**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT TERUMA**

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Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Teruma tells of God’s command to *Benei Yisrael* to construct the *Mishkan* which served as the site of sacrificial worship until the construction of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* in Jerusalem in the times of King Shlomo. The Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 34:1) tells of Moshe’s astonishment upon hearing this command:

At the time when the Almighty said to Moshe, “Make for Me a *Mishkan*,” Moshe was startled, and said, “The Almighty’s glory filled the upper and lower worlds – and He is telling me, ‘Make for Me a *Mishkan*’?” The Almighty said, “The way you think is not the way I think. Rather, twenty planks to the north and twenty to the south…I will [then] descend and constrict My presence within one square *ama*.”

For the human mind, the notion of a *Mishkan*, a place where God “resides” here on earth, is incomprehensible. God is infinite, and cannot be confined to any particular space. And so the command, “They shall me for me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell among them” (25:8) is baffling. But God insists that we comply with His instructions despite our inability to understand, guaranteeing that He will, indeed, “reside” in the *Mikdash* which we construct.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz (*Da’at Chokhma U-mussar*, vol. 2, 55) applied the message of this Midrash to the famous tradition that the promise of “*ve-shakhanti be-tokham*” (“I shall reside among them”) means that God will reside within each and every person. (Rav Moshe Alshikh famously explained that God speaks of residing “*be-tokham*” – “in **their** midst,” and not inside the Sanctuary, because His intention is to reside within each individual.) Just as Moshe was startled by the notion that God would dwell within a finite, physical structure, similarly, many of us understandably doubt that God could possibly “dwell,” in any sense of the word, within our beings. If we examine ourselves with perfect honesty and objectivity, we will recognize our faults and deficiencies, and feel wholly unworthy of God’s presence in our lives. And so we might ask, as Moshe did, “He is telling me, ‘Make for Me a *Mishkan*’?” Can our beings ever really be a suitable place for the Divine Presence? Can we ever be truly worthy of building and maintaining a close relationship with God?

The Almighty’s response to Moshe – “twenty planks to the north and twenty to the south” – is the response to this question, as well. For reasons we can never know, God wants to reside within us flawed, imperfect beings. As frail and blemished as we are, God wants us to obey His commands to the best of our very limited ability, and in this way, He will accompany us throughout our lives. He wants a relationship with us in our current condition, as imperfect as it may be, provided that we work to build the “*Mishkan*” within us in accordance with His commands. Even when we feel lowly and undeserving of His presence, we must have the confidence of knowing that God seeks to “reside” within us at all times, as long as we do what we can to build the “Sanctuary” which He has commanded us to build.

Sunday

The Gemara in Masekhet Yoma (72b) observes that three of the furnishings in the *Mishkan* were adorned with a “*zeir*” – a decorative rim, resembling a crown: the *aron* (ark), the *mizbei’ach* (altar), and the *shulchan* (table). These three articles with their respective “crowns,” the Gemara comments, represent the three “crowns” that exist in Jewish life, the three areas in which one can achieve special status. The *zeir* around the altar represents the “crown” of the *kehuna* (priesthood), as only *kohanim* were permitted to perform the rituals on the altar, and this “crown” is reserved for the priestly tribe. The *zeir* around the table represents the “crown” of kingship, which is reserved for King David and his descendants. And the *zeir* around the ark – which contained the tablets upon the commandments were engraved, as well as the original Torah scroll – represents the “crown” of Torah, which, the Gemara teaches, “is still available; whoever wishes may come and take it.” Whereas the “crowns” of the *kehuna* and kingship are reserved for specific groups, the “crown” of Torah is available to one and all.

Why does the Gemara view the *shulchan* as a symbol of the Jewish monarchy? The *aron* clearly represents the Torah because it contained the original texts of Torah instruction, and the altar was where the *kohanim* served, and so it represents the priesthood. But what is the connection between the *shulchan* and kingship?

The simplest answer is that as opposed to the scholars and *kohanim*, who were responsible for the nation’s spiritual wellbeing (the former through teaching and halakhic rulings, and the latter through the service in the Temple), the king was responsible for the nation’s material wellbeing. The primary role of the king was to lead the people militarily, and to ensure their needs were cared for. Indeed, the Gemara relates in Masekhet Berakhot (3b) that each morning during King David’s reign, when light first appeared on the eastern sky, the king would be approached by the nation’s scholars, who said, “Our master, the king – your nation, Israel, requires sustenance!” As this was the primary responsibility of the king, the kingship is associated with the *shulchan*, which contained the special *lechem ha-panim* (“show-bread”), and thus symbolized material sustenance.

The Tolna Rebbe (*Heima Yenachamuni*, Parashat Teruma) suggests a deeper connection between the *shulchan* and kingship. The Gemara (Menachot 97a) teaches, “In the time when the *Beit Ha-mikdash* stood, the altar atoned for a person; and now that the *Beit Ha-mikdash* does not stand, a person’s table atones for him.” This passage is commonly understood to mean that in the absence of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, we earn atonement through our charity and hospitality, represented by our “table.” However, the Tolna Rebbe noted that the specific reference to “*shulchano shel adam*” – a person’s “table” – as opposed to explicitly mentioning charity and generosity, might point to a different explanation. He suggested that the Gemara here teaches that there are two methods of earning atonement: through sacrifice, symbolized by the altar, and through enjoying worldly delights in a properly controlled fashion, as symbolized by the table. We earn atonement through our “table” by injecting meaning and significance into our mundane activities, by exercising moderation and self-control, eating and filling our other physical needs with dignity, with the proper mindset and intention, and in accordance with Torah’s laws and values. Our table becomes a means of atonement when we eat appropriately, in reasonable quantities, with meaningful and substantive conversation, and while fulfilling the various *halakhot* relevant to food. Whereas the altar is a place of sacrifice, the table is a place of enjoyment and indulgence – and the Gemara here teaches that even our enjoyment of, and indulgence in, the delights of the world can bring us atonement, if we approach them the right way.

This is the significance of the *shulchan* in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. It shows that physical enjoyment has a place in the “*Mikdash*,” in our spiritual life, in our pursuit of sanctity. The mundane areas of life are no less crucial than the “altar” – the sacrifices we are called upon to make – in our efforts to live a life of holiness and nobility, in the devoted service of the Almighty.

On this basis, the Tolna Rebbe suggests explaining the association between the *shulchan* in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* and kingship. The *shulchan* represents the notion of elevating our mundane pursuits, and in this sense, it signifies self-control and self-restraint. The ideal of the *shulchan* is living as “king” over oneself, exerting unlimited power over one’s base desires and human instincts. The *shulchan* is indeed about “kingship” – specifically, the most critical of all forms of kingship, the control over one’s own being. This control and authority is manifest not through self-denial, by withdrawing entirely from physical enjoyment, but rather through our uplifting our indulgence, conducting our mundane affairs in a dignified and spiritual manner, thereby earning what is perhaps the most important and valuable “crown” that we could ever hope to wear.

Monday

Parashat Teruma begins with God’s command to *Benei Yisrael* to donate materials towards the construction of the *Mishkan*. God said to Moshe, “Speak to the Israelites that they shall bring for Me a donation…” (25:2).

*Ba’al Ha-turim* cites the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 363) as interpreting the phrase “*dabeir el Benei Yisrael*” as indicating that the words of this command should be spoken in a manner of “*piyus*” – literally, “appeasement.” As this command, to donate precious materials for the construction of the *Mishkan*, required a considerable financial loss, the Midrash explains, God instructed Moshe to speak to the people in a soft, gentle, sensitive manner when commanding them to donate. Although the *Mishkan* brought honor to *Benei Yisrael*, and also provided them with a means of atonement, such that this undertaking was immensely beneficial for them, even so, the Midrash emphasizes, it was necessary for Moshe to speak to them in a manner of “*piyus*,” due to the significant financial sacrifice it entailed. The Midrash concludes that if “*piyus*” is necessary when soliciting money for an investment as valuable and rewarding as the *Mishkan*, then certainly the oppressors of the Jewish People, who forcibly seize the Jews’ property, will be harshly punished.

In presenting this explanation of the verse, the Midrash draws an association between the phrase “*dabeir el Benei Yisrael*” in this context and a verse from a famous prophecy in Sefer Yeshayahu (40:1) calling upon the nations to comfort *Am Yisrael* after the destruction of Jerusalem: “*Daberu al leiv Yerushalayim*” – “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem…” When God instructed Moshe, “*Dabeir el Benei Yisrael*” – to speak to *Benei Yisrael* about the need to donation materials, the Midrash teaches, He indicated that this must be done with delicately and with great sensitivity, as though comforting a nation after a devastating calamity.

The Midrash here urges us to exercise patience, sensitivity and understanding when trying to educate, in the effort to persuade those under our charge and influence to make the right decisions for themselves. Making sacrifices is very difficult and challenging, even for matters which are ultimately in the individual’s long-term best interest. And so when we seek to teach and implore children or students to make the sacrifices they need to make, we must do so in a manner of “*piyus*” – with great sensitivity, understanding that this is very difficult for them. Even when we ask for sacrifices for the purpose of the “*Mishkan*” – in the effort to train youngsters in Torah observance, we must be sensitive and attuned to the struggle involved, and approach this process with warmth and compassion, in order to ensure the greatest likelihood of success in motivating them to choose the proper course.

Tuesday

The first of the *Mishkan*’s furnishings discussed by the Torah in Parashat Teruma is the *aron* (ark), in which God commanded Moshe to place the “*eidut*” (“testimony”), referring to the stone tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were engraved. (The tablets are later (31:18) called “*luchot ha-eidut*” – “the tablets of testimony.”)

Rashi (25:21) observes that in presenting to Moshe the instructions concerning the *aron*, God twice commands him to place the tablets inside ark. He issues this command immediately after presenting the specifications of the ark itself (25:16), and then a second time after describing the *kaporet* – the pure gold covering that was placed on top of the ark (25:21). To explain the redundancy, Rashi writes that God emphasized that the *kaporet* must not be placed on top of the *aron* until after the tablets are brought inside the ark. The Rosh, in his Torah commentary, understood Rashi’s comment to mean that Moshe was not to place the *kaporet* even temporarily atop the *aron*, such as to ensure it was the correct size, before the tablets were put inside. Others, such as the Maharal of Prague (in *Gur Aryeh*) and *Meshekh Chokhma*, explained that this command was repeated to indicate that there was no requirement to make an *aron* without the *luchot* (tablets), as the ark was needed for the sole purpose of containing the *luchot*. And so in the second *Beit Ha-mikdash*, when the Jews did not have the *luchot*, they did not construct an *aron*, as there is no value to having an *aron* unless it is storing the tablets.

A symbolic explanation of this repeated command is suggested by Rav Shlomo of Radomsk, in *Tiferet Shlomo*. He suggests that these two identical instructions represent two different models of piety. The first mention of the command to place the tablets – symbolizing Torah knowledge – into the ark signifies excellence in scholarship. The second instance of this command, however, is presented as the conclusion of the requirement to cover the *aron* with the *kaporet*, which included the images of two *keruvim* (cherubs) facing each other with their wings extended heavenward (25:20). This second command, the *Tiferet Shlomo* writes, symbolizes the righteous figure who excels in praying for his fellowman – as illustrated by the *keruvim*, who appear to lift their wings to God in prayer while looking at each other, beseeching the Almighty on the other’s behalf. The *Tiferet Shlomo* explains that God instructed Moshe twice to place the law inside the ark to emphasize that greatness in Torah can be achieved by both models – by those who devote themselves primarily to study, and also by those who devote themselves primarily to prayers on behalf of their fellow.

Already the Gemara (Yoma 72b) viewed the *aron* with the *luchot* as a symbol of righteous people. According to the *Tiferet Shlomo*, God twice commanded placing the tablets in the ark to indicate that piety is achieved in more than one way. There is not just a single process whereby one becomes an “*aron*.” There are different models of greatness, different paths that people can take in order to infuse their lives with holiness. Not everyone will bring the “*luchot*” into their beings the same way. While the basic set of laws and obligations is shared by all, different people will specialize in different areas, and find different areas in which to excel and achieve. We are all bidden to become an “*aron*,” to bring the Torah into our beings, but we must each find our own unique, individual manner of undergoing this process and making our lives sacred.

Wednesday

The Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 33:8) relates that when God told Moshe to command *Benei Yisrael* to construct the *Mishkan*, Moshe wondered whether *Benei Yisrael* were capable of completing such a project. God then assured him that even a single member of the nation could be independently capable of building the *Mishkan*. The Midrash continues by relating that when the manna descended from the heaven in the morning, precious stones and jewels also fell, and some members of *Benei Yisrael* collected these items, which were then donated towards the construction of the *Mishkan*.

The simplest explanation of this Midrashic account, it would appear, is that it seeks to convey the message that with God’s assistance, we are far more capable than we might at first think. God’s abilities are infinite, and He has an infinite number of ways to help us, no matter how vexing the problem or how daunting the challenge. We are thus urged to remain upbeat and optimistic even when facing challenges which we feel incapable of surmounting, doing all we can and trusting in God’s ability to help us succeed.

Additionally, however, Rav Petachya Menkin, in his [*Pardeis Petachya*](https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=41905&st=&pgnum=65&hilite=\), offers a symbolic reading of the Midrash’s comment. He explains that in order to create a “*Mishkan*” within us, infusing our lives with sanctity and spiritual meaning, we must live with a sense of serenity and contentment, and with faith. If we never feel satisfied with our material standard, and we do not trust in God’s ability to provide, we will find ourselves incessantly preoccupied with the pursuit of wealth, leaving no time, energy or headspace for holiness. And thus the Midrash describes the manna as falling from the heavens together with precious materials needed for the *Mishkan*. These precious “materials,” Rav Menkin writes, were the priceless qualities of contentment and faith. The manna system provided each person with a small ration of food which provided minimal, though adequate, sustenance, and which sufficed only for that day. This system forced the people to feel content with having their basic needs cared for, and to place their trust in God’s provision of their needs the next day as they went to sleep at night with no food in their tents. These precious qualities are the most important “materials” that we need in order to build a “*Mishkan*” – to build for ourselves a life of spiritual meaning. We must train ourselves to feel content with whatever we have been given, and to recognize that we are always under God’s loving care, as only this way will we have the time, peace of mind and serenity to devote ourselves towards the task of building our “*Mishkan*,” our inner “sanctuary” of commitment and service to God.

Thursday

Yesterday, we noted the Midrash’s account (in *Shemot Rabba* 33:8) of how God miraculously enabled *Benei Yisrael* to provide all the materials needed for the *Mishkan* by having precious stones and jewels falls from the heavens each morning together with the manna. The Midrash relates: “Together with the manna that fell for Israel, precious stones and jewels fell, and the great among them would come and collect them…” These precious materials were then donated towards the construction of the *Mishkan*. The Midrash relates that Moshe at first wondered whether *Benei Yisrael* would be capable of completing this project, and God assured him that they would – and, indeed, He Himself helped them by miraculously providing them with the materials they needed.

Why did *Chazal* connect the precious materials used for the *Mishkan*, and the manna? Why are these materials described as being provided specifically with the daily portion of manna which fell from the skies each morning? And why does the Midrash describe only the “great among them” (“*ha-gedolim she-bahen*”) collecting these items?

The manna that fell for *Benei Yisrael* each morning in the wilderness instructs that even after this forty-year period, when we are able and encouraged to work, innovate, create and produce in order to obtain our sustenance, it is, ultimately, God who provides us with all our needs. The model of the manna is relevant even after the period of desert travel, as it reminds us to rely on God for our sustenance. And thus, on the eve of *Benei Yisrael*’s entry into the Land of Israel, Moshe commanded that when they cultivate the land and enjoy the fruits of their labor, they must always remember the period of travel through the uninhabitable wilderness, when they were supported miraculously by the heavenly manna (Devarim 8:2-18) – so they never forget that they are sustained by God, even as they till the land, dig wells, and produce their own food.

The Midrash here points to the fact that just as God provides us with our physical sustenance each day, so does He provide us with the “precious materials” which we need to build our “*Mishkan*.” Over the course of our ordinary, daily routine, we are given many different opportunities to learn, to grow, to advance, to become better people, and to attain a higher level of sanctity. Like Moshe, we might wonder whether or not we are capable of building a “*Mishkan*,” of creating holiness in our lives, given the pressures and challenges we face in tending to our basic physical needs, struggling to secure a livelihood and caring for ourselves and our families. The answer, the Midrash explains, is that along with the “manna” that God graciously provides for us, He also sends us precious opportunities for spiritual growth which we can use to build our inner “*Mishkan*” and develop ourselves spiritually, even as we go about trying meet our mundane necessities.

However, the Midrash warns, we need to be “great” in order to find these opportunities and seize them. Many people go out each day and see only the “manna,” the means of satisfying their physical needs. But if we aspire for greatness, we will see in our daily routine not only the “manna,” but also “precious materials,” priceless opportunities for learning, for spiritual advancement. The Midrash bids us to keep our eyes open for these valuables, to ensure not to squander these opportunities, and we will then be able to build for ourselves a “*Mishkan*” and bring God into our lives each and every day.

Friday

In the beginning of Parashat Teruma, we find the list of materials which *Benei Yisrael* were called upon to donate towards the construction of the *Mishkan*. These included “*orot techashim*” – the skins of an animal called the “*tachash*” (25:5), which, as we find out later (26:14), were used to form the outermost covering of the *Mishkan*.

Rashi, based on the Gemara (Shabbat 28b), notes *Targum Onkelos*’ translation of “*tachash*” as “*sasgona*,” and explains this word to mean “*sas u-mitpa’er ba-gevanim shelah*” – “rejoices and takes pride in its colors.” This creature’s skin had beautiful colors, which were a source of great joy and pride.

Some raised the question of why it would be appropriate to utilize these skins – which caused this creature to feel arrogant – for the sacred purpose of the *Mishkan*. In fact, these skins were not just included in the *Mishkan* – but were the most visible component of the *Mishkan*, as their brilliant colors adorned the building’s exterior. Why did God want the most noticeable portion of the *Mishkan* to be associated with an animal’s pride in its appearance?

One answer emerges from another comment the Gemara makes about the *tachash* – that it was created only at that time, specifically for its skins to be used for the *Mishkan*. The Gemara states that the *tachash* had never existed prior to the time of the *Mishkan*’s construction, and it never appeared again. God brought this creature into existence only when He commanded *Benei Yisrael* to build the *Mishkan*, so that its skins could be used for this purpose.

If so, then we can perhaps understand the meaning of the Gemara’s description of the *tachash*’s special pride in its beautiful colors. The *tachash*, as depicted by the Gemara, was created only at a specific time for a specific purpose – to adorn the *Mishkan*. Its “pride” was that its unique quality would serve a sublime role – and this pride is perfectly acceptable, and in fact noble. Pride in one’s unique talents, skills, capabilities or assets is legitimate if he recognizes that these have been granted to him to be used meaningfully. Pride becomes illegitimate when one misuses his special gifts for self-promotion, notoriety and privilege. But if one understands – as the *tachash* did – that God granted him special gifts to be used for the “*Mishkan*,” for the sake of promoting God, rather than promoting himself, then he has reason to be “*sas u-mitpa’er ba-gevanim shelah*” – gratified over and proud of the beautiful “colors” which he has received.

The Gemara’s depiction of the *tachash*, then, calls upon us to recognize that we, like this mysterious creature, have been created specifically now, for a specific purpose. And, like the *tachash*, we have all been granted special, magnificent “colors” – outstanding qualities and blessings which we must use to the best of our ability for making our unique contribution towards the “*Mishkan*,” in the service of the Almighty, and they then legitimately become a source of great joy and pride for us.

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