**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT TERUMA**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

            We read in Parashat Teruma of God’s commands to Benei Yisrael regarding the construction of the Mishkan, the edifice in which He would “reside” as they traveled through the wilderness.  There is a well-known debate among the commentators as to whether this command was given before the sin of the golden calf, or after – and in response to – this incident.  Rashi (commenting to Parashat Ki-Tisa, 31:18), based on the Midrash Tanchuma (31), asserts that although the command to build the Mishkan appears before the story of the golden calf, in truth, the command was given after Benei Yisrael worshipped the calf.  The Ramban, in his famous introduction to Parashat Teruma, explains differently, and maintains that the command to build the Mishkan directly followed the event of Matan Torah, as indicated by the text.  This is also the position taken by the Zohar.

            Rav Shmuel Borenstein of Sochatchov, in his Sheim Mi-Shmuel, discusses these different opinions, and suggests an explanation for the essential point of debate around which this disagreement revolves.  He elaborates at length on the special sanctity and supernatural quality of the Mishkan, noting in particular the famous tradition that the aron (ark) did not actually need to be carried through the wilderness, as it transported itself.  The Sheim Mi-Shmuel asserts that this was true also of the rest of the Mishkan, as a structure of this size, even after it was dismantled, would naturally be unable to be hauled via six wagons through the sandy desert.  Benei Yisrael earned this unique sanctity and supernatural manifestation of God’s presence, the Sheim Mi-Shmuelwrites, through their remarkable generosity in donating their wealth for the Mishkan’s construction.  As we read later, in Parashat Vayakhel (35:21-29, 37:3-7), the people responded immediately and generously to Moshe’s call to donate materials for this project.  So much so, that in just two days, they had already contributed more than what was needed for the Mishkan.  This generosity, the Sheim Mi-Shmuel writes, stemmed from Benei Yisrael’s overpowering love for God and fierce desire to connect with Him.

            If so, he explains, then the question lying at the heart of the debate among the commentators is from where these feelings originated.  According to the view that the command to build the Mishkan immediately followed Matan Torah, the source of the people’s intense spiritual drive was the Revelation at Sinai, the manifestation of God which they beheld.  This event inspired them and generated within them the emotions that were expressed through their generous donations of materials to the Mishkan.  According to the other view, however, this inspiration came from the process of repentance that followed the grave sin of the golden calf.  This process, even more so than the Revelation, aroused the people’s great love for God and their desire to have Him reside among them.

            The Sheim Mi-Shmuel’s analysis reflects the notion that inspiration and growth can stem from two opposite sources – from a lofty spiritual experience, or from abject failure.  And, at least according to one opinion, the process of recovering from failure is even more valuable a source of inspiration than an experience such as Matan Torah.  The Sheim Mi-Shmuel here teaches us that every situation, even our worst moments of shame and disappointment, can inspire a process of growth and propel us to great heights.  The process of acknowledging guilt, feeling remorse and committing to improve can inspire us to be far better and stronger than we were before we failed.  Just as we can grow from “Matan Torah,” from impactful spiritual experiences, so can we draw inspiration from “the golden calf,” from our mistakes and failures, if we work to recover from them, learn from them, and resolve to never repeat them.

Sunday

            Towards the beginning of Parashat Teruma we read about the aron, the gold-plated, wooden ark which was situated in the inner chamber of the Mishkan.  After outlining the specifications of the ark, God instructed Moshe that he should place in it the stone tablets which he would be receiving, and upon which the Ten Commandments would be engraved (25:16).  God then proceeded to describe the kaporet, the golden covering over the ark, concluding, “You shall place the kaporetover the ark, on top, and you shall place inside the ark the testimony which I will be giving you” (25:21).  As Rashi notes, God here repeated the instruction to place the stone tablets (“the testimony”) inside the aron – an instruction He had just given several verses earlier.  To explain the redundancy, Rashi suggests that in this second verse, God emphasized to Moshe that the luchot(tablets) were to be brought inside the ark when the ark was still open, before the kaporet was placed on top of the ark to cover it.

            The obvious question arises as to why this needed to be said.  It goes without saying that Moshe would not have been able to place the luchot inside the ark while it was covered.  Seemingly, Moshe did not need God to tell him to first place the tablets inside the ark before covering it.

            The Rosh, in his Torah commentary (cited in Torah Sheleima to 25:21, note 145), explains that God commanded Moshe not to even temporarily cover the ark before placing the luchot inside.  Moshe might have wanted to first position the kaporet above the ark to ensure that it sat properly, before placing the tablets inside, and thus God emphasized that the aron should never be covered without the luchot.

            A different answer is cited in the name of the Imrei Emet (by his grandson, Rav Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine, in Likutei Yehuda), suggesting, very simply, that Moshe might have considered inserting the tablets into the aron in miraculous fashion.  Chazal identify several miraculous features of the aron, and therefore, as the ark was a supernatural object, it would have been possible to place the tablets inside it even after it was covered.  God therefore needed to clarify that the tablets should be placed inside normally, before the ark was covered.

            What might be the significance of this command?  Why would the possibility have been entertained to place the luchot inside the aron in supernatural fashion?

            The luchot were prepared by God Himself (“ha-luchot ma’aseh Elokim heima” – 32:16), and were brought down from the heavens to this world.  As such, they did not, in principle, need to be confined to the restrictions of nature.  Originating from the heavens, the luchot were entirely supernatural, and there was thus no reason to assume that they should be handled in a manner conforming to natural law – such as placing them in the aron though the open top, as opposed to penetrating the ark’s walls.  God therefore had to emphasize to Moshe that the heavenly luchotwere to be brought into the earthly aron naturally, and not miraculously.

            Chazal viewed the aron as the symbol of a student of Torah (and thus, for example, the gold plating on the ark’s interior and exterior represents the obligation for a Torah scholar to be “golden” and pure both internally and externally – [Yoma 72b](https://www.sefaria.org/Yoma.72b?lang=he-en)).  Just as the luchot with the Ten Commandments were given from the heavens at Sinai and then stored in the aron, the Torah was given to us from the heavens for us to study, absorb and internalize.  And just as the placement of the luchot in the ark could not be done miraculously, similarly, there are no shortcuts for the process of bringing the Torah into our minds and into our beings.  At Sinai, the heavens opened and God gave us the Torah; thereafter, we need to open ourselves, our minds and our hearts, to receive the Torah, just as the aron needed to be open to receive the luchot.  We cannot expect our minds to absorb the knowledge and comprehension of Torah, or our hearts to absorb the values and ideals of Torah, “miraculously,” without hard work.  We must take the initiative and invest time and effort in the pursuit of Torah knowledge and in the development of a Torah personality, realizing that there is so quick or easy way to bring the Torah into our beings.

Monday

            Parashat Teruma begins with God’s command to Benei Yisrael to collect donations of materials for the construction of the Mishkan “me’eit kol ish asher yidevenu libo” – “from every person whose heart wishes to give.”

            Seforno comments that the Torah requires collecting specifically from people “asher yideveno libo” to emphasize that no coercion should be used, and no pressure should be applied.  The materials for the Mishkan were to be donated on a strictly voluntary basis, and not as a mandatory tax.  (The exception is the machatzit ha-shekel donation, the half-shekel tax imposed upon every member of the nation for the construction of the sockets that formed the foundation of the Mishkan.)  Along similar lines, Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch writes that the root of the word “yidevenu” – n.d.v. – denotes “the most complete freedom of will,” emphasizing that the materials for the Mishkan were to be motivated by pure idealism and volunteerism, without any coercive component.

            A different insight into this verse is offered by Rav Leibele Eiger, who finds it significant that the Torah formulates the word “yidevenu” in the future tense (“yidevenu,” as opposed to “nedavo”).  He suggests that the Torah alludes here to somebody who does not yet feel pure sincerity, who is not truly, wholeheartedly driven and inspired to donate.  God here indicates to Moshe that He wants the contributions of even those “asher yidevenu libo,” who aspire to the level of pure, genuine sincerity, even if they are not quite there yet.

            This Chassidic insight into the word “yidevenu” teaches us that we expected to make our “contributions” at our current level and stature, no matter how far we still are from our ideal standards.  We should not wait until we feel genuinely inspired to “build” our “Mishkan,” our spiritual beings and our spiritual build.  We are expected to “contribute” as much as we can to this process regardless of our current stature, and even if our motives are as yet not perfectly pure and sincere.  God wants the work and effort of each and every one of us to build his or her own “Mishkan,” to strive to be as “sacred” as we can, rather than waiting until we feel especially inspired and driven, until our intentions are pure and pristine.  In whatever condition we find ourselves in, we are able – and expected – to build our “Mishkan” and strive to bring God’s presence into our lives.

Tuesday

            The Torah in Parashat Teruma describes the construction of the Mishkan, which was a wooden structure covered by a series of flax curtains (26:1-6).  These curtains were then covered by a “tent” made from goatskins (26:7-13), which was itself covered by a layer of rams’ skins, and an additional layer made from the skins of an animal called the “tachash” (26:14).

            Rashi (25:5), based on the Gemara ([Shabbat 28b](https://www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.28b?lang=he-en)), comments that the tachash was an especially colorful animal which had never before existed, and never existed again.  It came into existence, Rashi writes, specifically at that time, when Benei Yisrael constructed the Mishkan, and for this very purpose.  There was never such an animal before, and it never returned afterward.  Rashi further comments (again, citing from the Gemara) that Targum Onkelos translates the word “tachash” as “sasgona,” which represents the phrase, “sas u-mitpaer ba-gevanim shelo” – the tachash “rejoiced and took pride in its colors.”

            What might be the significance of the peculiar nature of this animal, whose magnificent colors adorned the exterior of the Mishkan?

            Rav Yitzchak Eizik of Spinka, in his Chakal Yitzchak, suggests that the Gemara here addresses the problematic nature of what he calls “hitpa’arut” – outward displays of extravagance and glory.  The tachash, as mentioned, is described as rejoicing over and taking pride in its magnificent colors, and its colors adorned the outermost layer of the Mishkan, lending it a spectacular appearance.  Normally, the Chakal Yitzchak explains, such outward extravagance is inappropriate.  We are discouraged from calling attention to ourselves through an unusually “glittery” appearance.  As a result, we should not be like the tachash, flaunting our special “colors” and putting our unique talents and achievements on display.  The tachash’s existence was exceptional, because the “bright colors” and “glitter” that it represents should be the exception, rather than the rule.  Magnificent, eye-catching displays are appropriate only for the “Mishkan,” when they serve to enhance a mitzva and bring glory to God.  We are not to follow the tachash’s example and proudly display our “colors” except when this brings honor to God, instead of to ourselves.  God left the tachash out of creation, so-to-speak, because as a general rule, we are to specifically avoid the kind of public display symbolized by this creature.  It is only when such a display serves a sacred purpose, enhancing the Mishkan – our mitzvot, thereby bringing honor and glory to the God – that we ought to emulate the glory and majesty of the tachash.

Wednesday

            In introducing the command to construct a Mishkan, God tells Moshe that the Sanctuary and its appurtenances should be built in strict in accordance with His instructions, and He then concludes, “ve-khein ta’asu” – “and so shall you do” (25:9).  Rashi comments that this seemingly redundant addition was inserted to indicate that the details regarding the Mishkan are relevant for all time.  If one of the furnishings of the Mishkan was lost, and when the permanent Beit Ha-mikdash would be built with new furnishings, the same specifications must be followed.

            The Ramban disputes Rashi’s reading of the phrase “ve-khein ta’asu,” noting that the utensils built by King Shlomo when the Beit Ha-mikdash was constructed had different dimensions than those in the Mishkan, thus proving that the detailed instructions that applied to the Mishkanwere not relevant in future generations.  According to the Ramban, the phrase “ve-khein ta’asu” was added for the purpose of “chizuk ve-zeiruz” – emphasis and “spurring,” to impress upon Benei Yisrael the importance of this project and to urge them to proceed quickly and diligently.

            Rav Yerachmiel Yisrael Yitzchak of Alexander, in Yismach Yisrael, suggests a deeper insight into this phrase, based on Rashi’s comment that it was added to apply the command of the Mishkan to future generations.  Later in Parashat Teruma (25:31), Rashi writes (based on the Midrash Tanchuma, Parashat Behaalotekha) that Moshe had difficulty understanding how to construct the menorah in the Mishkan.  As he was unable to grasp the proper way to build this structure, God told Moshe to simply throw the block of gold into fire, and the menorah would miraculously be formed.  This account is one example of the supernatural assistance that was required for the Mishkan to be properly constructed.  (Another example is found in Rashi’s comments later in Sefer [Shemot (39:33)](https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.39.33?lang=he-en), where he writes that the large wooden planks could not have been lifted and put into place without God’s miraculous intervention.)  On this basis, the Yismach Yisrael suggests that the phrase “ve-khein ta’asu,” which is understood as establishing the eternal relevance of the command of the Mishkan, refers to the need for God’s assistance in building His Sanctuary.  Just as the Mishkan in the wilderness could not have been built without God’s help, similarly, any “Sanctuary” we ever seek to build – either literal or figurative – requires God’s assistance.

            The Yismach Yisrael explains that at times people feel despair as they face spiritual challenges, seeing themselves as unable to build a Mishkan, to live a life of sanctity as the Torah demands.  The command of “ve-khein ta’asu” serves to remind us that even at the feet of Mount Sinai, under the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu, Benei Yisrael were unable to build the Mishkan on their own, without God’s help.  Bringing sanctity into one’s life is a challenge for all people, in every generation.  When we find ourselves struggling to build our own “Mishkan,” we should realize that this struggle is part of the process, that even Moshe encountered difficult obstacles in the process of building a Sanctuary.  And so rather than feel discouraged, we should continue working and striving to achieve to the best of our ability, and trust that God will step in to assist us at every step along the way.

Thursday

            Parashat Teruma begins with God’s command to Benei Yisrael to collect voluntary donations of materials for the construction of the Mishkan, listing the specific materials that were needed (gold, silver, copper, dyes, flax, goatskins, acacia wood, and so on).  This list of materials includes olive oil and spices, which were needed to prepare the anointing oil with which the kohanim and the Mishkan’s furnishings were consecrated, as well as for the kindling of the menorahand for the ketoret (incense).

            A number of commentators raised the question of why oil and spices were included in this list, which consists of materials needed for building the Mishkan, not for the rituals performed in the Mishkan once it was built.  God at this point did not command Benei Yisrael to bring animals for sacrifices or flour for the lechem ha-panim (“showbread”), because this command was to collect materials to **construct** the Mishkan, not to facilitate the rituals that would be performed in the Mishkan once it was built.  Why, then, did God include in this command the donation of oil and incense?  As for the oil, we could perhaps understand that the process of anointing the Mishkanand its appurtenances marked the conclusion of the Mishkan’s construction, and so the anointing oil is included in this list.  However, in presenting this list God mentions the need of oil “la-ma’or” – for illumination, and not only for the anointing oil.  And, as mentioned, He also mentions the need of spices for the ketoret.  What is unique about these two rituals – the kindling of the menorah and the offering of spices – that the materials they required were included in the list of materials needed for the construction of the Mishkan?

            Evidently, as the Tosafists explain (in Da’at Zekeinim, and in Peirush Rabboteinu Ba’alei Ha-Tosafot), the illumination of the menorah and the fragrance of the incense constituted part of the very structure of the Beit Ha-mikdash.  The kindling of lights and the offering of incense were required not merely as part of the daily routine of rituals in the Mishkan, but rather as an essential feature of the Mishkan itself.  The Tosafists write that kings’ palaces were both illuminated and scented, such that the lights of the menorah and the fragrance of the ketoret were, in a sense, essential parts of the building.  Hence, God included oil and spices in His list of items that were needed for the construction of the Mishkan.

            This insight of the Tosafists can perhaps answer a number of other questions that arise.  One such question emerges from the Gemara’s remark in [Masekhet Ketubot (106b)](https://www.sefaria.org/Ketubot.106b?lang=he-en) that the incense offered in the Beit Ha-mikdash, just like the other public offerings, was funded by the annual half-shekel tax imposed upon the entire nation.  The money from this tax was used to purchase the sacrifices which were offered on behalf of the entire nation, and the Gemara notes that this included the ketoret.  But if this is the case, then why did God include spices for the ketoretin His list of materials that should be voluntarily donated for the Mishkan’s construction?  If the ketoret is to be purchased with money collected from the half-shekel tax, then why did God call for voluntary donations of incense for ketoret when He called for donations of materials for building the Mishkan?

            Rav Velvele Soloveitchik is cited as answering that this voluntary donation of incense was needed to supply the ketoret during the seven-day milu’im period, when the kohanim offered special sacrifices as part of their consecration process.  Funds from the half-shekel tax were not used until after this period, and thus God called for voluntary donations to supply incense for the ketoretduring these seven days.

            However, this assumption – that ketoret was offered during the milu’im period – itself requires explanation.  The standard routine of public sacrifices began only the day after the milu’im.  Why, then, would incense be required during these seven days?  If the other standard offerings did not begin until after the milu’im, why was the incense offering different, beginning already during the milu’im period?

            According to the theory advanced by the Tosafists, the answer is clear.  The ketoret is not only one of the offerings in the Beit Ha-mikdash, but also part of the very structure of the Beit Ha-mikdash.  Therefore, as the milu’im rituals were performed in the Mishkan, the Mishkan needed to be fully constructed – and this requires ketoret.  As such, although the ketoret offering brought as part of the daily service in the Mishkan began only after the seven days of the milu’im, it was nevertheless required as part of the building right from the outset, even during the period of the milu’im.

(Based on Rav Chaim Meir Steinberg’s Mishnat Chayim – Shekalim, chapter 36)

Friday

            The Talmud Yerushalmi (Shekalim 4:5) addresses the question of whether the absence of one of the keilim – the furnishings of the Beit Ha-mikdash – affects the rituals that are to be performed on the other keilim.  The conclusion of the Yerushalmi’s discussion is that if one of the keilim is, for whatever reason, not present in its place in the Beit Ha-mikdash, then the rituals which are to take place inside the Mikdash cannot be performed.  For example, the blood of certain sacrifices is to be sprinkled on the incense altar, which was inside the Mikdash, and in the absence of any one of the Temple’s keilim, this ritual cannot be performed.  Rituals that are to take place in the courtyard outside, however, are unaffected by the absence of one of the keilim.

            A number of Acharonim (including Rav David Rappaport, in his Mikdash David, 2:5) noted that the Talmud Bavli does not appear to share this position.  In [Masekhet Zevachim (59a)](https://www.sefaria.org/Zevachim.59a?lang=he-en), the Gemara establishes that if, for whatever reason, the incense altar is not in its place in the Beit Ha-mikdash, the incense is nevertheless offered, at the location where the altar is supposed to stand.  It thus emerges that the offering of incense – which, of course, is performed inside the Mikdash – may be performed even in the absence of the incense altar.  It would stand to reason, then, and all the more so, that it may be offered even in the absence of one of the other keilim.  Seemingly, then, the Yerushalmi’s discussion is in opposition to the view taken by the Talmud Bavli.

            Some writers, however, endeavored to reconcile these two sources.  One approach is based upon the theory we saw yesterday, viewing the ketoret (incense offering) as a two-tiered obligation.  The offering of incense is required not only as part of the daily routine of Temple rituals, but also because it is integral to the very identity of the Beit Ha-mikdash.  As we saw, the Tosafists describe the incense offering (and the kindling of the menorah) as part of the building, which must have a pleasing fragrance (and illumination), as was customary in royal palaces.  Accordingly, there are two aspects to the ketoret obligation – a ritual requirement like the other daily offerings in the Mikdash, and a basic need of the Mikdash itself, which requires incense as part of its very definition.  If so, then we can easily reconcile the two passages noted above.  If one of the keilim is missing, then the specific mitzva of ketoret cannot be fulfilled, just as other rituals cannot be performed inside the Mikdash.  However, since the Temple still retains its halakhic status as a “Beit Ha-mikdash” even in the absence of one of the keilim, incense is still needed as part of the requirements of the building itself.  This aspect of the ketoret is not dependent upon any of the keilim – including, surprisingly, the incense altar – and it is therefore offered even if one of the Temple furnishings is missing.

(Based on Rav Chaim Meir Steinberg’s Mishnat Chayim – Shekalim, chapter 45)

**THE FIRST DECADE OF SALT ARCHIVES CAN BE FOUND AT:**

[www.etzion.org.il/en/salt-archives.html](http://etzion.org.il/en/salt-surf-little-torah-archives)

**MORE RECENT INSTALLMENTS OF SALT DIVREI TORAH CAN BE FOUND AT:**

[www.etzion.org.il/en/topics/salt-surf-little-torah-weekly-files](http://www.etzion.org.il/en/topics/salt-surf-little-torah-weekly-files)