YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat TERUMA  
SICHA OF HARAV YAAKOV MEDAN**

**The *Mishkan* and the tent**

### I.

Our *parasha* deals extensively with the *Mishkan* and its structure. The term *Mishkan* refers to the entire complex, consisting of the structure fashioned out of boards and curtains, the courtyard, and even the vessels found in each of the three parts of the *Mishkan.* The term *Mishkan* is also the name assigned to one of the component in the complex; because of that component, the entire complex is called by that designation. Let us compare the following verses:

And you shall make curtains of goats' hair to be a tent upon the ***Mishkan*.** (*Shemot* 26:7)

And you shall make boards for the ***Mishkan*.** (26:15)

And you shall make the ***Mishkan*** with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet; with *keruvim* of artistic workshall you make them. (26:1)

The curtains of goats' hair cover the *Mishkan* and the boards are designed for the *Mishkan*. In contrast, the curtains of twined linen, blue, purple, and scarlet are the *Mishkan* itself, and because of them the entire complex is called by that name*.*

The boards are meant only to stabilize the structure. After the people of Israel entered the Promised Land and erected the permanent *Mishkan* at Shilo, it was a stone structure without a ceiling (*Zevachim* 118a). The boards of the *Mishkan* were stored away, as there was no longer any need for them. Nevertheless, the structure continued to be called the *Mishkan*, because its ceiling was made of curtains of twined linen, blue, purple, and scarlet. As with the *mitzva* of *sukka*, in which no importance is attached to the material from which the walls are fashioned, but only to the ceiling, the *skhakh*, so too in the case of the *Mishkan* – the essence is the ceiling of curtains.

The *Mishkan* is also called a "tent." The psalmist defined it as follows: **"So that He forsook the *Mishkan* of Shilo, the tent where He made His dwelling among men"** (*Tehillim* 78:60). The *Mishkan*is called a tent on account of the curtains of goats' hair that rest upon the curtains of the *Mishkan*:

And you shall make **curtains of goats' hair to be a tent** upon the *Mishkan*.(*Shemot* 26:7)

**II.**

What is the difference between the *Mishkan* and the tent? The *Mishkan* is called "the *Mishkan* **of the testimony"** (*Shemot* 38:21), whereas the tent is always called "the tent **of meeting."**

And what is the difference between "testimony" and "meeting"? The "testimony" refers to the tablets containing the Ten Commandments, which are called "the tablets of the testimony" (31:18; 32:15; 34:29), since the two tablets are the two witnesses to the covenant that God made with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai.[[1]](#footnote-1) The *Mishkan* is "the *Mishkan* of the testimony" because its primary purpose is to house those two tablets.

When Shlomo dedicated the Temple, he said:

And I have built a house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. And I have set there a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord. (I *Melakhim* 8:20-21)

Unlike the term "testimony," the term "meeting" describes the encounter with the *Shekhina* in the *Mishkan*:

This shall be a continual offering throughout your generations at the door of the tent of **meeting** before the Lord, where I will **meet** you, to speak there to you. And there I will **meet** with the children of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by My glory… And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. (29:42-45)

The "testimony" encounters the "meeting" in another verse:

And in the ark you shall put the **testimony** that I shall give you. And there I will **meet** with you, and I will speak with you from above the *kaporet*. (25:21-22)

What is the difference between "testimony" (*edut*) and "meeting" (*hiva'adut*)? The testimony is an everlasting memorial to a specific incident that took place at a particular time. The tablets commemorate the moment of meeting in the past, at Mount Sinai. They may be likened to the wedding band that a woman wears to commemorate the moment of her marriage. In contrast, the meeting is the continual meeting between God and His people through a prophet, in this case Moshe. God appears to him often, and conducts with him the continual conversation that He maintains with His people. The meeting may be likened to the bridal chamber or "seclusion room," the meeting between bride and groom, which will be a daily encounter for the rest of their lives.

The "testimony" and the "meeting" further parallel the Written and the Oral Law. The Written Law (the "testimony") was given to us all at once, and the moment that it was given, it "froze," as it were. We do everything in our power to preserve that moment for eternity. In contrast, the Oral Law (the "meeting") is given to us every day anew by virtue of the continual dialogue between God and His people. In particular, it is renewed every day by way of the unending dialogue between the Torah, which exists forever as it is, and the constantly changing reality.

The "testimony" can also be likened to the fixed walls of a house, while the "meeting" can be likened to the furniture and utensils, the place, color, and shape of which change from time to time in accordance with the needs of the household. Finally, the "testimony" can be likened to the fixed iron rules between the two partners in a marriage, while the "meeting" can be likened to their ever-changing implementation in accordance with the here and now.

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What is the difference between the place of the "testimony" and the place of the "meeting"? The "testimony" (the tablets) is located in the ark, whereas the "meeting" takes place above it – above the *kaporet* between the two *keruvim*:

And you shall put the *kaporet* above, upon the ark; and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. **And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the *kaporet*, from between the two *keruvim***which are upon the ark of the testimony. (25:21-22)

Corresponding to the location of the "meeting" above the "testimony," the location of the curtains of goats' hair which cover the *Mishkan*, “the tent of meeting,” is above the curtains of twined linen, blue, purple and scarlet – the *Mishkan* of testimony.

**III.**

What is the difference between the curtains of the *Mishkan* and the curtains of the tent? The curtains of the *Mishkan* are made of choice materials – twined linen, blue, purple and scarlet, with *keruvim* of artistic work embroidered upon them. These are royal curtains, appropriate for the palace of the King, before He comes to His permanent dwelling – the Temple, which will be built of grand stones plated with gold from within. Even the clasps that join the two parts of the curtains of the *Mishkan* are royal golden clasps:

And you shall make fifty **golden clasps** and couple the curtains together with the clasps, that the *Mishkan* may be one. (26:6)

In contrast, the curtains of goats' hair are made of coarse, black wool.[[2]](#footnote-2) The clasps that connect them are made of brass:

And you shall make fifty **clasps of brass**, and put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together, that it may be one. (26:11)

Despite their coarseness and lesser beauty, the goats' hair curtains are in one important way superior to the curtains of the *Mishkan.* The goats' hair curtains are strong and resilient to the desert winds and sandstorms; the covering of rams' skins above them, together with the covering of *tachash* skins above that, make the *Mishkan* resistant also to the rain. As noted, however, the goats' hair skins are less beautiful and do not leave a majestic impression. The beauty and delicacy – the curtains of twined linen, blue, purple and scarlet, with *keruvim* of artistic work embroidered upon them – are concealed on the inside, visible only to one who sees the *Mishkan* from within. One who observes the *Mishkan* from the outside sees only a large tent, very similar to the Bedouin tents – the tents of Kedar (*Tehilim* 120:5; *Shir Ha-Shirim* 1:5) – which are covered on top and from the sides with black, goats' hair curtains.

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It is possible that Shlomo had in mind this contrast between the delicate, inner curtains and the coarse, outer curtains, when he described the beauty of the people of Israel as a black maiden, shamefully exploited by her older brothers:

I am black but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Shlomo. (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 1:5)

In our opinion, the verse should be understood as follows: "I am black like the tents of Kedar, but comely like the curtains of Shlomo.”

The people of Israel, who serve as the dwelling place of the *Shekhina*, are symbolized in *Shir Ha-Shirim* by the *Mishkan*. On the outside, they are black like curtains of goats' hair, like the tents of Kedar. But anyone who looks at them from the inside will see a maiden as beautiful as the curtains of Shlomo – royal curtains, curtains like the curtains of the *Mishkan*, made of twined linen, blue, purple, and scarlet.

*Chazal* may have had this mind when they expounded:

I am black throughout the week, but comely on Shabbat… I am black in this world, but comely in the world-to-come. (*Shir Ha-Shirm Rabba* 1)

Shabbat and the world-to-come are the inner, beautiful side of the people of Israel.

**IV.**

We have presented curtains as a metaphor for the people of Israel, the "beloved's" loved one in *Shir Ha-Shirim*, for "'his house' refers to his wife" (*Yoma* 2a). But the *Mishkan* is first and foremost the house of the "beloved,"the house in which God Himself resides. In the *Mishkan* and the tent, the "beloved" receives a double house, which is similar from the inside to the (temporary) palace of a king and from the outside to a shepherd's tent. We will not go on about the significance of the fact that God is a more magnificent king than any mortal king. We will, however, expand upon the image reflected in the tent of goats' hair curtains with its brass clasps – the shepherd's tent.

We tend to be carried away by the romantic image of a shepherd, leading his flock while playing a peaceful tune on his flute. But the primary meaning of the word "*ro'eh*" (shepherd) is "break," similar to the phrase *shevarim-teru'a*, the two variations ofbroken shofar blasts. The *teru'a* is a shattered, shaky sound. The prophet says as follows:

When Ashur shall come into our land and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him **seven shepherds (*ro'im*),** and eight princes of men. **And they shall graze (*ve-ra'u*) the land of Ashur with the sword…** Thus shall He deliver us from Ashur, when he comes to our land and when he treads within our border. (*Mikha* 5:4-5)

The shepherd is a warrior who rescues his flock from the hands of plunderers; he grazes (breaks) those who plunder his flock like the shepherds whom God shall appoint to break Ashur with their swords.

The *gemara* (*Bava Metzia* 93a-b) discusses a shepherd's responsibility to his flock and the obligation of an armed shepherd to stand up to armed bandits. Yaakov, who tended the flocks of Lavan, exemplifies the shepherd who risks his life day and night to keep his employer's flocks safe from predatory animals. David is another example:

And David said to Shaul, “Your servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, and I went out after it, and smote it, and delivered it out of its mouth.” (I *Shmuel* 17:34-35)

God as a shepherd fights for and protects His flock – the people of Israel – against their enemies. He dwells in a rugged and portable shepherd's tent until the day that He will gives His people rest from all their enemies, and only then will He come to dwell in His royal palace, the Temple:

For I have not dwelt in any house since that time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but I have walked in a tent and in a *Mishkan*… Moreover, I have appointed a place for My people Israel, and planted them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and be troubled no more; neither shall the children of wickedness torment them anymore, as at the beginning… But I will give you rest from all your enemies, and the Lord tells you that He will make you a house. (II *Shmuel* 7:6-11)

And when Shlomo dedicated the Temple, and brought the ark inside, he said:

Lift up your heads, O you gates; and be lifted up, you everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. (*Tehilim* 24:7-8; see *Shabbat* 30a)

In other words, the era of wars is over, and God, mighty in battle, can now enter into His house. But in the wilderness, He still "feeds His flock like a shepherd" (*Yeshayahu* 40:11).

**V.**

*Shir Ha-Shirim* paints us a picture of the glorious king – "King Shlomo" – who, according to *Chazal* (*Shevu'ot* 35b), refers to God, "the king whose is the peace (*shalom*)."

King Shlomo made himself a palanquin of the timbers of the Lebanon. He made its pillars of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple. (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 3:9)

This image of God is reflected in *Shir Ha-Shirim* in the person of Shlomo. From another perspective, it is reflected in the image of a shepherd, who tends his flocks in the wilderness "on the mountains of Beter" (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 2:17). The shepherd represents the person of the "beloved" (*dod*), who is reflected in King David.

David tends his people and fights their wars. Most of his life he fulfills his oath:

How he swore to the Lord and vowed to the mighty God of Yaakov: Surely I will not come into the tent of my house nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes, slumber to my eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, a habitation for the mighty One of Yaakov. (*Tehillim* 132:2-5)

Neither he nor his God found a permanent place of rest for themselves as long as the people of Israel were still in distress. Shlomo was a man of rest, and God in his day was "the king whose is the peace." In the days of Shlomo, the *Shekhina* moved from its temporary abode to Mount Moriya in Jerusalem, the mountain upon which the prophet Yeshaya would one day proclaim the vision of peace of "the king whose is the peace":

And many people shall go and say: Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Yaakov; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths, for out of Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall decide among many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (*Yeshayahu* 2:3-4)

(Translated by David Strauss)

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1. Elsewhere, the tablets are called "covenant" (*berit*). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Today's white-haired goats are a much later import. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)