

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

There is an important principle in Judaism, a source of hope and also one of the structuring principles of the Torah. It is the principle that G-d creates the cure before the disease. Bad things may happen but G-d has already given us the remedy if we know where to look for it.

So for instance in Chukkat we read of the deaths of Miriam and Aaron and how Moses was told that he would die in the desert without entering the Promised Land. This is a terrifying encounter with mortality. Yet we read before any of this, we first hear the law of the red heifer, the rite of purification after contact with death. The Torah has placed it here to assure us in advance that we can be purified after any bereavement. Human mortality does not ultimately bar us from being in the presence of Divine immortality.

This is the key to understanding Terumah. Though not all commentators agree, its real significance is that it is G-d's answer in advance to the sin of the golden calf. In strict chronological terms it is out of place here. It (and Tetzaveh) should have appeared after Ki Tissa, which tells the story of the calf. It is set here before the sin to tell us that the cure existed before the disease, the tikkun before the kilkul, the mending before the fracture, the rectification before the sin.

So to understand Terumah and the phenomenon of the mishkan, the Sanctuary and all that it entailed, we have first to understand what went wrong at the time of the golden calf. Here the Torah is very subtle and gives us, in Ki Tissa, a narrative that can be understood at three quite different levels.

The first and most obvious is that the sin of the golden calf was due to a failure of leadership on the part of Aaron. This is the overwhelming impression we receive on first reading Exodus 32. We sense that Aaron should have resisted the people's clamour. He should have told them to be patient. He should have shown leadership. He did not. When Moses comes down the mountain and asks him what he has done, Aaron replies: "Do not be angry, my lord. You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make an oracle to lead us, since we do not know what happened to Moses, the man who took us out of Egypt.' So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewellery,

take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" (Ex. 32: 22-24).

This is a failure of responsibility. It is also a spectacular act of denial ("I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!").¹ So the first reading of the story is of Aaron's failure.

But only the first. A deeper reading suggests that it is about Moses. It was his absence from the camp that created the crisis in the first place. "The people began to realize that Moses was taking a long time to come down from the mountain. They gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Make us an oracle to lead us. We have no idea what happened to Moses, the man who brought us out of Egypt.'" (Ex. 32: 1).

G-d told Moses what was happening and said: "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have wrought ruin" (32: 7). The undertone is clear. "Go down," suggests that G-d was telling Moses that his place was with the people at the foot of the mountain, not with G-d at the top. "Your people" implies that G-d was telling Moses that the people were his problem, not G-d's. He was about to disown them.

Moses urgently prayed to G-d for forgiveness, then descended. What follows is a whirlwind of action. Moses descends, sees what has happened, breaks the tablets, burns the calf, mixes its ashes with water and makes the people drink, then summons help in punishing the wrongdoers. He has become the leader in the midst of the people, restoring order where a moment before there had been chaos. On this reading the central figure was Moses. He had been the strongest of strong leaders. The result, though, was that when he was not there, the people panicked. That is the downside of strong leadership.

But there then follows a chapter, Exodus 33, that is one of the hardest in the Torah to understand. It begins with G-d announcing that, though He would send an "angel" or "messenger" to accompany the people on the rest of their journey, He Himself would not be in their midst "because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way." This deeply distresses the people (33: 1-6).

In verses 12-23, Moses challenges G-d on this verdict. He wants G-d's presence to go with the people.

¹ In Deuteronomy 9: 20, Moses discloses a fact which has been kept from us until that point: "G-d also expressed great anger toward Aaron, threatening to destroy him, so, at that time, I also prayed for Aaron."

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He asks, "Let me know Your ways" and "Pray let me see Your glory." This is hard to understand. The entire exchange between Moses and G-d, one of the most intense in the Torah, is no longer about sin and forgiveness. It seems almost to be a metaphysical inquiry into the nature of G-d. What is its connection with the golden calf?

It is what happens between these two episodes that is the most puzzling of all. The text says that Moses "took his tent and pitched it for himself outside the camp, far from the camp" (33: 7). This must surely have been precisely the wrong thing to do. If, as G-d and the text have implied, the problem had been the distance of Moses as a leader, the single most important thing for him to do now would be to stay in the people's midst, not position himself outside the camp. Moreover, the Torah has just told us that G-d had said He would not be in the midst of the people – and this caused the people distress. Moses' decision to do likewise would surely have doubled their distress. Something deep is happening here.

It seems to me that in Exodus 33 Moses is undertaking the most courageous act of his life. He is saying to G-d: "It is not my distance that is the problem. It is Your distance. The people are terrified of You. They have witnessed Your overwhelming power. They have seen You bring the greatest empire the world has ever known to its knees. They have seen You turn sea into dry land, send down food from heaven and bring water from a rock. When they heard Your voice at Mount Sinai, they came to me to beg me to be an intermediary. They said, 'You speak to us and we will hearken, but let not G-d speak to us lest we die' (Ex. 20: 16). They made a calf not because they wanted to worship an idol, but because they wanted some symbol of Your presence that was not terrifying. They need You to be close. They need to sense You not in the sky or the summit of the mountain but in the midst of the camp. And even if they cannot see Your face, for no one can do that, at least let them see some visible sign of Your glory."

That, it seems to me, is Moses' request to which this week's parsha is the answer. "Let them make for Me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst" (25: 8). This is the first time in the Torah that we hear

the verb sh-kh-n, meaning "to dwell," in relation to G-d. As a noun it means literally, "a neighbour." From this is derived the key word in post-biblical Judaism, Shekhinah, meaning G-d's immanence as opposed to His transcendence, G-d-as-One-who-is-close, the daring idea of G-d as a near neighbour.

In terms of the theology of the Torah, the very idea of a mishkan, a sanctuary or Temple, a physical "home" for "G-d's glory," is deeply paradoxical. G-d is beyond space. As King Solomon said at the inauguration of the first Temple, "Behold the heavens and the heavens of the heavens cannot encompass You, how much less this house?" Or as Isaiah said in G-d's name: "The heavens are My throne and the earth My foot-stool. What house shall you build for Me, where can My resting place be?"

The answer, as the Jewish mystics emphasized, is that G-d does not live in a building but rather in the hearts of the builders: "Let them make for me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them" (Ex. 25: 8) – "among them," not "in it." How, though, does this happen? What human act causes the Divine presence to live within the camp, the community? The answer is the name of our parsha, Terumah, meaning, a gift, a contribution.

"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying 'Tell the Israelites to bring Me an offering. You are to receive the offering for Me from everyone whose heart moves them to give.'" This would prove to be the turning point in Jewish history.

Until that moment the Israelites had been recipients of G-d's miracles and deliverances. He had taken them from slavery to freedom and performed miracles for them. There was only one thing G-d had not yet done, namely, give the Israelites the chance of giving back something to G-d. The very idea sounds absurd. How can we, G-d's creations, give back to the G-d who made us? All we have is His. As David said, at the gathering he convened at the end of his life to initiate the building the Temple:

Wealth and honour come from you; you are the ruler of all things ... Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. (I Chronicles 29: 12, 14)

That ultimately is the logic of the mishkan. G-d's greatest gift to us is the ability to give to Him. From a Judaic perspective the idea is fraught with risk. The idea that G-d might be in need of gifts is close to paganism and heresy. Yet, knowing the risk, G-d allowed Himself to be persuaded by Moses to cause His spirit to rest within the camp and allow the Israelites to give something back to G-d.

At the heart of the idea of the sanctuary is what Lewis Hyde beautifully described as the labour of

gratitude. His classic study, *The Gift*,² looks at the role of the giving and receiving of gifts, for example, at critical moments of transition. He quotes the Talmudic story of a man whose daughter was about to get married, but who had been told that she would not survive to the end of the day. The next morning the man visited his daughter and saw that she was still alive. Unknown to both of them, when she hung up her hat after the wedding, its pin pierced a serpent that would otherwise have bitten and killed her. The father wanted to know what his daughter had done that merited this divine intervention. She answered, "A poor man came to the door yesterday. Everyone was so busy with the wedding preparations that they did not have time to deal with him. So I took the portion that had been intended for me and gave it to him." It was this act of generosity that was the cause of her miraculous deliverance.³

The construction of the sanctuary was fundamentally important because it gave the Israelites the chance to give back to G-d. Later Jewish law recognised that giving is an integral part of human dignity when they made the remarkable ruling that even a poor person completely dependent on charity is still obliged to give charity.⁴ To be in a situation where you can only receive, not give, is to lack human dignity.

The mishkan became the home of the Divine presence because G-d specified that it be built only out of voluntary contributions. Giving creates a gracious society by enabling each of us to make our contribution to the public good. That is why the building of the sanctuary was the cure for the sin of the golden calf. A people that only received but could not give was trapped in dependency and lack of self-respect. G-d allowed the people to come close to Him, and He to them, by giving them the chance to give.

That is why a society based on rights not responsibilities, on what we claim from, not what we give to others, will always eventually go wrong. It is why the most important gift a parent can give a child is the chance to give back. The etymology of the word *Terumah* hints at this. It means, not simply a contribution, but literally something "raised up." When we give, it is not just our contribution but we who are raised up. We survive by what we are given, but we achieve dignity by what we give. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of

² Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006.

³ Shabbat 156b.

⁴ Maimonides *Hilkhot Shekalim* 1: 1, *Mattenot Ani'im* 7:5

one piece with the cover, at the two ends. The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover". (Exodus 25:19-20)

What is the most crucial vehicle for the transmission of our Jewish faith and traditions? Is it the Synagogue, the Study Hall, the Jewish Community Center, the charitable organizations or none of the above? Let us study the details of two of the major accoutrements of the Desert Sanctuary and perhaps we will discover the answer to our question.

The Sanctuary menorah described in this week's Torah reading, had the shape of a golden tree, whose trunk extended into six branches, three on each side, replete with stems and flowers. (Ex. 25:31-40) It was a tree, which shed light.

The ark was the repository for the tablets of stone, which contained the Ten Commandments. A golden cover (*Kaporet* or *Parokhet*) was placed over and above the ark, from which two cherubs were hammered out on either side. Rashi cites the Midrash: "They had the form of the face of a young child." (B.T. *Sukkah* 5b) The cherubs were formed to be looking at each other, and the Almighty communicated with Moses from between the two cherubs. (Ex. 25:10-30)

The Sages described the special qualities of these cherubs, and the way in which our Gentile captors viewed these images:

Rav Katina said, "When the Israelites would ascend to Jerusalem during the three Pilgrim Festivals, the (Temple custodians) would show them the cherubs, who were embracing each other. They would say to the pilgrims, See how your love before the Almighty should be as the love of a man for a woman" Said Resh Lakish, "when the destruction (of the Temple) came about, the Gentiles entered (the sacred shrine) and said: 'These Jews, whose blessing is a blessing and whose curse is a curse, are involved in such a sculpture?' They derided the Israelites, citing the verse, 'All who (formerly) respected her, came to mock her, because they saw her nakedness'. And what was her nakedness? The cherubs, embracing each other!" (B.T. *Yoma* 54a)

Why did our Holy Temple feature sculptures like the cherubs-in-embrace, which allowed the Romans to revile Israel as worshipping their G-d through pornography?

We have seen that the menorah is a golden tree, symbolically reminiscent of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. The first couple was banished from the primordial Garden of Perfection, and humanity prevented from eating of the tree of eternal life, because Adam and Eve sinned by partaking of the fruit of knowledge of good and evil. Our major commentator, Rashi suggests that the forbidden fruit injected within the human personality what Sigmund Freud would call

the libido, substituting lust for love, illicit passion for sexual purity. That is original sin. The ultimate goal of Torah – also referred to as a “tree of life” in the Biblical Book of Proverbs as well as in our liturgy – is to re-fashion our imperfect world into the Garden of Eden, to enable a perfected humanity to finally eat the fruit of the tree of eternal life. According to Rashi’s interpretation, this ultimate feat can only be achieved when sexual purity will be restored, when familial love rather than extra marital lust will be normative human behavior. Then we will have righted the wrong, done penance for the sin, which caused our existential exile in the first place.

The Roman conquerors missed the point of the cherub symbolism. Our Sages insist that “they had the form of the face of a young child”, symbolizing purity, innocence, and whole-heartedness. The physical embrace of such male-female winged beings -with the pure faces of children – express love without lust, sexual unity which enhances family rather than sexual depravity which destroys family.

Undoubtedly, the family – that which has such powerful potential for creative supportiveness and spiritual continuity – can tragically degenerate into crippling destructiveness and pathological dysfunction. I heard it said in the name of the great Hassidic sage Rav Aharon Karliner that it is difficult to see the compassion with which G-d created the world – unless you take into account the fact that Adam and Eve were born without parents. Nevertheless, our religious tradition holds great store in the importance and ultimate potential of family as the matrix from which a perfected society will one day emerge – and therefore our Sabbath, festival, life-cycle and family purity rituals laws and customs, all aim to protect, strengthen and deepen the most positive family ties and relationships.

Dysfunctional family – Adam and Eve blaming each other for their own weaknesses – produces the first murder (Cain and Abel); unified family, – when the hearts of the parents turn to the children, and the hearts of the children to the parents – will herald national and world redemption. Family depraved banished humanity from Eden; family redeemed will return us to Eden and the tree of life.

The sacred objects of the desert Sanctuary teach us that the most important vehicle for the transmission of our tradition is the family. Only by nurturing family purity and unity will we succeed in protecting Torah and properly utilizing it to perfect all of society. ©2015 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The initial and most successful building campaign in Jewish history is recorded for us in this week’s Torah reading. The Torah, in recounting the event, teaches us that Moshe was to accept offerings of gold,

silver, copper, precious stones, weaving materials, acacia wood, artistic talent and everything else that would be necessary for the construction of the great tabernacle/mishkan in the desert.

However, the Torah places a caveat on the donations of goods and services, wealth and talent that Moshe was to receive from the people of Israel. The Torah states that he was to accept all donations but only from those whose hearts and will motivated their generosity. We are all aware that it is much easier to write a check than to really feel good, excited and sincere about the donation.

The nature of human beings is to be less than forthcoming in their generosity and even if they are willing to part with some of their material possessions, the spirit and true intent of that generosity is often missing. Here the Torah is teaching us an important lesson. A building or any institution whose purpose is service of G-d and the spiritual enhancement of human beings cannot be built of human material generosity alone.

As the Talmud so succinctly phrases it, “G-d demands our heart.” Professional fundraisers employ all means and tactics to raise money for their goals and projects. However, after many decades of observing fundraising techniques, I know that it is very difficult to penetrate the heart of the donor. Without such a penetration, the fund-raising exercise becomes devoid of spiritual meaning and soulful uplift.

I think that the giving feeling that the Torah emphasizes here is achievable only when one feels that the cause or object of one’s generosity is really worth more than the wealth that one is parting with. The example I use in teaching is that if one feels that giving charity is the equivalent of paying one’s taxes then that donation is completely devoid of any spiritual content. We all have to pay our taxes as a national duty and a practical necessity. Yet people do not feel any sort of spiritual achievement in paying their taxes. We may sign the check but our hearts are not in it.

This attitude, which after all is still acceptable when paying our material taxes is concerned (since no government is really interested in the spiritual effects of its taxes on the status of your soul), is not the attitude that will suffice when it comes to building a tabernacle/mishkan. In this latter case we are asked not only to give of our material wealth and personal talents but truly to give of ourselves as well.

The demand of the Torah is not only to give from our heart but to give our heart itself to the exalted cause and spiritual greatness of the tabernacle/mishkan. It is not a donation that the Torah asks of us, rather it is a commitment of self that is demanded. The tabernacle/mishkan has long ago disappeared from our physical view but its lessons remain relevant and important to us today as when they were taught millennia ago. ©2015 *Rabbi Berel Wein* -

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of blessed memory, points out that prayer and prophecy are two sides of the same coin. While both involve dialogue between the human being and G-d, there is one major difference: In prophecy G-d initiates the dialogue, while in prayer, the human being is the initiator.

But how can the limited and finite person interface with the unlimited, infinite G-d when the distance is so great? Furthermore, how can one initiate contact when the chasm is so vast?

The mishkan (tabernacle), constructed by the Jews at G-d's behest in the desert, plays a crucial role in addressing this very issue.

Clearly G-d does not command that the tabernacle be built for Himself. G-d is

everywhere and His Being fills the entire world, therefore a specific dwelling is no use for him. No wonder the text in our parsha states: "And they shall build for Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them (betokham)," (Exodus 25:8) rather than saying "that I may dwell in it (betokho)." Betokho would imply the mishkan can actually contain G-d.

The formulation of the text stresses that, through the mishkan, people would be able to more profoundly feel the presence of G-d. From this perspective the mishkan was not built for G-d but for am Yisrael. The mishkan offers us the potential to bridge the tremendous abyss between the human being, and G-d.

This makes the character of the mishkan very dependent. Rather than being intrinsically holy, its sanctity very much hinges upon how holy the people make it. A clear example of this is found in I Samuel (4:1-11). After suffering a harsh defeat at the hands of the Philistines, the Jews conclude that the absence of the Ark was what led to this tragic result. They therefore decided to bring the Ark from Shiloh for surely in its presence they would be saved and succeed. However, even with the Ark, the result was the same.

The thinking of the Jews was that the Ark was G-d and with G-d present they could not be defeated. Their mistake was that the Ark was not G-d, it was rather the symbol of G-d. The symbol is dependent on one thing, the devotion of the people to G-d.

This is also the case with the everyday contemporary mishkan-the synagogue itself. If void of spiritual meaning, the synagogue becomes an empty shell, bricks without soul. Our challenge is to lift our houses of worship to the full potential of their spiritual

heights to become a place where everyone is embraced-a place of study and transcendence where we reach beyond ourselves to touch the Divine in the hope that G-d will dwell betokheinu, among all of us.

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah teaches us an important perspective about the Holy Temple and our synagogue. The haftorah opens with a detailed account of Shlomo Hamelech's construction of the Bais Hamikdash. He engaged nearly two hundred thousand workers in hewing and transporting scarce heavy stones for the Bais Hamikdash's foundation. He built its exterior walls from perfectly hewed stones from the quarry that did not require any cutting or planing. He enhanced the basic structure with numerous chambers, annexes and winding staircases and paneled the entire structure with impressive cedar wood.

In the midst of this heavy construction Hashem sent Shlomo Hamelech a prophetic message and stated, "(Regarding) The house you are building, if you walk in My statutes, adhere to My laws and guard all My mitzvos.... I will dwell amongst the Jewish people and not forsake My nation, Israel." (M'lochim I 6:12,13) Hashem told Shlomo Hamelech at the outset that the expressed purpose for all his labor was to create an earthly abode for Hashem. The impressive architectural structures, jewel studded walls and gold trimmings would not secure this objective. The sole factor in this would be guarding Hashem's statutes and carefully adhering to all His mitzvos. Hashem declared that the entire value of this magnificent edifice depended upon the Jewish people. If they sincerely desired to unite with Him they would merit His Divine Presence. Hashem pledged to remain amongst them as long as they displayed true desire to be with Him.

Malbim notes the juxtaposition of this prophecy in the midst of the construction. Scriptures indicate that Shlomo received this prophecy upon completing the Bais Hamikdash's exterior before beginning its interior. Malbim sees this moment as a transitional point in the building process, a time most appropriate for this prophecy. We can appreciate Hashem's timely message through S'forno's insightful comment about the Sanctuary and the Holy Temple.

The Sages inform us that the actual Sanctuary remained perfectly intact and never fell into foreign hands. When King Yoshiyahu foresaw the Jewish nation's exile he secretly buried the Holy Ark, the Sanctuary and many of its holy vessels in a cave below Yerushalyim for preservation. The first Holy Temple did not merit such fortune and aside from suffering much

deterioration ultimately fell into wicked Babylonian hands who leveled the entire magnificent edifice. This digression continued and the second Temple did not even merit to house Hashem's intense Divine Presence within its walls.

S'forno informs us the reason for such contrasting experiences with these sacred structures. He sees the key factor in this as the pious nature of individuals involved in erecting these structures. The Sanctuary was built by pious, devout individuals totally focused on creating an earthly abode for Hashem. Moshe Rabbeinu oversaw the entire construction devoting himself to the perfect fulfillment of every detail. Hashem's devout Levites had a major hand in the construction under the leadership of Ahron Hakohain's son, Isamar. The project's contractor was Betzalel gifted with sacred insights to the Heavenly process of creation. The holy structure they constructed did not allow for deterioration or destruction and demanded eternal preservation.

Conversely, the first Temple's construction shared only some of these experiences. Although the pious Shlomo Hamelech oversaw its construction his massive undertaking included multitudes of skilled craftsmen from Tyre. These foreign workers did not relate to spirituality value and failed to dedicate their every act towards that end. Although Hashem rested His intense presence in the first Temple this sacred edifice was not spared from deterioration and destruction. The second Temple was not even overseen by devout, pious individuals. Hashem's Levites were not involved in its construction and the bulk its workers were of foreign decent. In fact, the second Temple did not even merit the return of the holy Ark and Hashem's Divine Presence was not intensely sensed within its walls. (S'forno S'hmos 38:21)

In light of the above we appreciate Hashem's timely message to Shlomo Hamelech. After successfully completing the exterior Shlomo set his focus on the interior of the Bais Hamikdash. At that exact moment Hashem reminded Shlomo of the interior's exclusive purpose. Hashem desired to secure the Temple for as long as possible and chose this exact moment to inspire Shlomo towards its spiritual direction. This impressive structure was to serve as Hashem's earthly abode provided His people display true desire to unite with Him. After Shlomo received his charge he immediately focused on the project's Divine dimensions and dedicated every detail of the interior to Hashem. Shlomo hoped to create through this Hashem's permanent earthly abode. Although other factors interfered with Shlomo's noble goal, his efforts were fruitful. Unlike the second Bais Hamikdash, Shlomo's Bais Hamikdash merited Hashem's intense presence for four hundred and ten years. The awesomeness of this experience is best expressed through the Vilna Gaon's classic reflection. He once

commented that he could not even fathom the spiritual capacity of the ordinary Jew of those times who merited to enter the Bais Hamikdash and stand in Hashem's sacred presence.

This lesson in construction and devotion equally applies to our miniature Bais Hamikdash, our synagogue. HaRav Chaim of Volozhin shared with us the potential sanctity of our synagogue. He said, "Imagine what would result in one devoted his thoughts when chopping the wood for the handle of the ax used to chop the wood for the walls of a synagogue. If every detail of construction was devoted towards housing Hashem's Divine presence the following result would undoubtedly result. The sanctity within its walls would be so intense that it would be virtually impossible to engage there in idle chatter. Indeed, even our present day synagogue has potential for true sanctity. When we construct a house for Hashem totally for His sake it will also merit everlasting spiritual status. Although majestic interior contributes to the beauty of our Bais Haknesses its endurance and spiritual capacity does not stem from this. The singular factor is our focus on the Divine Presence residing therein. When we construct our miniature Temple in this manner it will undoubtedly merit intense degrees of sanctity and forever remain the home of Hashem.

Although such conditions are difficult to meet in full we can do our part to preserve the sanctity of our sacred synagogues. Even in our times Hashem desires to rest amongst His people. Our humble synagogue can facilitate this goal when shown its proper respect. If we pause before entering this sacred edifice and contemplate who rests within its walls we would merit to sense, in some way, His Divine presence. If we could devote sincere effort towards preserving our synagogue's sanctity we would be overwhelmed by Hashem's intense presence sensed therein. May we soon merit Hashem's full return to His people and may we be privileged to stand in His sacred presence forever. © 2015 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Ark of Inclusion

In this week's portion, Hashem commands the Jewish nation to build the Mishkan. Each one of the utensils is specified as to how it should be constructed, its width, its length, and its height. The type of material whether it was gold, silver, or copper, is enumerated and the details of its ornaments are provided.

The procedure for the construction of each vessel is preceded by a command stated in the singular form: "And you shall make" "And you shall make a show bread table." "And you shall make a Menorah." "And you shall make an Altar."

The command is directed toward Moshe to delegate the construction. The Aron Kodesh, the Holy Ark is different. Its command is not stated in the

singular form, rather in the plural. The Torah does not say and you shall make a Holy Ark, it states, "And they shall make a Holy Ark." The commentaries ask, why was the command to build the Ark the only one that was given to a group?

In a small shul in Yerushalayim, a daily Daf HaYomi shiur (Talmudic folio class) was held each morning before Shacharis. An elderly Russian immigrant attended the shiur. Quiet as he was, his behavior in the shiur intrigued the lecturer. He would never ask a thing. Often he would nod off. Sometimes, when the Rabbi quoted a particular Talmudic sage, the old man's face would light up -- especially when the Rabbi mentioned an opinion from a obscure Talmudic personality.

This behavior continued throughout the summer. Always quiet, the man would sometimes nod off, and at other times he would perk up. Then winter came. The group of men would gather around the table in the frigid mornings huddled close as they would warm to the strains of the Talmud and the straining heater in the old synagogue. The old man never missed a class.

One morning a rare snow blanketed Jerusalem. No one showed up to the shiur except the Rabbi and the elderly Russian Jew. Instead of giving his usual lecture, the Rabbi decided he would ask the old Jew a little bit about himself.

"Tell me," he inquired, "I watch you as I say my shiur. Sometimes you look intrigued but at other times you seem totally disinterested. The trouble is I would like to make the shiur more interesting for you during its entirety, but I can't seem to make out what perks you up and makes you doze?"

The old man smiled. "I never had a Jewish education. I can barely read Hebrew. I do not come to the shiur for the same reasons that the other men come." He paused as his eyes pondered his past. "You see, I was a soldier in the Red Army during World War II. Every day our commander would herd us into a room and put a gun to our heads. He commanded us to recite the names of every member of the Politburo. And we did. We learned those names backwards and forward. I come to this class to hear the names of every rabbi in the Talmud. If I cannot learn at least I will know the names of all the great sages! "That." he smiled "is my Daf HaYomi!"

Although the show bread table, the Menorah, and the Altar can be constructed by individuals -- the Ark that holds the Torah is different. One man cannot make it alone. It must be a communal effort. Just as the Torah cannot be learned by one man alone, its Ark cannot be built by an individual either.

The Torah is given for everyone to learn and to experience -- each one according to his or her own level and ability. Lighting a Menorah is a clear-cut ritual delegated to the Kohain. The Altar is used for the

sacrifices brought by the kohanim. The Torah is for everybody. And each individual has his own Shas and Daf HaYomi. Each person has his share in Toras Yisrael. Everyone extracts something holy from the Torah. To some it may be extrapolative halachic theory, while for others it may be the refinement of character. And still for others it may be the names of Abayai and Rava. ©2015 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

One of the vessels associated with the outer, copper altar (upon which the animals were offered, as opposed to the inner, golden altar, upon which the incense was offered) are fire-pans (Sh'mos 27:3). Rashi tells us that the fire pans "had a receptacle in order to take [burning] coals from the [outer] altar to carry them onto the inner altar for the incense." Although his wording can be interpreted in several ways (as we shall see), the bottom line is that its purpose was to take burning coals from the top of the outer altar to be used to burn the incense on the inner altar. However, when the Torah (Bamidbar 4:14) gives us the list of the vessels of the outer altar that are packed up with the that altar for transport (when the nation traveled), which is essentially the same list as in our verse (the only difference being the absence of the pots used to empty the ashes into, likely because it wasn't packed up like the other vessels, but was in use even during transport -- turned upside-down and placed over the fire to protect it and/or to protect the other vessels from it), Rashi tells us that the fire-pans were used "to rake the coals for the 'lifting of the ashes,'" something done each morning at the start of the services of the outer altar (see Vayikra 6:3). Why does Rashi give two different explanations for the same vessel?

Before trying to understand why Rashi changed his explanation of the purpose of the vessel from Sh'mos to Bamidbar, we should try to figure out whether these two explanations are mutually exclusive, or if both can be true. Although this could lead to some very lengthy digressions, suffice it to say that despite some being of the opinion that there were separate fire-pans used for these two activities, one for the "T'rumas HaDeshen" (lifting of the ashes) and one to bring coals from the outer altar to the inner altar, others say that the same fire-pan can be used for both (at least in the Mishkan). In addition, Rashi's wording (in Sh'mos) can be understood to mean that one fire-pan was used to take coals off of the outer altar and bring them to the inner altar, or to mean that the fire-pan mentioned in the verse was only used to remove coals from the outer altar, with the coals being carried to the inner altar on a different fire-pan (see Maskil L'Dovid). If this is what he meant, then even if a separate fire-pan was used for the coals for the incense, it could easily have been the

same fire-pan used for the T'rumas HaDeshen that was used to remove some coals from the outer altar and put them on another fire-pan that brought the coals to the inner altar. Either way, though, we would still need to understand why Rashi chose to mention different uses in each location.

As is widely known, Rashi tries to explain things based on the simplest, most straightforward way of understanding the subject he is trying to explain (whether it be a verse or a section of the Talmud) based on the context. In Sh'mos, the fire-pans are mentioned last, even though the first two things listed are used to remove ashes from the altar (albeit not as part of the T'rumas HaDeshen, but when there the pile of ashes becomes too high). Between those two "ash removal" tools and the fire-pans, two other vessels are mentioned, neither of which is used for ash removal. Since the context of the placement of the fire-pans in this verse indicates that they are not associated with ash removal, Rashi describes its other major use -- taking the coals to be used for the incense from the altar. [The placement of the fire-pans away from the other ash removal tool does not preclude it from also being used for the T'rumas HaDeshen; it had to be separated from them because it is a very different type of ash removal, and the fire-pan's primary use there is to separate the coals before the ashes are removed for the T'rumas HaDeshen. Nevertheless, being separated from any kind of ash removal likely led Rashi to avoid mentioning its use for the T'rumas HaDeshen.] In Bamidbar, on the other hand, the fire-pans are mentioned first, shortly after the previous verse mentioned removing the ashes from the altar before it's packed up for transport. [It is still separated from the other ash removal tool included in the list, so that we don't conflate the two types of ash removal.] In this context, mentioning the fire-pans close to the removal of the ashes allowed Rashi to mention the fire-pans' association with the T'rumas HaDeshen.

Although this may explain why Rashi chose each specific use in each specific location, and perhaps why he only mentioned the one use in each rather than both, it only kicks the can further down the road; we now have to try to understand why the Torah put each mention of the fire-pans in a context that led Rashi to do so.

As previously mentioned, there is a discussion regarding whether the same fire-pan was used for both tasks, or if each task had its own designated fire-pan. If there was a separate fire-pan designated only to take the coals brought to the inner altar for the incense, why was it classified as one of the vessels of the outer altar rather than as being a vessel of the inner altar? This is kind of a trick question, though, as there are no vessels listed for the inner altar, so this fire-pan couldn't be included in a list that doesn't exist. Since it has a connection with both altars (even if it wasn't used for

the T'rumas HaDeshen), as it takes the coals from one to be brought to the other, and there is no list of vessels for the inner altar, it had to be included in the list of the outer altar's vessels. Either way, then, the mention of the fire-pans had to be separated from the ash removal tools, either because some weren't associated with any aspect of ash removal (as they could only be used to get the coals for the incense), or because none were associated with the type of ash removal the first two tools listed were used for. In order to avoid taking sides in this discussion (or because he was taking one side over the other), Rashi only mentioned the use of the fire-pans that everyone agreed could involve the inner altar too.

In Bamidbar, although there is also no explicit mention of any vessels of the inner altar, there is a term used that could include the vessels of the inner altar; "and they shall take all of the service vessels used in the holy [sanctuary] and put them in a garment of blue-dyed wool" (4:12). In fact, Rashi understands these vessels to be precisely the vessels of the inner altar (which is the topic of the previous verse). If the vessels of the inner altar are already included in this verse, and the fire-pan used to bring the coals to the inner altar qualifies as one of those vessels, the fire-pans mentioned with the vessels of the outer altar two verses later can't include this fire-pan! Therefore, there is no reason for the Torah to separate the fire-pans associated with the outer altar from the ash removal required before the altar is packed up for transport, and Rashi could only mention the use of the fire-pans that are only associated with the outer altar, i.e. the T'rumas HaDeshen. © 2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

