to move not only the Ark itself but also what lies inside -- the tablets of testimony. This leads us to the insight that not only does the Shechina move together with the Tabernacle, but also that the tablets, which serve as written evidence of the events of Sinai-based on the Ten Commandments-move together with Bnei Yisrael too, wherever they go. What is emphasized in the portion of Pekudai is the role of the rods in giving motion to the stones of testimony, and there would therefore be no purpose served by placing the rods on the Ark before the tablets have been placed inside. Thus, in this description we are told that Moshe put the rods in place only after he put the stones of testimony into the Ark: "he placed the testimony in the Ark, and he put the rods onto the Ark."

There is no way to be sure how the double placing of the rods into the Ark actually took place. But the alternate description of the way the rods were put into the Ark is an indication of their dual role-carrying the Ark itself and also carrying the tablets. It may be that this dual role is hinted at in the Torah portion of Terumah. First, G-d commands Moshe to "place the rods in the rings on the sides of the Ark, in order to carry the Ark" [25:14]. This is directly related to the task of carrying the Ark. Then the command to make rods is repeated, but this time it appears in close proximity to a verse about the tablets of testimony. "The rods shall be in the rings of the Ark, they shall never be removed from there. And put the tablets of testimony which I will give you into the Ark." [25:15-16].

"He Put Wisdom in the Hearts of All the Wise Men"

by Rabbi Eliyahu Blum, head of Nahar Dei'ah Hesder Yeshiva, Nahariya

In this week's Torah portion, we are told that the mission of building the Tabernacle was assigned to people with a "wise heart." For example, "Let all those with a wise heart among you come and make everything that G-d commanded" [Shemot 35:10]. This phrase appears only five times in the Torah, all of them in this week's Torah portion. This might be taken to imply that "wisdom of the heart" is specifically linked to the art of construction, as was noted by the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim (3:54). However, the phrase seems to include a broader category than simply the ability to make things. In other places in the Tanach, the phrase is related to the observance of the mitzvot. "One whose heart is wise will do the mitzvot, but a fool will have tired lips" [Mishlei 10:8].

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi notes, "We describe G-d as 'wise in the heart,' because it is the intellect that is our essence, and He is the very ultimate of intellect-not because intelligence is a description of G-d." [Kuzari 2:30]. Wisdom of the heart-complete unity between wisdom and the one who possesses it-is a natural characteristic of G-d, and a human being can achieve the same objective if he yearns for G-d and attempts to be an instrument for the establishment of G-d's kingdom in our world.

In a discussion of "the internal meaning of the Torah" the Ramban explains that the expression "wisdom of the heart" describes a unique combination of wisdom, faith, and will: "If you believe that the Torah is very deep and reaches the innermost depths, you will always yearn and have a desire for it... This is the meaning of 'If you will listen and hear' [Devarim 28:1], that is, if you listen and believe that it has great hidden elements and secrets that every whole person should follow, you will have the privilege of hearing... This is the secret of the phrase 'He gives wisdom to the wise' [Daniel 2:21], 'and in the heart of all the wise men I have placed wisdom' [Shemot 31:6]." In other words, the expression "wisdom of the heart" refers to innate faith in the Torah and a desire to fulfill its commands, which provide a key to understanding its secrets. The same concept appears in the book Torat Moshe. "Because of the merit of waking up and coming to perform the task, by the very act of waking up and the steps taken to act, I will influence them to take action." Wisdom of the heart is a bridge between wisdom and the heart, which is the innermost essence of a man, consisting of will and dedication.

A similar term, "a wise heart," is used to describe King Shlomo. He asked, "Please give your servant a heart that listens, in order to judge your nation" [Melachim I 3:9]. And the Almighty replied, "I have given you a wise and understanding heart, one that has never appeared before you and will never again appear" [3:12]. Shlomo asked for "a heart that listens, in order to judge"-a deep understanding of judgment, in order to rule in a just manner. And he received "a wise and understanding heart"-complete wisdom.

In summary, it is likely that the wisdom needed to build the Tabernacle is wisdom that can translate a Divine plan into human reality, something that will form a bridge between Yisrael and our Father in Heaven. The Tabernacle is the center of vitality of the nation of Yisrael. It is a spiritual and national center, the source of all teaching of Bnei Yisrael. What is needed to construct such a center is wisdom that is combined with a heart. Only this can bring together the highest point of the Jewish soul and its strong yearning for G-d. This is a wisdom that results from the link between man and G-d.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“The cherubs were with wings spread upwards, sheltering the Ark Cover (Kaporet)... with their faces toward one another" (Exodus 37:9)

What was the symbolism behind these cherubs? The Sages of the Talmud gave an interpretation fraught with significance regarding the Rabbinic attitude towards marriage and sex, an attitude which is especially crucial for our Age of the Internet:

"Rav Katina said, 'When the Israelites would ascend (to the Holy Temple) on the Festival, (the Priest-Kohanim) would roll up the curtain (Parohet) for them, and display for them the cherubs, who were joined together (in an embrace)'. The Priest-Kohanim would then tell them, 'Behold, the beloved feelings for you on the part of the Omni Present. Are like the beloved feelings of a male for a female'"(BT Yoma 54a).

The Talmud queries as to which Holy Temple is under discussion; after all, the First Temple built by King Solomon did not have a Curtain (Parochet) between the Holy of Holies and the Sanctuary, only a stone wall, and the golden cherubs of the Holy Ark Cover (Kapporet) never made it to the Second Temple! R. Aha Bar Yaakov explained that R. Katina is indeed discussing the Second Temple, which had a parochet (curtain) in front of the Holy of Holies, and this curtain was indeed rolled up during the Pilgrim Festivals; the cherubs which were on display were actually painted engravings upon the wooden panels which covered the stone walls of the Holy of Holies, engravings of cherubs which harked back to the First Temple and which decorated the Second Temple as well.

As the Bible records, "All the walls of the Temple were surrounded by designs, (an engraved network of figures of) cherubs, palm trees and blossoming flowers... and he overlaid (them) with gold; (the cherubs)... were as the joining of a man, accompanied" (1 Kings 6:29, 35 and 7:36). And what is meant by these last words, "as the joining of a man, accompanied?" Rabbah bar Rav Shila explained, in the very discussion of the Talmud of our question at hand, "(The cherubs appeared in the engravings) as a man who is joined in an embrace with his female companion"(BT Yoma 54b).

The Talmud then records how the Roman conquerors, who destroyed the Second Temple, had no understanding of, or appreciation for, this pictorial representation of the cherubs on the wall of the Holy of Holies:

"Said Resh Lakish, 'When the Gentiles entered the Sanctuary, they saw (the engravings of) the cherubs joined together in an embrace. They took (the engravings) out to the marketplace, and they said, Should these Israelites- whose blessing is a blessing

and whose curse is a curse (so they are so close to G-d) -- be involved in such (erotic) matters? Immediately, (the Romans) debased (the Israelites), as it is said, (Lamentations 1:8) All who once respected her (Israel), debased her, for they saw her nakedness.'"(Ibid).

The Gentiles totally misunderstood the sacred symbolic message of the cherubs: G-d's love for Israel, and Israel's love for G-d, can only be compared to the love of a lover and beloved, a bride and her groom. Maimonides (Rambam) -- the arch rationalist-legalist-theologian of the twelfth century-puts it very well:

"What is the proper love that we must have for G-d? It is to love G-d with an exceedingly great and intensely powerful love until the individual is constantly enraptured by it; he must be stricken like a lovesick person, whose mind is at no time free from his passion for a particular woman, with the thought of her filling his heart at all times, whether he be sitting down or rising up, whether he be eating or drinking. Even more intense should the love of G-d be in the hearts of those who love Him, and this love should constantly absorb him, as we are commanded to love the Lord 'with all your heart and with all your soul.' Solomon expressed this allegorically in the verse, 'for I am sick with love' (song of songs, 2:5). Indeed, the entire Song of Songs is an allegorical description of this love." (Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, Laws of Repentance, 10,3).

It is fascinating to note that it was the great Rabbi Akiba who taught- concerning the love song which is the Song of Songs-that if each book of the 24 books of the Bible is holy, the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies. This is the same Holy of Holies which featured the engraving of the embracing cherubs. And Rabbi Akiba did not merely mean to say that the lover in the Song of Songs is the Almighty and the beloved is the Israelite nation; after all, the Rabbinical Sages have already taught us that "no verse is to be completely detached from its literal meaning." Therefore what R. Akiba is teaching is a most lofty truth: every proper and passionate love relationship between man and woman is reflective of the one greatest cosmic love relationship between G-d and Israel. Love is a sacred feeling, union is a sacred expression, and marriage is a sacred ritual.

Hence, it is tragic when our youth receive their sex education from the street, or from impure relationships depicted by movies, or from internet porn. Our schools must be equipped, our educators must be trained, to teach about the sexual relationship from the stories and commandments of our Bible, from the engravings of the cherubs of the Holy of Holies. And parents must explain to their children not only the evils of immoral sexuality, and not only the legitimate joys of marital sex but also the sanctity of the sexual union from the perspective of Judaic teachings. Sex must once again be joined to love and marriage, and must be seen as one of the great miracles and wonders of a

fulfilled family life. And such education has to begin no later than the sixth grade of elementary school!

For me, as a Rabbi who has been privileged to participate in thousands of weddings, the most meaningful blessing I know is the blessing of Sanctification: "Blessed are thou, O Lord our G-d, who has sanctified us with His commandments and has exhorted us against sexual immorality... Blessed art Thou who has sanctified us through the nuptial canopy and the sanctity of betrothal." (BT. Ketubot 7b-according to the most accepted text of normative practice). © 2006 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

This week we end the book of Shmot (Exodus). In light of this, I would like to analyze the Ramban's introduction to the book of Shmot and see his startling insights.

The Ramban introduces each of the Five Books with a synopsis statement about the major themes in each Book. The following is from Ramban's introduction to Shmot:

"...After He finished the story of Creation (in the Book of Genesis) He began a Book about the first Exile, which was previously decreed (with the Covenant to Abraham), and the Redemption from it. The Exile is not completed until the day that they (i.e. Israel) return to their place and to the elevated level of their Forefathers. So when they left Egypt, even though they had left the house of slavery, they were still considered to be in exile. For they were in a land not their own, wandering in the wilderness. And when they arrived at Mt. Sinai, and made the Mishkan, and G-d returned (after the Golden Calf sin) and rested His Spirit on them, then they returned to the elevated level of their Forefathers. When the Shechina of G-d was resting in their tents, and they (Israel) are the Merkava ("Chariot"-mystical term for being G-d's base in the world), then they were considered Redeemed. That is why the Book (of Exodus) ends with the construction of the Tabernacle-when G-d's Glory filled it continuously."

The Ramban is explaining the message of the whole Book of Exodus. It begins with the Exile in Egypt and ends with the details of the Mishkan.

So far, so good. Now let us question and analyze the Ramban's words.

Ramban says the true redemption is for the Jews to be in their own place and reach the spiritual level of their Forefathers.

Read closely his words and ask a question (or two).

A Question: Ramban makes a point that leaving Egypt and its slavery was not yet a total redemption, because the Jews were not yet in their own place. I would assume he means, not yet in the Land of Israel. But then, how could the redemption be complete

(at the end of the Book), as it is according to Ramban, if they had a Mishkan but they were not yet in the Land of Israel?

It also seems that the Ramban says the highest level of redemption is when the Jews are on a high spiritual level ("the level of the Forefathers").

A Question: Why wasn't the culmination of spiritual achievement the Revelation at Sinai? This would certainly seem to be the pinnacle of human spiritual achievement. The Book could have ended at that climax. Why then the need to continue with the Mishkan-wouldn't it seem to be anti-climactic?

Can you think of some answers?

An Answer: It would seem that when the Ramban says "The Exile is not completed until the day that they (i.e. Israel) return to their place", he does not mean to the Land of Israel; he means a "spiritual place." Notice the Ramban says "to their place," and not "to their Land." This is really striking. The Ramban was an ardent lover of Zion-he came to live in Eretz Israel the last years of his life. Yet living in Israel is not, in and of itself, the pinnacle of spiritual achievement. That was achieved in the wilderness since the Place of G-d's in-dwelling was there.

As to our second question: Why isn't Sinai Revelation considered the peak spiritual achievement, even more than the Mishkan?

An Answer: The reason seems to be: granted that the Revelation was a peak experience, but it was not the normal daily experience. The true spiritual goal, according to the Ramban, is having G-d live with us day in and day out. To have His Shechina with us "continuously" (the Ramban's last word). To have G-d with us in our normal, day by day, living. This is the peak even more than Sinai. And it can be achieved even without living in Eretz Yisrael. (A personal note: I live in Jerusalem over 30 years, so I'm not looking for an "out.") And it can be achieved mainly in our own homes, "tents." The Ramban says "Shechina of G-d was resting in their tents."

The message is both startling and enlightening. Neither Mt. Sinai nor the Land of Israel are the elements necessary for the highest spiritual achievement, according to Ramban. Of course, both are helpful and in a certain sense, necessary, but we reach the Torah's heights in our daily life when G-d is dwelling within us. This Israel achieved in the wilderness living with the Mishkan in their midst. © 2006 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org

