

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**R**abbi Shimon says, 'there are three crowns: the Crown of Torah, the Crown of Kehuna (priesthood) and the Crown of Malchus (royalty); and the crown of a good name goes above them.' One of the questions asked on this Mishna (Avos 4:13) is how Rabbi Shimon can say there are only three crowns if he himself lists a fourth.

"Rabbi Yochanan said, 'there are three [vessels in the Mishkan that have] crowns: [the crown] of the Mizbe'ach (altar) and [the crown] of the Aron (ark) and [the crown] of the Shulchan (table). [The crown] of the Mizbe'ach was merited by Aharon [the Kohain Gadol], and he took it. [The crown] of the Shulchan was merited by Dovid (King David), and he took it. [The crown] of the Aron is still laying there; whoever wants to take it should come and take it.' This Talmudic statement (Yuma 72b) makes a correlation between the three vessels that have crowns and Rabbi Shimon's three crowns. The Aron that contains the Torah (and the Luchos) represents the Crown of Torah; the Mizbe'ach Hazahav (golden altar), upon which the kohanim brought the ketores (incense offering), represents the Crown of Kehuna; and the Shulchan upon which the "lechem hapanim" (show bread) was kept is compared to the "table of the king" ("shulchan melachim"), which not only represents opulence, but is the table upon which the most lavish of meals are served.

Although the "fourth crown," the crown of having a stellar reputation, is not mentioned there, the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 14:10), after mentioning the first three crowns and the vessels that correspond to them, adds that the crown of having a good name corresponds to the Menorah. However, the Menorah does not have a crown as part of its many ornaments. It has flowers. It has knobs. But it has no crown. If this fourth "crown" is "above" the other three, why is there no crown on its corresponding vessel? And why is it positioned as an additional thought rather than as an integral part of the teaching? It's not taught as if there are four crowns corresponding to four vessels, but as three plus an additional one. Why?

The three "crowns" listed are really three different leadership positions. The Crown of Royalty refers to the political leadership. It is obviously worn by the monarch, who oversees the running of the society

he rules over. He is responsible for the infrastructure and makes changes to it when he determines the need arises (charging taxes to fund them). The Crown of Kehuna refers to the religious, or ritual leadership. The kohanim ran the Temple operations, with the Kohain Gadol (High Priest) "wearing" this crown. The Crown of Torah refers to the judicial leadership, the judges who transmitted (and decided, if need be) what the law was, based on the Torah and its traditions. The "Av Beis Din," head of the Sanhedrin, "wore" this "crown." Rabbi Shimon was teaching us that G-d bestowed upon His nation these three categories of leadership. Each had (has) its role, with two of them limited to specific families (Kehuna to the descendants of Aharon and Royalty to the descendants of Dovid) and the third open to the most qualified, no matter what his lineage was.

Nevertheless, excelling at any of these three does not necessarily speak to the quality of every aspect of the individual. We know of many great political leaders who were morally bankrupt. During the Second Temple the "Crown of Kehuna" went to the highest bidder, making the quality of the individual almost irrelevant. Even those who do truly excel at performing Jewish rituals can leave something to be desired in other areas. And having the ability to teach Torah, or to understand its intricacies well enough to "judge" situations to determine which law applies, does not automatically mean that biases can not creep in that threaten to pervert justice. They may wear their respective "crowns," but that does not mean they are highly regarded by others. Only those with a "good name" can wear their crown with true dignity. It's not a separate crown, but an integral part of the other crowns.

When the Midrash correlates the Menorah with the "crown of a good name" it quotes the verse (Mishlay 6:3) that says, "for a candle is [like] a mitzvah." Being full of mitzvos is a good indication of the type of person one is, but it's more than that. It's not just about doing "good deeds," but doing "mitzvos," doing them because our Creator commanded it. If the emphasis is on doing G-d's will, it is much less likely for the leadership to become corrupt. Yet mitzvah observance is only part of why the Menorah represents the "Kesor Shaim Tov," the crown of having a good name.

There is nothing that concerns inappropriate leadership more than scrutiny. If people don't know the details of what's going on behind closed doors, they

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can only judge the explanations presented for questionable actions. Inside the Mishkan, on the other side of the Paroches from the Aron and close to the Hazahav and the Shulchan, was the Menorah, there to shine its light. The Menorah also represents "chuchma," wisdom, the ability to scrutinize the situation to determine its status and legitimacy. If the leadership is forthright, the brighter the light shone on it, the more it will shine. And it will not be afraid of people reading between the lines. It is therefore the Menorah that corresponds to leadership with a solid reputation.

There are only three crowns. But by making fulfilling G-d's will the priority, and allowing for transparency, each of those crowns will be enhanced by "the crown of having a good name," which is above, and enhances, the other three. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah informs us that the Ark (Aron-Exodus 25:11), the Table (Shulhan -Exodus 25:24) and the Altar of Incense (Mizbeiakh Miktar Ketoret - Exodus 30:3) were all decorated with rims. Why is this so?

It can be suggested that each of these appurtenances corresponds to different roles of important personalities. (Yoma 72b) The Ark relates to the Torah scholar, as the Torah was actually contained in the Ark itself. The Table symbolizes the prosperity of our people best represented by the Ruler. And, the Altar reminds us of the Priest as he offered incense upon it.

Each of these individuals play important roles and each has a distinct challenge. The Torah scholar must be careful not to allow his knowledge to lead him to arrogance, to feeling superior over other less learned Jews. The King, the most influential of individuals, must be careful never to use his power to take advantage of his subjects. And the Priest may never permit his important religious position to be used as a platform to abuse others.

It is no wonder that the Hebrew word for rim is zaire. On the one hand, zaire comes from the word zar which means "alien". In other words, the Torah scholar, King or Priest could pervert their important roles, thus alienating themselves from G-d's way.

But, as Rabbi Shmuel Bornstein of Sochaczew in his Shem Mishmuel writes, zaire intersects with the word Nazir. The Nazarite is one who achieves a high level of spirituality by dedicating life entirely to the service of G-d. Thus, the goal of the Torah scholar, the King and Priest is to direct all energy to holiness. To see to it that the rim at the top of these objects is manifest in the spirit of Nazir. In this sense, the rim around can be viewed as a crown, a symbol of royalty nobly turning one to G-d.

Note, that in Ethics, the rabbis speak of three crowns, the crown of Torah, the crown of the priesthood and the crown of kingship. Not coincidentally, they correspond to the Ark, the Table and the Altar in the Tabernacle. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the rabbis conclude that the most important crown is the crown of a good name (shem tov); in their words, "but the crown of a good name is greater than them all." (Avot 4:13).

The challenge is to infuse the three objects in the Tabernacle, representative of these three major roles in Judaism with the critical dimension of a good name. In Shem Mishmuel's words: "Each of these three great gifts to the community of Israel-Torah, Kingship and the Priesthood-needs special attention to insure that they are used only for holy, rather than self-seeking purposes. The crown on the Ark, Table, and Altar represent this constant need." © 2009 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

In an environment of financial crisis and reduced philanthropy the call for donations issued by Moshe in this week's parsha is timely if not in essence very challenging.

There are many reasons why people do or don't contribute to charities and educational and social causes. Moshe does not offer any convincing reasons for the necessity of his appeal for monetary help.

He represents that it is G-d's wish that the people of Israel become a nation of donors, each person according to the donative instinct that resides within his or her heart.

The Lord phrases His appeal as being a donation symbolically to G-d Himself. "Let them take for Me" is the sentence that is used to justify this appeal for donations from the people. Apparently donations are given because of our relations to our Creator and not only because of the justice of causes that require our help.

Charity is a commandment of the Torah. It may be a commandment that we can empathize with and claim to understand and appreciate but at the very root

of this commandment is the bald fact that we are bidden to imitate our Creator and our definition of G-d is one of goodness and charity.

We are told in the Torah that G-d is with the widow and the orphans even though we are ignorant as to why He made them widows and orphans. But nevertheless that is our duty to also pursue goodness and charity as the Lord commands us to do. So at the very end of the day charity is an inexplicable commandment.

The reason that there is so much charity in the world is that there is, somewhere deep within our consciences and souls, a streak of human kindness and goodness. We really wish to be charitable people.

That is why the Torah is convinced that everyone will contribute according to the donative intent of one's own heart and being. It is within the nature of all to be charitable. However since we have freedom of will and choice we can overcome our inner instincts of goodness and become miserly and even cruel towards others and to ourselves as well.

Just as there are very base instincts that lurk within us and we possess within ourselves the freedom to overcome and deny them so too does this power of freedom of will and choice allow us to sublimate our good and charitable instincts.

There is a well known statement of the rabbis that many people regret being put upon for a charitable contribution and yet feel a deep satisfaction within themselves after they have in fact made that contribution.

It is that deep instinct towards being charitable that engenders the satisfaction within a person after having done a charitable deed or having made a charitable contribution.

The Torah wishes to encourage our charitable instinct. It resorts to making what is essentially a voluntary act one that becomes mandatory. It is a mechanism to allow the good within us to burst forth from. The holy institutions of Israel can only be constructed with the charitable instincts of the Jewish people. © 2009 Rabbi Berel 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.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“They shall make an Ark of acacia wood...” (Ex. 25:10) The incredibly detailed descriptions of all the architectural and physical details of the Bible's first sacred building, the Sanctuary or Tabernacle (mishkan in Hebrew), is introduced in this week's portion of Teruma. Elaborating the details of the mishkan's structure occupies much of the rest of the Book of Exodus, a vast subject which begins with a

command in our portion, "They shall make (ve'asu) for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell in their midst" (Ex. 25:8). This verse is followed almost immediately by another command, "And they shall make (ve'asu) an Ark..." (Ibid 25:10).

As we see in these opening verses, the stress is on third-person plural, '...they shall make.' However, with regard to all other Sanctuary accoutrements, the Bible uses second person singular, issuing the commands in terms "...you shall cover... you shall make... you shall pour... you shall place... you shall bring" - each use of the second person (ve'asita), addressed specifically to Moses. The use of third person plural, "they shall make," is limited to two commands: the Tabernacle itself, and to the Ark. Why should this be so?

My second question also refers to the Ark, repository of the sacred tablets of stone, the Divine Torah. We read: "And you shall bring poles through the rings on the side of the Ark, in order to carry (lift, bear, move) the Ark by means of them. The poles shall remain through the rings of the Ark; they (the poles) must not be removed from them" (Exodus 25:15).

I understand that at this particular time in Jewish history, when the nation was moving from encampment to encampment in the desert, it was crucial for the Sanctuary in general and the Holy Ark in particular, to be mobile, allowing easy movement from place to place as the situation required it, and hence the significance of the poles.

However, the Torah's vision of the Mishkan is not a nomadic Sanctuary for the foreseeable future. The goal was to reach Jerusalem, ultimately arriving at our place of "inheritance and rest" where we would, with the help of G-d, remain permanently, allowing for the Holy Ark and its Torah to be sheltered in a stationery setting, fixed and eternal, not subject to changes or movements either geographically or ideologically.

As the great sage Shammai declares (Mishnah Avot 1, 15), "Make your Torah fixed, steady, unwavering and unmoving" (Keva, in Hebrew). So what's the logic behind these poles remaining within the rings of the Ark "forever" (Hebrew le'olam, Rashi ad loc), as mandated by the Bible as well as Maimonides?!

Answering these two questions directs us to the most fundamental path-breaking message of Judaism: The purpose of the Sanctuary is to bring both the Sanctity of the Divine (Mikdash) to the nation Israel, and the Presence of the Divine (Mishkan) to the corporate body Israel. Unlike most religions and neo-platonic philosophies, our G-d does not dwell in the lofty and exalted ethereal heavens, beckoning His children to escape from their physical world, to remove the fetters of their materialistic and bodily "prisons", and somehow ascend, in a virtually disembodied state, to His place of splendid isolation.

The opposite is true: G-d commands us to bring Him down to earth, to create, or rather re-create, an earthly and worldly environment in which He can comfortably dwell, to utilize His laws of compassionate righteousness and justice to bring blessings into the lives of the people of all the nations of the world (Genesis 18:18,19). Indeed, the Rabbis of the midrash maintain that before Abraham, G-d was Known as the G-d of the heavens, whereas after Abraham, G-d was Known as the 'G-d of the heavens and the earth.' (Genesis 24:2,3 and midrash ad loc).

As we see, G-d repeatedly instructs Moses that he must "go down" from the high mountains and the supernal heavens in order for him to give over the Divine Revelation (Ex. 19: 21-25), and the Israelites must make a Sanctuary so that G-d will be able to dwell in the midst of the entire nation. And ultimately, through Israel, the entire earth must become a Sanctuary for G-d's presence, penetrating every aspect of life, both the spiritual and the material (Genesis 12:3, Exodus 19:6, Isaiah 43:10, Micah 4). And since our religion is not merely comprised of a scattering of individuals reaching up to G-d from isolated caves and mountaintops but rather of an entire nation devoted to bringing G-d down to the entire earth, the Sanctuary must be made by the whole nation, *va'asu*.

Maimonides provides a different nuance, emphasizing the fact that Torah belongs equally to every Jew, to the entire congregation of Israel, and therefore the plural verb: the crown of priesthood was conferred upon Aaron; the crown of kingship was conferred upon David; but the crown of Torah is for all of Israel... Whoever deserves it, let him come and take it" (Laws of Torah Study 3,1). For this very idea, and ideal-that every Jew must have equal access to Torah- R. Yehoshua Ben Gamla, close to 2000 years ago, introduced compulsory education from age six (B.T. Bava Batra 15). The Talmudic Sages praised Rabbi Eliezer for opening up the Talmudical Academies of Higher Learning to anyone who wished to enter (B.T. Brachot 28b; see R. Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation*, February 2004, for these sources and more).

I'd like to consider two additional approaches to explain the plural verb form "...and they shall make the Ark," as well as the eternal nature of the poles. When G-d forgave the Jews for their sin of the Golden Calf and agreed to give them a second set of stone tablets, it was Moses - symbolizing Jewish religious leadership in partnership with G-d in the creation of an Oral Law - who hewed out the stones and wrote the words. The plural verb includes the human input that G-d has empowered committed Israel to complete His Torah. And just as the sanctuary must bring G-d down to corporate Israel, so must the 'poles' bring the Torah to the Jewish people.

Secondly, we learn from the 'poles' that the Oral Torah must "move" with history: Judaism 'moved' from a Temple-centered faith to a Synagogue-and-Study-Hall centered faith after the destruction of the Second Temple, it had to revise the laws of the Sabbatical year and provide women with inheritance rights after the world changed from agriculture to industry, it had to account for different possibilities of fertilization and the establishment of time -of-death with new scientific discoveries, and it has to properly respond to the great possibilities wrought by our miraculous return to our homeland. The very term *halakha* - just like the "poles" - reflect movement, a movement which insists that "the old must be renewed, and the new must be sanctified" (Rav A.Y.H. Kook). © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Translated by Kaeren Fish

Among the many commands pertaining to the building of the Mishkan that appear in this week's parasha, we find the command concerning the Ark: "They shall make an Ark of shittim wood-two cubits and a half long, and a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high." (Shemot 25:10)

The command is formulated in the third person plural-"They shall make" (*ve-asu*) -- in contrast to the commands concerning the other vessels, which are all given in the second person singular: "You shall make (*ve-asita*) a table" (25:23); "And you shall make (*ve-asita*) a menorah of pure gold" (25:31); "And you shall make (*ve-asita*) poles of shittim wood" (25:13); "And you shall make (*ve-asita*) a covering" (25:17); etc.

Ramban notes this discrepancy and explains that the other commands are given in the singular because Moshe, who was in charge of building all the other vessels, was considered equal to all of Israel. This explains why the other commands are given in the singular, but we are still left with the question of why specifically the command concerning the Ark is in the plural. Ramban therefore brings another reason, quoting the Midrash:

"Perhaps it hints that all of Israel should participate in the fashioning of the Ark, for it is 'the holiest dwelling-place of the Most High' (Tehillim 46:5), and so that all will merit the Torah. Indeed, it says in Midrash Rabba (Shemot Rabba 34:2): 'For what reason does the Torah say, 'you (singular) shall make' concerning all of the other vessels, while with regard to the Ark it says, 'They shall make an Ark'? Rabbi Yehuda the son of Rabbi Shalom answered: [It is as if] G-d said, 'Let all come and engage in [fashioning] the Ark, so that they will all have a share in the Torah.'"

According to this midrash, only the command about the Ark is formulated in the plural because only with regard to this endeavor—the Ark that will store the Torah—is there an expectation that all of the Jewish nation should join in as one to carry out the task. This hints to us that every person is able to earn a share in the Torah, if he so desires.

If we look at the Midrash itself, we find that a further explanation is provided there for the discrepancy between the singular formulation concerning the other vessels, and the plural in the case of the Ark:

"Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said: There are three crowns—the crown of kingship, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of Torah. The crown of kingship is [represented by] the Table, concerning which it is written, 'A golden zer (crown) around it'; the priesthood is [represented by] the altar, concerning which it is written, 'a golden zer around it'; and the crown of Torah is [represented by] the Ark, concerning which it is written, 'a golden zer.' Why is the word 'zer' used in connection with these? To teach us that if a person is worthy, they become a crown for him. If not, they are 'zar' (foreign). And why, concerning all [of the other vessels] does it say, 've-asita lo' (you shall make for it...), while concerning the Ark it is written, 've-asu alav' (they shall make upon it...)? To tell us that the crown of Torah is above them all. If a person has acquired Torah, it is as if he has acquired all of them." (Shemot Rabba 34:2)

It would seem that there is a great difference between the first part of the midrash, cited by the Ramban, and the second part. According to the second part, all of Am Yisrael should engage in building the Ark by virtue of the superiority of Torah over all other values. According to the first part, however, all of Am Yisrael should take part in building the Ark in order to acquire a share in the Torah. But if we look carefully at the Ramban, we see that both aspects are actually included in his words: "that all of Israel should participate in the fashioning of the Ark, for it is 'the holiest dwelling-place of the Most High' [=second reason], and so that all will merit the Torah [=first reason]." We may conclude that in fact these are not two different aspects, but rather two sides of the same coin.

In contrast to other religions, where involvement in the law is the province of a chosen few, while the population at large is simply obligated to fulfill the Divine command, amongst Am Yisrael engaging in Torah is meant to be a common endeavor and aspiration, each person applying himself in accordance with his level and abilities. Some contribute greatly to Torah study, others offer a more modest contribution to the endeavor, while others still identify with the goal without actively participating. All must be part of the edifice of Torah.

The Rambam (Hilkhot Talmud Torah 3:1) cites the midrash that we discussed above: "Three crowns were bestowed upon Israel: the crown of Torah, and the crown of priesthood, and the crown of kingship. The crown of priesthood was given to Aharon... the crown of kingship was given to David... the crown of Torah is ready and waiting for all Jews... anyone who wishes to may come and partake of it. Lest you say that those [other two] crowns are greater than the crown of Torah, it is therefore written, 'By Me kings reign, and rulers legislate righteousness, and princes rule' (Mishlei 8:15) -- from this we learn that the crown of Torah is greater than both of them."

Upon closer scrutiny we note that the midrash conveys an even stronger message than the Rambam. According to the midrash, not only is the crown of Torah greater than the other crowns, but a person who acquires the crown of Torah has in fact acquired all of them!

Obviously, this cannot be understood on the literal, functional level: we cannot say that a person who learns Torah turns into a kohen or a king. Clearly, the priesthood is reserved for the descendants of Aharon, and royalty belongs only to the descendants of David. However, on a deeper level, the concept is certainly true. The midrash seems to be telling us that, in moral terms, priesthood and kingship are only means to attain the crown of Torah. The Torah is more important than they are, and they exist to serve it.

The Torah must be the center of our lives. We must understand the centrality of Torah and feel our connection to it—even when we are busy with other occupations that are related to "kingship" (exercising authority and serving the country). Any such occupation is ultimately meant to serve Torah study, and is by definition secondary to it. (*This sicha was given on Shabbat parashat Teruma 5756 [1996].*)

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

The stones of the Choshen—the breastplate worn by the High Priest—sparkled in many different colors. There were twelve precious stones, each one unique, each one representing a tribe of Yisrael. The shoham—the onyx—stood out among the other stones. This stone was used more than once in the clothing of the High Priest. Not only was it in the Choshen, it was also attached to his shoulder straps. "And you shall take two onyx stones and engrave the names of Bnei Yisrael on them... And Aharon will carry their names before G-d on his two shoulders, as a memory." [Shemot 28:9,12].

But this is not the only one among the twelve building blocks of the nation which appears more than once, as opposed to the symbols of the other brothers.

Yosef the Righteous appears twice, since he had the privilege of having his children divided into two tribes. The onyx is the stone which represents the tribe of Yosef, and it is reasonable to suggest that the two onyxes on the High Priest's shoulders represent the sons of Yosef-Menasheh and Efraim.

Yosef occupies a unique position among the brothers. He is not only a son but also a father. This is linked by the Midrash to the verse, "From there he shepherds the stone of Yisrael" [Bereishit 49:24]. Stone-"even"-is interpreted as an anagram for "av" and "ben"-father and son. The three patriarchs instituted the three daily prayers, and Yosef added the prayer of Mussaf. There are only three people called patriarchs, but Yosef is the father of two tribes. Yosef received two portions of Yaacov's heritage, similar to the inheritance of a firstborn. One portion is related to his character as a son, the other one is because of his trait as a father, a partner in establishing the Jewish home and its continued existence. "The House of Yaacov will be a fire, and the House of Yosef a flame" [Ovadiah 1:18]. Yosef continues to represent our father Yaacov among the children, he combines succeeding generations with each other, he gives the generation of the descendents the opportunity to continue to rise to the highest possible status of the fathers.

This is also the status of Adar, the month which is doubled in a leap year, with the purpose of bridging the gap between the lunar year and the solar year. The lunar year reminds us of the current situation of Yisrael, oscillating between darkness and light, between being full or contracted. The solar year, on the other hand, represents the unique treasure of Yisrael as it relates to their Divine trait. "And the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, while the light of the sun will be seven times stronger, like the light of the seven days" [Yeshayahu 30:26].

The onyx stones represent the unique ability of Yosef to combine others into one entity. They are always carried on the High Priest's shoulders, as stones of memory for Bnei Yisrael, linking every one of Yisrael together-no matter what their individual status-to the Divine central point, its main root.

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The sedra of Terumah describes the construction of the tabernacle, the first collective house of worship in the history of Israel. The first but not the last. It was eventually succeeded by the Temple in Jerusalem. I want to focus on one moment in Jewish history which represents Jewish spirituality at its very highest: the moment the Temple was destroyed.

It is hard to understand the depth of the crisis into which the destruction of the First Temple plunged the Jewish people. Their very existence was predicated on a relationship with G-d symbolised by the worship

that took place daily in Jerusalem. With the Babylonian conquest, Jews lost not only their land and sovereignty. In losing the Temple it was as if they had lost hope itself. For their hope lay in G-d, and how could they turn to G-d if the very place where they served Him was in ruins? One document has left a vivid record of the mood of Jews at that time: Psalm 137, 'By the waters of Babylon we sat and wept as we remembered Zion... How can we sing the songs of the Lord in a strange land?'

It was then that an answer began to take shape. The Temple no longer stood, but its memory remained, and this was strong enough to bring Jews together in collective worship. In exile, in Babylon, Jews began to gather to expound Torah, articulate a collective hope of return, and recall the Temple and its service.

The prophet Ezekiel was one of those who shaped a vision of return and restoration, and it is to him we owe the first oblique reference to a radically new institution that eventually became known as the Bet Knesset, the synagogue: 'This is what the sovereign Lord says: although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet I have become to them a small sanctuary [mikdash me'at] in the countries where they have gone' (Ezek. 11: 16). The central sanctuary had been destroyed, but a small echo, a miniature, remained.

The synagogue is one of the most remarkable examples of an *itaruta de-letata*, 'an awakening from below'. It came into being not through words spoken by G-d to Israel but by words spoken by Israel to G-d. There is no synagogue in Tenakh, no command to build local houses of prayer. To the contrary, insofar as the Torah speaks of a 'house of G-d' it refers to a central sanctuary, a collective focus for the worship of the people as a whole.

We tend to forget how profound the concept of a synagogue was. Professor M. Stern has written that 'in establishing the synagogue, Judaism created one of the greatest revolutions in the history of religion and society, for the synagogue was an entirely new environment for divine service, of a type unknown anywhere before'. It became, according to Salo Baron, the institution through which the exilic community 'completely shifted the emphasis from the place of worship, the sanctuary, to the gathering of worshippers, the congregation, assembled at any time and any place in G-d's wide world'. The synagogue became Jerusalem in exile, the home of the Jewish heart. It is the ultimate expression of monotheism-that wherever we gather to turn our hearts towards heaven, there the Divine presence can be found, for G-d is everywhere. Where did it come from, this world-changing idea? It did not come from the Temple, but rather from the much earlier institution described in this week's sedra: the Tabernacle. Its essence was that it was portable, made

up of beams and hangings that could be dismantled and carried by the Levites as the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness. The Tabernacle, a temporary structure, turned out to have permanent influence, whereas the Temple, intended to be permanent, proved to be temporary-until, as we pray daily, it is rebuilt.

More significant than the physical structure of the tabernacle was its metaphysical structure. The very idea that one can build a home for G-d seems absurd. It was all too easy to understand the concept of sacred space in a polytheistic worldview. The G-ds were half-human. They had places where they could be encountered. Monotheism tore up this idea at its roots, nowhere more eloquently than in Psalm 139:

"Where can I go from Your Spirit? / Where can I flee from Your presence? / If I go up to the heavens, You are there; / if I make my bed in the depths, You are there."

Hence the question asked by Israel's wisest King, Solomon: "But will G-d really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (I Kings 8: 27)

The same question is posed in the name of G-d by one of Israel's greatest prophets, Isaiah: "Heaven is My throne, / and the earth is My footstool. / Where is the house you will build for Me? / Where will My resting place be?" (Is. 66: 1)

The very concept of making a home in finite space for an infinite presence seems a contradiction in terms. The answer, still astonishing in its profundity, is contained at the beginning of this week's sedra: "They shall make a sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell in them [betocham]."

The Jewish mystics pointed out the linguistic strangeness of this sentence. It should have said, 'I will dwell in it', not 'I will dwell in them'. The answer is that the Divine presence lives not in a building but in its builders; not in a physical place but in the human heart. The sanctuary was not a place in which the objective existence of G-d was somehow more concentrated than elsewhere. Rather, it was a place whose holiness had the effect of opening the hearts of those who stood there to the One worshipped there. G-d exists everywhere, but not everywhere do we feel the presence of G-d in the same way. The essence of 'the holy' is that it is a place where we set aside all human 'devices and desires' and enter a domain wholly set aside to G-d.

If the concept of the mishkan, the Tabernacle, is that G-d lives in the human heart whenever it opens itself unreservedly to heaven, then its physical location is irrelevant. Thus the way was open, seven centuries later, to the synagogue: the supreme statement of the idea that if G-d is everywhere, He can be reached anywhere. I find it moving that the frail structure described in this week's sedra became the inspiration of an institution that, more than any other, kept the

Jewish people alive through almost 2000 years of dispersion-the longest of all journeys through the wilderness. © 2009 Rabbi J. Sacks & torah.org

RABBI ZEV ITZKOWITZ

A Byte of Torah

T"he extra cubit on both sides, over the length of the tent's sheets shall hang down over the sides of the [tapestries of the] Tabernacle to cover them on both sides." (Exodus 26:13)

Why do sheets cover the tapestries of the Tabernacle? The Torah is teaching us that when a person owns something precious, he should take care of it properly (Rashi). Too often, we abuse our prized possessions, until they break or wear out long before their life expectancy. If we gave these items the proper upkeep and protection, we would end up using and enjoying them much longer. © 1995 Rabbi Z. Itzkowitz

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Where We Live

by *Andrea Simantov*

Lately, my children have rephrased the question "Are we having any guests?" to "Who's coming for Shabbos?" And inwardly I'm smiling because I know that despite all the trappings of "coolness," my kids can't get enough of new faces, stories, and plenty of table singing while they also relish the opportunity for a bit of showing off as each one serves the dish that he or she has prepared. I stopped cooking approximately four months ago, because one daughter graduated from chef school and is in charge of entrees and side dishes, the youngest daughter does the baking — breads, cakes, cookies — and the boys create all the salads.

Each summer, prior to the upcoming academic year, we make a general calculation of who the regulars will be. Children of family members and good friends are often in Israel for a year after high school, studying in different yeshivas and women's seminaries. We try to rotate the invitations and make certain that these young people know that, for at least a year, we can be relied upon for a hot bean-and-barley cholent or unsolicited advice on myriad life-in-Israel topics. This year we are enjoying Rachel in much the same way we felt attached to her sister, Meira, only a decade earlier; Adam is a frequent guest, following in the footsteps of his brother, Jonathan, who was a familiar face two years ago. And sometimes our guests bring guests, making the meals even more memorable.

On Friday night, Rachel mentioned something that really got me thinking. She told me that before moving to Jerusalem, she casually mentioned to a Manhattan co-worker that she had knocked on her neighbor's door the previous Thursday morning, explained that she was going to be alone for Shabbos,

and asked if she could join the family for dinner. Her neighbor seemed very happy and apologized for not having personally invited Rachel earlier.

The co-worker was stunned. "What?" she asked. "You know your neighbor? Do you know other people in the building? Where did you find the guts to do that?"

She shared this story with us because she knew that we'd understand how confusing she found the question, because we all come from this same, inter-connected world. And in turn I shared with her that before I moved into my current home, I made certain that the people in the adjoining apartments were People-Like-Us sorts, i.e., Grandchildren-running-in-the-hallway-may-I-borrow-a-cup-of-sugar-or-your-entire-apartment-while-you're-away types. The sounds of plastic chairs being dragged and bounced in the stairwells means that someone is having guests, and dropping in unexpectedly for coffee and dessert on a wintry Friday night is not bad manners. It is expected.

In the early days of Operation Cast Lead, the entire country awakened to learn about a nearly unfathomable horror that had taken place on the outskirts of the Jabaliya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. Three soldiers stealthily entered a house in which they believed murdering terrorists were hiding.

The very sensitive heat and movement detectors of an Israeli tank sensed the presence of people in the enemy building and, talking aim, fired a shell with lethal precision.

One of the three dead soldiers was Staff Sergeant Nitai Stern, and he was 21 years old. An adorable boy with an almost-corny grin, he had a large cadre of buddies who were high-spirited, charming, irreverent, intelligent, and good to their mothers. I not only know this from the local press coverage; I know this because counted among Nitai's closest friends was my own son, Nate.

The military cemetery at Har Herzl was a carpet of mankind as people from around the country gathered to bury two exemplary young men on a chilly but sunny Tuesday afternoon. (The third, Yousef Moadi, was from a well-respected family in the Druze community; his uncle, Sheik Jaber Muadi, is a former Knesset member and minister. Yousef was buried in the village of Yarka.)

I try never to imagine myself in the position of Nitai's parents, having to remember a zesty, joy-filled child whose death did not result in making our country even one-teaspoon safer. I am too superstitious to even "go there" and am not the only Israeli parent who has developed an uncanny ability to transcend unbearable reality at the drop of a hat when things feel too scary around these parts.

No one gave me a checklist for comforting a generally-closed child when his good friend dies; every boy in this country who stands next to the fresh grave

of a soldier knows that only fate stands between him and a headstone. I needn't have worried about the aforementioned checklist, however, because it was Nitai's father, Reuven, who offered succor to my son, Nate, and the other buddies with bear hugs and loving pats on the cheeks every day in the shiva (mourning) home.

In an early interview, Reuven Stern answered an interviewer's inquiry about whether there was anger at the "unnecessary" death of his boy. He responded that, "He was my boy. This is a very difficult time; all of Israel is grieving." His cousin added, "Nitai was a warrior for the people of Israel, a hero, and a martyr. We are so proud of him. We know he was fighting the war of his people."

Who are these heroic parents that appear so ordinary when I pass them on the streets or jostling on a city bus? Rabbi Amos Netanel said at the funeral of his son, Jonathan, "He died for Kiddush HaShem (sanctification of G-d's name). He did what he had to do, proceeding with courage and might. Wherever he went, he had integrity and morality." And the family of Sergeant Dagan Vertman listened attentively to the officer who informed them of their son's death but expressed no anger. They inquired on the details of the incident but stated over and over for the press that they understood the fighting conditions in the area and that during massive combat, sometimes tragedies occur.

The last night of the mourning period, the boy who had shot the shell that killed Nitai arrived at the shiva (mourning) house, accompanied by his parents. Reuben Stern embraced him and asked him to please sit with his own family. "You must forgive yourself," he told the shaken young man. "From this day forward, you are also my son."

An open home — physical and spiritual — is a hallmark of the world in which we live. One step, one day, one person at a time, the intrinsic concern we feel for one another is, I believe, a testing ground for whether or not we merit being beloved unto others.

A family from Ashdod is scheduled to move in with us for a while, at least until the family members feel safe enough to return home. We aren't the only Jerusalemites who are tossing out a few extra mattresses at the time of this writing. Pot-luck suppers, blanket collections, sending dry socks to the front lines, home schooling, and amateur magic shows in bomb shelters: no one will ever be able to honestly say that he or she could not find a way to be part of the glorious fabric called 'Israel.'

This is where we live. Pull up a chair. There is always room at the table. © 2009 A. Simantov & www.jewishworldreview.com

