

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

**O**ur Torah selection this week, the first half of the double portion of Vayakhel-Pekudei, opens with the command to work six days and for the seventh day to be a solemn day of holy rest - the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a major foundation-stone of Judaism, and which majestically appears as the crown of G-d's creation (Genesis 2: 1-3), and proudly stands as the fourth of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8). And then, after the two Biblical portions of Terumah and Tetzaveh, delineated the exquisite Sanctuary furnishings and the richly symbolic priestly vestments to be worn for the Sanctuary offerings, the Sabbath comes once again as a kind of warning: "But my Sabbaths shall you observe because it is a sign between Me and between you for your generations that I am the Lord who makes you holy" (Ex. 31:13,14). From here it would seem that the Sabbath day indelibly unites Israel with G-d in a special bond.

However, within this context the Sabbath seems to be an introduction to the tragic drama of the Golden Calf transgression, and in this week's portions, the Sabbath appears as a kind of conclusion to the Golden Calf episode, at the same time that it is an introduction to the resumption of the detailed performance of the actual Sanctuary construction: "Six days shall you do your creative activity and the seventh day shall be for you holy, a Sabbath of Sabbaths unto the Lord; anyone who does creative activity on it shall die. You shall not burn a fire in all of your habitations upon the Sabbath" (Ex.35:2,3). Why so many repetitions, and is there a connection between the Sabbath, the Sanctuary and the Golden Calf?

Before attempting to interpret these passages, I must first address the apparent age of the universe. Despite Jewish calendrical calculation that we are in the 5769th year since the creation of the world, modern science (as a result of carbon dating applied to various fossils that have been dug from previous ages and earlier civilizations) maintains that the world is billions if not trillions of years old.

For some religiously inclined people the scientific numbers must be rejected, but for me carbon dating never posed a serious theological problem. Since the Bible records that the creation of the sun and

the moon, the source for our 24 hour day, did not take place until the fourth day, it means that the Hebrew 'yom'- (day), when used in the Bible for the days of creation, could not possibly refer to a twenty-four hour day. Indeed, the Midrash refers to the primordial days of creation as being G-d's days, and for G-d '...one thousand years in your eyes are as the day of yesterday,' as the Psalmist records. Thus expanding the age of the universe does not contradict the claims of the Torah. But if that's the case, why does the Bible record the creation story as having taken place in one week? Why not picture six or seven indeterminate epochs for the creation of the various aspects of life on earth?

I believe the answer lies in the most vital commandment in the Bible, the central injunction, "And you shall walk in His ways." Following the sin of the Golden Calf and, part-and-parcel of our atonement and forgiveness, we find the revelation of the Divine attributes, with the critical command of our Sages, "Just as G-d loves unconditionally, so must you; just as G-d is long-suffering and patient, so must you be." Indeed, we must walk in G-d's ways.

Most importantly, every one of our human, calendrical weeks must repeat the very cycle of the Divine primordial week: just as G-d was engaged in creative activity for six 'days' and rested on the seventh, so must we be engaged in creative activity for six days and rest on the seventh. In effect, our very first commandment is to be creative; just as G-d stood at the brink of black, inchoate abyss and declared 'Let there be light,' so must we go into dark corners and bring illumination!

Now what does it mean that G-d rested from creation on the seventh day? I'd like to suggest that the verse implies that G-d created an incomplete and imperfect world, a world with darkness as well as light, with chaos as well as order, with evil as well as good (Isaiah 45:7)- a world which 'G-d created for the human being to do,' for the human being to complete and perfect. This is the meaning of the Divine command to Moses and Israel, 'Make for me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell in their midst.' In effect G-d is saying 'I made for you a world, albeit an imperfect one, and I want you to return the compliment, to recreate a world for Me, a world in which I will feel comfortable to reside.'

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G-d rested from creation in order to leave room for the human being to create. But herein lies an inherent danger: if the human being has the freedom and the power to create, it follows necessarily that he also has the ability to destroy should he make the wrong choices. Wisely the Shabbat captures a taste of a perfect world; of the elusive goal of the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life, the experience of familial peace, communal harmony and Divine love.

Hence immediately after the initial command to construct the Sanctuary and its accoutrements comes the warning: "But My Sabbaths shall you observe;" remember to create and recreate, not to destroy; place in front of your eyes the dream of Shabbat, the vision of the era which is entirely Sabbath, the Messianic era which is the sanctity of time and relationship. The Sanctuary must be the means to a world in which G-d resides within each individual's heart, mind and soul; the Sanctuary dare not become a physical object which itself is worshipped and idealized!

Tragically, the nation failed and worshipped the Golden Calf; they lost sight of the Sabbath goal and destiny. And so immediately after reading of the perversion and idolatry, we again receive the command of the Sabbath, but this time before the Sanctuary is concluded and actually erected. The purpose of a magnificent Sanctuary is to inspire the nation to rendezvous with G-d. The Sabbath is our dance with the Divine, to the music of the Song of Songs. The Sabbath and G-d's rest expresses at one and the same time the period of perfect peace as well as our human role of co-creators without which the goal of Sabbath-Eden can never be realized. After all, the G-d of love has decided- when He rested on the Sabbath from creation - that He will never dance alone! © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Moshe was unable to come into the Tent of Meeting, for the cloud dwelled upon it, and the honor of G-d filled the Mishkan” (Shemos 40:35). Since Moshe spent much time in the Mishkan communicating with G-d (see Bamidbar 7:89), a great deal has been written trying to reconcile this verse, which says that Moshe was unable to enter the

Mishkan, with the verses that say he did so on a regular basis.

Some Midrashim (e.g. Tanchuma Vayikra 1, see also Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam on our verse) explain that Moshe was physically "able" to enter the Mishkan even when G-d's presence was there, he was just so full of awe that he was too afraid to. After G-d invited him in, and reassured him that he should, Moshe did enter, and was "able" to enter from then on as needed.

Most commentaries (and Midrashim), however, understand Moshe's "inability" to enter while G-d's presence was there to be a physical impossibility, and, although the way it is described varies greatly, there is a general consensus that G-d's presence did not stay in the "kodesh" part of the Mishkan long-term. Instead, it rested in the "kodesh hakadashim," where the Aron was (see Rashi, Rashbam, Ramban, et al). This allowed Moshe to enter the Mishkan when he needed to communicate with G-d (as he stood in the "kodesh" part), as well as allowing Aharon and his sons to light the Menorah, bring the incense offering, and set up the "show bread," all of which took place in the "kodesh."

Nevertheless, there is still an issue that needs to be resolved. Once a year, on Yom Kippur, Aharon (and subsequent Kohanim Gedolim) entered the "kodesh hakadashim," "ketores" (incense offering) in hand (Vayikra 16:12-13), and sprinkled blood (from the bull brought as his sin offering and the goat that was the nation's sin offering) right next to the Aron (Vayikra 16:14-15). How could Aharon enter the "kodesh hakadashim" to do the Yom Kippur service if G-d's presence was there and it was impossible for a human being (even Moshe) to share the same space as G-d's presence?

The Netziv asks a similar question, based on the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 1:7) that Moshe also entered the "kodesh hakadashim." [It should be noted that it is not clear whether the Midrash really means that Moshe entered the "kodesh hakadashim" or only that he heard G-d speak to him from there (as suggested by the Maharzo). However, since the Netziv takes this Midrash literally, we can apply his explanation of how Moshe could enter the "kodesh hakadashim" to how Aharon could enter it.] The Netziv differentiates between the ten-cubit by ten-cubit area that was the "kodesh hakadashim" and the area that was on the other side of the "paroches," the curtain that divided the "kodesh" from the "kodesh hakadashim." The poles of the Aron, despite being unable to be removed from the Aron, did slide back and forth in their rings. After the Aron was put in the "kodesh hakadashim," its poles were moved eastward, towards the "paroches," so that they caused a protrusion in the "paroches" visible from the other side (from the "kodesh"). The Netziv says that G-d's presence did not occupy the area between the poles on the "kodesh

hakadashim" side that was more than ten cubits from the back wall, i.e. the area that would have been on the "kodesh" side had the Aron's poles not pushed the "paroches" away. It was there, the Netziv suggests, on the other side of the "paroches" but where there was no "cloud," that Moshe stood when he went "inside" the "kodesh hakadashim."

Although it was "between the poles" of the Aron that Aharon sprinkled the blood (without touching the Aron itself, see Rambam's Hilchos Avodas Yom Hakippurim 3:5), the implication is that it was done right next to the Aron, not from a distance of the fully extended poles. It is also hard to imagine that Aharon was able to do all that he needed to do while confined to just the area vacated by the "paroches" as a result of the extended poles.

The Talmud (Yuma 4b), in order to reconcile our verse (which says that Moshe couldn't enter the Mishkan because of the "cloud") with the verse that says that Moshe "entered into the cloud" that was atop Mt. Sinai (Shemos 24:18), says that on Mt. Sinai G-d cleared a path for Moshe to walk through. In other words, even though Moshe couldn't physically occupy the same space as the "cloud" that contained G-d's presence, G-d vacated (as it were) the area that Moshe needed to walk through (see Tosfos Rid). It can therefore be suggested that on Yom Kippur, when Aharon was commanded to enter the "kodesh hakadashim," a similar path was made for him to walk through. When the "cloud" that contained G-d's presence vacated the area of that path, the "cloud" of the incense (see Vayikra 16:13) filled that area, clearing the way for Aharon to be able to enter. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**he last two portions of the Book of Exodus apply and repeat information found in previous passages of the Torah. In Parshat VaYakhel, the Tabernacle is constructed in its detail following the prescriptions found in the portion of Terumah. In the portion of Pikudei, the priestly garments are made again following the details laid out earlier in the portion of Tetzaveh.

Why is it that the Torah needs to repeat every detail when describing the making of the Tabernacle and the garments? Wouldn't it have been enough for the Torah to simply say that the Temple was constructed and the garments were made as G-d had commanded?

Several reasons for repetition can be suggested. First, the Torah may want to make the very point that the commands were followed in great detail. Presenting the details of the law shows that nothing mandated by G-d was overlooked.

Another possibility is that presenting the details again points to a loving involvement in this process.

Each step in making the Tabernacle and the garments was an expression of the love that Moshe (Moses) and the people felt towards G-d.

But for me, the answer to our question may lie in considering the sequence of events in the latter part of Exodus. The portion of Terumah deals with the command to make the Tabernacle. Tetzaveh follows with the command of the priestly garments. Immediately following these portions, the importance of Shabbat is mentioned in the portion of Ki Tisa.

Not coincidentally, the portion of Vayakhel, which follows Ki Tisa, mentions Shabbat at its very beginning. The building of the Tabernacle, found in Vayakhel, and the making of the garments, found in Pikudei, then follow. The sequence is truly a mirror opposite with one notable exception. Whereas the command of Tabernacle and priestly garments was followed by Shabbat, in the actual implementation of the laws, Shabbat comes first.

In Judaism, there are two sanctities, the sanctity of place and the sanctity of time. As important as place may be, time is of even greater importance. Perhaps then, it can be suggested that the reason why the Torah repeats the commandments in details is to point out that Shabbat, the epitome of the sanctity of time, is even more important than the sanctity of space represented by the Tabernacle and the garments.

In his book "The Sabbath," Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel points out that the acquisition of "space," is an appropriate human quest. But life goes wrong when one spends all of his/her time to amass "things." "For to have more, does not mean to be more."

It is interesting to note that the incident that falls between the command and the implementation is the sin of the Golden Calf. The keruvim, the angelic forms atop the Ark were holy objects; the Golden Calf which the Jews may have seen as a replacement was a defiling of place.

Precisely because of this perversion of the sanctity of space, the Torah deems it important to repeat the whole sequence, but to place Shabbat first so that its spirit be infused in every detail of the construction of the Tabernacle and making of the priestly garments. This teaches that ultimately we are people who carve out our empires in time and not in space. © 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**

**T**he Torah reviews for us once again the details of the construction of the mishkan / Tabernacle. In this review the Torah points out that the work was

done by volunteers, people whose hearts and intuition brought them to do the actual work.

And as Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin points out, these were not trained artisans that volunteered to build the mishkan / Tabernacle. Rather, they were people who had a vision of the holy building in their minds and hearts, who were willing to sacrifice their hands and minds and time for the cause.

Of course they had to have talent to do their jobs. But it was not so much a contest to find the best carpenter or goldsmith but it was rather a call for people whose hearts would bring them to do the work.

The volunteers were to be people who were aware that they were involved in building a spiritual structure and not just a physical building. This is true regarding all tasks of holiness and eternity.

Teachers have a job but it is not just a job. There is a commitment to the student and his or her future and to the importance and holiness of the subject matter being taught.

The Talmud states that teachers who do not have this attitude and commitment are guilty of doing G-d's work in a fraudulent fashion. Volunteerism, commitment, holy attitude and soaring vision are all necessary to complete a holy building. One's heart must accompany one's hands.

This message is not to be construed as allowing a novice with good and holy intentions to practice as a brain surgeon.

There is a famous Jewish story about a young rabbi who had just come to town and with great enthusiasm set for himself the task of constructing a mikvah/ritualarium.

Not having architectural instructions and plans or previous construction experience he nevertheless set himself to the task with great commitment and enthusiasm. The source of his expertise in the construction of the building was his study and understanding of the mishnayot of tractate Mikvaot. After a short period of time the building rose and was completed.

After another period of time the building suddenly collapsed. When the townspeople came to inform the rabbi of the collapse of the building he mused and said to them: "Tosafot, the later commentary to Mishna and Talmud, truly raises an objection to the conclusion of that mishna!"

The Mishkan was built by talented people. But in the Jewish world talent without commitment is eventually of little value just as commitment without talent is not the way to build buildings or teach children.

The Torah always deals in practical human terms. But having commitment, vision and a holy attitude is a practical requirement not a soaring spiritual achievement. This lesson of the Torah applies to all areas of life - marriage, children, professions, and human projects, etc.

One has to always see the larger picture, the vision that lies behind all of the apparently smaller things in life. And perhaps that is the most important and relevant lesson that the parsha has to teach us.

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**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

## Virtual Beit Medrash

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

*Translated by Kaeren Fish*

“**A**nd the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and G-d's glory filled the Mishkan. And Moshe could not come into the Tent of Meeting for the cloud rested upon it, and G-d's glory filled the Mishkan.” (Shemot 40:34-35)

In his Introduction to Sefer Shemot, Ramban explains the momentous significance of this moment: "And behold, the exile will not be over until the day when they return to their place and to the level of their ancestors. When they left Egypt, although they left the house of slavery they were still considered exiles, for they were in a land that was not their own, wandering about in the wilderness. And when they came to Mount Sinai and made the Mishkan, and the Holy One, blessed be He, once again brought His Presence to dwell in their midst, then they regained the level of their ancestors, who had G-d's secret upon their tents, and they themselves were His chariot, and then they were considered redeemed. Therefore, this Sefer concludes with the completion of the subject of the Mishkan, and with G-d's glory filling it constantly."

According to Ramban, even after the Exodus from Egypt, Am Yisrael were considered a nation in exile. Only after G-d's glory filled the Mishkan was Am Yisrael's redemption complete, and they merited to regain the level attained by their forefathers-that they themselves represented the chariot bearing the Divine Presence.

However, a closer look at the verses also reveals the opposite phenomenon: it is specifically after the inauguration of the Mishkan that Moshe is prevented from entering the Tent of Meeting, and a sort of barrier appears between him and G-d. We may suggest that the words "lo yakhol" mean that he was "not authorized" or "not permitted," rather than "not able" to enter, such that the text is not describing any deficiency in the relationship between Moshe and G-d. However, the literal reading of the verse suggests that Moshe was simply unable to enter the Tent of Meeting.

The verses provide two reasons for this inability: "For the cloud rested upon it," and "G-d's glory

filled the Mishkan." It seems that there is a profound difference between these two reasons.

The cloud resembles a locked door: it is a barrier that prevents Moshe from entering the Mishkan. The cloud, as it were, guards the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, blocking anyone from passing through. In contrast, "G-d's glory," which fills the Mishkan, prevents Moshe from entering for a different reason. It is not a matter of the Tent of Meeting being "locked"; rather G-d's glory fills it completely, and hence there is no room for Moshe to enter, even if the cloud was not preventing him from doing so.

Either way, we come back to our question: why is it specifically after Am Yisrael ascends to such a lofty level that the direct encounter with G-d is blocked?

It would appear that when G-d came down to dwell amongst His people, He saw fit to emphasize the barrier separating Him from mortals. While G-d permits His Presence to dwell amongst the nation, this "dwelling" still has barriers and boundaries. "The Divine Presence never descended lower than ten handbreadths [from the ground]" (Sukka 5a). Despite the closeness between Am Yisrael and G-d, the Holy One remains transcendent. Even the most unique of men, Moshe himself, cannot enter the Mishkan while the Divine Presence rests there.

In fact, the same concept finds expression in the Temple, too. As we know, the connection between Am Yisrael and G-d within the Temple was a special and powerful one:

"And the tips of the poles [of the Ark of the Covenant] were visible...' does this mean that they did not move from their place? [Surely not, and] accordingly the text teaches, 'and the poles were long.' Does this mean that they tore through the curtain and protruded? [Surely not, and] accordingly the text teaches, 'And they were not seen on the outside.' How was this possible? They pressed the curtain and protruded and stood out like a woman's two breasts, as it is written, 'a bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me, lying between my breasts.' Rav Katina said: When Am Yisrael would make their pilgrimage, the curtain would be rolled back and they would be shown the keruvim, intertwined with each other, and they would say to them: 'See how beloved you are before G-d? like the love of a man and woman.'" (Yoma 54a)

However, it is precisely for this reason that it was important to emphasize, right at the beginning, at the inauguration of the Mishkan, that there remains a great distance between the Divine realm and the mortal realm: "And it was, when the kohanim emerged from the Kodesh, that the cloud filled G-d's house, and the kohanim could not stand and minister because of the cloud, for G-d's glory filled G-d's house." (I Melakhim 8:10-11)

We may add that the two obstacles noted above express two distinct differences between G-d

and man. The cloud represents G-d's transcendental nature and man's inability to grasp His essence or to reach Him. Any attempt to cleave to G-d's actual essence is blocked, as it were, by a locked door. On the other hand, "G-d's glory" symbolizes the intimacy of G-d's closeness. The intensity of this intimacy is so great that the existence of all of Creation is placed in doubt, since "there is none but Him," and there is no room in the world for any other entity. It is as though there is no room for separate creations in the world in which G-d's essence is revealed.

According to the above, the Mishkan expresses the situation that was meant to prevail in the world had it not been for G-d's mercy which facilitates our existence, and the fact that the world continues to exist only by virtue of G-d's will. (*This sicha was delivered on Shabbat parashat Pekudei 5755 [1995].*)

**RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**T**he Torah states regarding donations made for the clothing of the Cohen Gadol (High Priest), "And the heads of the tribes brought shoham stones (onyx) and (other) stones to be set for the ephod (an apron-like garment) and for the breastplate" (Ex. 35:27). Why does the Torah make specific mention that the Princes of the tribes were the ones bringing the stones?

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchok) who lived 1040-1104 and is considered the leading commentator on the Torah and the Talmud) cites the words of the Sages who note that the heads of the tribes brought the last donations for the Sanctuary. The Princes said, "We will let the other people donate whatever they will donate, and we will bring whatever is missing." However, the people brought all that was needed. The heads of the tribes then asked, "What can we still do?" The only things remaining were the special stones that were needed and this is what they brought. Since they procrastinated, the Torah hints a reproof to them by spelling the name nesiiim (princes) lacking one Hebrew letter yud.

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz comments that their original intention appears to be virtuous. They said that they would bring whatever was needed at the end. (The Sanctuary was built through donations-except the foundations of the pillars which came from compulsory communal funds. The Princes felt that the needs would be too great for the people to cover; they underestimated the national fervor and generosity!) This appears to be a very generous proposal on their part. However, we learn from here that since their behavior touched on the negative trait of laziness, their behavior was considered incorrect and they were censured for it.

Whenever a negative character trait could be an underlying factor for your behavior, be very careful to clarify what your true motivation is. This especially

applies to the trait of laziness. It is easy to give many good-sounding reasons for not doing things. When laziness could be the real reason for your lack of action, be suspicious that your reasons are actually rationalizations by which you are trying to excuse yourself. Our lesson:

Don't procrastinate in preparing for Pesach! It can become too late. *(Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin) © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

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

**T**he verses at the end of the Torah portion of Pekudai, like the last passage in the book of Shemot, involve the awesome and wonderful event of building the Tabernacle, when all of Bnei Yisrael were privileged to see the Holy Cloud settle on the Tabernacle, "and the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle" [Shemot 40:34]. This took place on the first day of the month of Nissan, and we can once again feel the link between the Torah and the element of time this Shabbat, when the Torah portion of Pekudai is read together with the special Maftir about the beginning of the month of Nissan (Parshat Hachodesh).

The same event is repeated in two other passages, when the dedication of the Tabernacle is described from different points of view. In the portion of Shemini, the Torah singles out the dedication of the Altar out of all the other elements of the Tabernacle, while the portion of Nasso gives a detailed list of the sacrifices that the leaders of the nation brought starting on the first day of the dedication. Each of the three descriptions emphasizes a different aspect of the events.

Each passage has its own "hero." In Shemini, Aharon the High Priest is at the center, bringing his sacrifices. The prominent figure in this week's portion is Betzalel, who is privileged to see his handiwork built and then put to use for its holy objective. The portion of Nasso takes special note of the role played by the main leader, Moshe: "And when Moshe went to the Tent of Meeting to speak to Him, he would hear the voice speaking to him from above the cover, which was on the Ark of Testament, from between the two kruvim" [Bamidbar 7:89].

It is interesting to note the contrast between this week's portion and Nasso, and specifically the different characters of Betzalel and Moshe. It seems in Nasso almost as if the entire description of the Tabernacle appears only in order to note the wonderful and awesome heights that Moshe reached, allowing him to fulfill his role in the best way possible. However, in this week's portion Moshe is "pushed aside" from his natural task, as is written, "And Moshe could not go into

the Tent of Meeting, because the Cloud rested upon it" [Shemot 40:35].

This "rejection," where evidently the beams and curtains made by Betzalel took precedence over Moshe's holy service, emphasizes the high spiritual level of the Tabernacle from Betzalel's point of view. Why was he called Betzalel? The name implies that he was in G-d's shadow ("tzel") and he could therefore argue with Moshe about the detailed sequence of the construction? putting the curtains and the beams in place before bringing in the Ark. He said, "the common practice in the world is that a man first builds a house and then moves his vessels inside." Moshe did not make this comparison in his mind, rather he saw the Tabernacle mainly as a continuation of the Divine revelation, an Ark and the keruvim, with the voice of G-d coming from a space between them. Betzalel, on the other hand, instinctively understood the most basic concept? G-d yearns for a house, a dwelling place on the lowly earth.

This novel idea, that "indeed G-d will dwell on the earth" [Melachim I 8:27], is so important that it even takes precedence for a short time over Moshe's unique status and his holy task.

### RABBI JONATHAN SACKS

## Covenant & Conversation

**R**ight at the end of the book of Shemot, there is a textual difficulty so slight that it is easy to miss, yet-as interpreted by Rashi-it contains one of the great clues as to the nature of Jewish identity: moving testimony to the unique challenge of being a Jew.

First, the background. The Tabernacle is finally complete. Its construction has taken many chapters to relate. No other event in the wilderness years is portrayed in such detail. Now, on the first of Nissan, exactly a year after Moses told the people to begin their preparations for the exodus, he assembles the beams and hangings, and puts the furniture and vessels in place. There is an unmistakable parallelism between the words the Torah uses to describe Moses' completion of the work and those it uses of G-d on the seventh day of creation: "And Moses finished [vayechal] the work [hamelakhah]. And G-d finished [vayechal] on the seventh day the work [melakhto] which He had done." The next verse states the result: "Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle."

The meaning is both clear and revolutionary. The creation of the sanctuary by the Israelites is intended to represent a human parallel to the Divine creation of the universe. In making the world, G-d created a home for mankind. In making the Tabernacle, mankind created a home for G-d.

From a human perspective, G-d fills the space we make for His presence. His glory exists where we renounce ours. The immense detail of the construction

is there to tell us that throughout, the Israelites were obeying G-d's instructions rather than improvising their own. The specific domain called "the holy" is where we meet G-d on his terms, not ours. Yet this too is G-d's way of conferring dignity on mankind. It is we who build His home so that He may fill what we have made. In the words of a famous film: "If you build it, he will come."

Bereishith begins with G-d making the cosmos. Shemot ends with human beings making a micro-cosmos, a miniature and symbolic universe. Thus the entire narrative of Genesis-Exodus is a single vast span that begins and ends with the concept of G-d-filled space, with this difference: that in the beginning the work is done by G-d-the-Creator. By the end it is done by man-and-woman-the-creators. The whole intricate history has been a story with one overarching theme: the transfer of the power and responsibility of creation from heaven to earth, from G-d to the image-of-G-d called mankind.

That is the background. However, the final verses of the book go on to tell us about the relationship between the "cloud of glory" and the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle, we recall, was not a fixed structure. It was made in such a way as to be portable. It could quickly be dismantled and its parts carried, as the Israelites made their way to the next stage of their journey. When the time came for the Israelites to move on, the cloud moved from its resting place in the Tent of Meeting to a position outside the camp, signalling the direction they must now take. This is how the Torah describes it: "When the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, the Israelites went onward in all their journeys, but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted. 38 So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel in all their journeys."

There is a small but significant difference between the two instances of the phrase *bechol mas'ehem*, "in all their journeys." In the first instance the words are to be taken literally. When the cloud lifted and moved on ahead, the Israelites knew they were about to travel. However in the second instance they cannot be taken literally. The cloud was not over the Tabernacle in all their journeys. On the contrary: it was there only when they stopped travelling and instead pitched camp. During the journeys the cloud went on ahead.

Noting this, Rashi makes the following comment: "A place where they encamped is also called *massa*, 'a journey'... Because from the place of encampment they always set out again on a new journey, therefore they are all called 'journeys.'"

The point is linguistic, but the message is anything but. Rashi has encapsulated in a few brief words-"a place where they encamped is also called a journey"-the existential truth at the heart of Jewish

identity. So long as we have not yet reached our destination, even a place of rest is still called a journey-because we know we are not here for ever. There is a way still to go. In the words of the poet Robert Frost, "The woods are lovely, dark and deep. / But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep."

To be a Jew is to travel, and to know that here where we are is a mere resting place, not yet a home. It is defined not by the fact that we are here, but by the knowledge that eventually-after a day, a week, a year, a century, sometimes even a millennium-we will have to move on. Thus, the portable Tabernacle, even more than the Temple in Jerusalem, became the symbol of Jewish life.

Why so? Because the G-ds of the ancient world were G-ds of a place: Sumeria, Memphis, Moab, Edom. They had a specific domain. Theology was linked to geography. Here, in this holy place, made magnificent by ziggurat or temple, the G-ds of the tribe or the state ruled and exercised power over the city or the empire. When Pharaoh says to Moses: "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go" he means-here, I am the sovereign power. Egypt has its own G-ds. Within its boundaries, they alone rule, and they have delegated that power to me, their earthly representative. There may indeed be a G-d of Israel, but his power and authority do not extend to Egypt. Divine sovereignty is like political sovereignty. It has borders. It has spatial location. It is bounded by a place on the map.

With Israel an old-new idea (it goes back, according to the Torah, to Adam and Cain, Abraham and Jacob, all of whom suffered exile) is reborn: that G-d, being everywhere, can be found anywhere. He is what Morris Berman calls the "wandering G-d." Just as in the desert His cloud of glory accompanied the Israelites on their long and meandering journey, so-said the rabbis-"when Israel went into exile, the Divine presence went with them." G-d cannot be confined to a specific place. Even in Israel, His presence among the people depended on their obedience to His word. Hence there is no such thing as physical security, the certain knowledge that here-I-am-and-here-I-stay. As David said in Psalm 30: "When I felt secure, I said, / 'I will never be shaken.' / ... but when You hid Your face, / I was dismayed."

Security belongs not to place but to person, not to a physical space on the surface of the earth but to a spiritual space in the human heart.

If anything is responsible for the unparalleled strength of Jewish identity during the long centuries in which they were scattered throughout the world, a minority everywhere, it is this-the concept to which Jews and Judaism gave the name *galut*, exile. Unique among nations in the ancient or modern world, with few exceptions they neither converted to the dominant faith

nor assimilated to the prevailing culture. The sole reason was that they never mistook a particular place for home, temporary location for ultimate destination. "Now we are here," they said at the beginning of the seder service, "but next year, in the land of Israel."

In Jewish law (Yoreh Deah 286: 22) 7, one who hires a house outside Israel is obliged to affix a mezuzah only after thirty days. Until then it is not yet regarded as a dwelling-place. Only after thirty days does it become, de facto, home. In Israel, however, one who hires a house is immediately obligated *mishum yishuv eretz Yisrael*, "because of the command to settle Israel." Outside Israel Jewish life is a way, a path, a route. Even an encampment, a place of rest, is still called a journey.

There is a marvellous scene in the 19th chapter of the First Book of Kings. The aged Elijah encounters G-d on the mountain, in the "still small voice" that follows the wind, the earthquake and the fire. G-d tells him that he must appoint Elisha as his successor. He does so: "So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. 'Let me kiss my father and mother good-by,' he said, 'and then I will come with you.'"

"Go back,' Elijah replied. 'What have I done to you?'"

"So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the ploughing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant."

Elisha was not expecting the call. Yet without delay, he abandons everything to follow Elijah. Almost as if terrified at the sheer starkness of the demand he is making of the younger man, Elijah seems to change his mind at the last moment: "Go back. What have I done to you?" (There is an echo here of an earlier passage in which Naomi tries to persuade Ruth not to follow her: "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home... Return home, my daughters, why would you come with me?" In both cases, Ruth and Elisha prove their calling by refusing to be dissuaded). At the end of his essay, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik gives a deeply moving analysis of the encounter: "Elisha was a typical representative of the majestic community. He was the son of a prosperous farmer, a man of property, whose interests were centred around this-worldly, material goods such as crops, livestock, and market prices... What did this man of majesty have in common with Elijah, the solitary covenantal prophet, the champion of G-d, the adversary of Kings, who walked as a stranger through the bustling cities of Shomron... What bond could exist between a complacent farmer who enjoyed his homestead and the man in the hairy

dress who came from nowhere and to finally disappeared under a veil of mystery? [Yet] he bade farewell to father and mother and departed from their home for good. Like his master, he became homeless. Like his ancestor Jacob he became a 'straying Aramean' who took defeat and humiliation with charity and gratitude... Elisha was indeed lonely, but in his loneliness he met the Lonely One and discovered the singular covenantal confrontation of solitary man and G-d who abides in the recesses of transcendental solitude."

That scene was repeated time and again during the years 1948-51 when one after another of the Jewish communities in Arab lands-the Maghreb, Iraq, Yemen-said goodbye to homes they had lived in for centuries and left for Israel. In 1990, the Dalai Lama, who had lived in exile from Tibet since 1951, invited a group of Jewish scholars to visit him in North India. Realising that he and his followers might have to spend many years before they were allowed back, he had pondered the question, "How does a way of life sustain itself far from home?" He realised that one group above all others had faced and solved that problem: the Jews. So he turned to them for advice (the story is told in Roger Kamenetz' book, *The Jew in the Lotus*).

Whether the Jewish answer-which has to do with faith in the G-d of history-is applicable to Buddhism is a moot point, but the encounter was fascinating none the less, because it showed that even the Dalai Lama, leader of a group far removed from Judaism, recognised that there is something unparalleled in the Jewish capacity to stay faithful to the terms of its existence despite dispersion, never losing faith that one day the exiles would return to their land.

How and why it happened is contained in those simple words of Rashi at the end of *Shemot*. Even when at rest, Jews knew that they would one day have to uproot their tents, dismantle the Tabernacle, and move on. "Even an encampment is called a journey." A people that never stops travelling is one that never grows old or stale or complacent. It may live in the here-and-now, but it is always conscious of the distant past and the still-beckoning future. "But I have promises to keep / and miles to go before I sleep."

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