

THEMES AND IDEAS IN THE HAFTARAH

This haftara series is dedicated in memory
of our beloved Chaya Leah bat Efrayim Yitzchak
(Mrs. Claire Reinitz), zichronah livracha,
by her family.

Parashat Vayakhel

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The *haftara* for *Parashat Vayakhel* (according to Sephardic custom, *Melakhim* I 7:13-39; according to Ashkenazic custom, *Melakhim* I 7:40-50) is yet another entry in the series of *haftarot* taken from the chapters of *Melakhim* dealing with Shlomo's Temple. These *haftarot* accompany the reading of the *parshiyot* in the book of *Shemot* that deal with the *Mishkan*, namely, *Teruma*, *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei*.^{1[1]}

One of the striking differences between the account of the Temple and the account of the *Mishkan* concerns the relationship between the structure and its vessels. Anyone who reads *Parashat Teruma* can see that the Torah focuses primarily on the vessels of the *Mishkan*. Immediately following the command, “And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them,” the Torah continues at length with the sections dealing with the building of the ark, the table and the candelabrum as practical applications of that mitzva. Only after completing the description of the various vessels does the Torah begin to relate the mitzva of building the *Mishkan* itself. Later as well, the sections dealing with the brass altar, the golden altar and the laver seize significant space. Indeed, it is not for naught that the Ramban writes:

The main desire in the *Mishkan* is the site of the resting of the *Shekhina* which is the ark, as it is stated: “And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the covering” (*Shemot* 25:22). **Therefore, the ark and its cover are mentioned first, for it is first in importance. And following the ark come the table and the candelabrum which are vessels like it. They teach about the essence of the *Mishkan* which was made for them.** (Commentary on *Shemot* 25:2)

Without going into a broad halakhic discussion regarding the precise relationship between the *Mishkan* and the vessels,^{2[2]} it is clear to anyone who reads *Parashat Teruma* and *Parashat Vayakhel* that the vessels are a central component of the *Mikdash*.

1 [1] Another opportunity to read a *haftara* dealing with Shlomo's Temple – once every few years – is the *haftara* of the second Shabbat of Chanuka, in years when Chanuka includes two Shabbatot.

2 [2] The starting point of such a discussion is the disagreement between the Rambam, the Ra'avad and the Ramban regarding the number of *mitzvot* connected to the building of the Temple and the discussions regarding the place and function of the vessels in the framework of the Temple and/or outside of it. See: the Rambam's *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, positive commandment no. 20; the Ramban's stricture on positive commandment no. 33; the Ra'avad's

In contrast, the passages in the book of *Melakhim* are formulated very differently. The candelabrum, the table and the altar play only a minor role in the description of the Temple in Jerusalem, and even the role and status of the ark is much more modest than in *Shemot*. It is telling that the command regarding the candelabrum and the table in the *Mishkan* continues for eighteen consecutive verses (*Shemot* 25:23-40)³[3] and the account of their actual fashioning takes up another five verses, while in the book of *Melakhim* a mere three verses are dedicated to these two vessels (*Melakhim* I 7:48-50). These verses, which are part of our *haftara*, are swallowed up in the framework of a fairly general description, and they don't merit a separate section or independent importance. In similar fashion, the extended description of the golden altar in the Torah (*Shemot* 30:1-10; 37:25-28) contrasts with the brief description of the altar in *Melakhim* I (6:20-21; 7:48). What is more, the burnt-offering altar that merits an entire section in *Teruma* and another section in *Vayakhel* is not mentioned at all in the account of the building of the Temple.⁴[4] Among all the vessels of the Temple, only the laver, which is not mentioned at all in *Teruma*, but only at the beginning of *Ki-Tisa* in the context of the preparations for the service, and not as part of the *Mishkan* itself, is given significant treatment in the description of the Temple!

In other words, in the book of *Shemot* the walls serve as a shell for the vessels that are the heart of the *Mishkan*, whereas in the book of *Melakhim* the structure itself is central, while the vessels are meant merely to fill the structure. This point is especially striking in our *haftara*. If we read the account of the building of the Temple in *Melakhim* I 7, we immediately see that ample space is dedicated to a description of the two pillars of the *Ulam* (*Yakhin u-Bo'az*). The verses describe in great detail the capitals and decorations added to these pillars, meaning that the building was not meant to function as a shell for the holy vessels found inside, but rather that it enjoyed independent symbolic and spiritual significance. Therefore, it was of utmost importance to decorate and adorn it in its own right. Scripture emphasizes the "capitals of molten brass" (16), "nets of checkerwork" (17), "pomegranates" (18) and "lilywork" (19) because of their artistic and spiritual expression; their role is ornamental and symbolic, and not only functional. This is, of course, the reason that they are given names; if the function of the pillars was merely to support the doorposts and lintels so that they not fall down, they would certainly not have been assigned names. But since they are not merely part of the construction of the building, but rather works of art, they are given names like other works of art.

The contrast to what we find in the *Mishkan* could not be greater. There, the pillars serve exclusively to hold up the curtains of the *Mishkan* and support the structure, and therefore there is no mention of any decorative elements. Needless to say, the pillars do not have names, capitals or nets of checker work. Thus, in addition to the contrast mentioned above between the descriptions of the *Mishkan* and Shlomo's Temple with respect to the relationship between the vessels and the building, the respective texts' attitudes toward the pillars attest to a significant difference between the *Mishkan* and the Temple with respect to the purpose of the building in itself.

stricture on the short count of *mitzvot*, positive commandment no. 20; *Yerushalmi, Shekalim* 4:2; and *Da'at Zekeinim Mi-ba'alei Ha-tosafot, Shemot* 25:6).

3 [3] See also the opening verses of *Parashat Tetzave* (*Shemot* 27:20-21), which deal with the lighting of the lamps of the candelabrum as well, and the verses in *Vayikra* 24 and *Bemidbar* 5.

4 [4] The altar, like the ark, makes a significant appearance in the account of Shlomo's dedication of the Temple in chap. 5, but not in the account of its building.

The truth is that the pillars are not merely ornamental, but also monumental. They are eighteen cubits tall, twelve cubits in circumference, and their capitals are five cubits in height. These dimensions also attest to the fact that the building, with its pillars, was meant to impress and to fill a symbolic and representational role in addition to its functional role.

A similar process is also evident in the second utensil that stars in the *haftara*: the sea and the bases. These correspond to the laver and its pedestal that appear in *Ki-Tisa*. Whereas the Torah presents the laver in utmost brevity as a functional vessel that contains water, the main purpose of which is to enable the priests to wash their hands and feet (“And you shall make a laver of brass... for washing... and you shall put water in it. For Aharon and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat”), in our *haftara* the sea becomes a vessel with independent importance and symbolic significance. Its functional purpose is not even mentioned. This is especially striking in the account of the base.⁵[5] It merits a separate section, has its own name and is not merely an appendage to the laver as it is in the Torah – “a laver of brass, and its pedestal also of brass” (*Shemot* 30:18) – and it is crowned and decorated with animal figures and *keruvim* between its borders. According to various opinions, the symbolism of these decorations is exceedingly significant; the Radak (v. 33) goes as far as to say that these decorations are an expression of the *Shekhina's* heavenly chariot!

Here too, the dimensions of the laver are very large (five cubits high and thirty cubits in circumference) and they reflect the tendency toward monumental dimensions, beyond functional necessity, that rules in the Temple.

It should be noted further that Shlomo did not suffice with one candelabrum and one laver, as were found in the *Mishkan*, but built ten of each, despite the fact that one of each would have been enough to fulfill the relevant *mitzvot*. What is evident here is an increase in magnitude and the creation of the impression of power and prosperity, above and beyond what was needed on the practical level. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the altar constructed by Shlomo was exceedingly large – considerably larger than the altar made by Moshe.⁶[6]

The conclusion that arises from all this is that with the building of the Temple, the format of the *Mishkan* changed considerably, translating into a larger building of great dimensions, decorated with precious metals, carved walls, wonderfully fitted decorations, and large and numerous vessels. The principle underlying the building was splendor and majesty, which found expression in the larger dimensions, material wealth and structural decorations. It should be emphasized that in the wake of *Chazal's* accounts of the Temple of Herod, we tend to attribute these features to the second Temple, but in truth, this was already the trend set by Shlomo's Temple.

All this stands in stark contrast to the *Mishkan* in the wilderness. This was a temporary structure that could be taken apart, its roof was a tent, and its dimensions were much more modest. It seems that this is not only an aesthetic difference but also an expression of a different kind of spiritual experience. The *Mishkan* conveyed a feeling of intimacy between man and God; it was sort of a small, pleasant cottage, in which man could be alone with his God. Of course, there too there was a responsibility to

⁵ [5] The base, referred to here as “*mekhona*,” is called “the *kan* [of the laver]” in *Shemot*.

⁶ [6] See *Zevachim* 59b.

maintain reverence, and the quality of “rejoicing with trembling” prevailed, but its purpose was not to be a structure that broadcasted strength and power to the outside. Rather, the purpose of the *Mishkan* was to express the relationship between man and God. The prophecy of Yeshayahu, “The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all the nations shall flow unto it” (*Yeshayahu* 2:2), reflects the ethos of the Temple that faced outward with an intensity of strength, and whose architecture was intended to express this. The *Mishkan*, on the other hand, did not accord with this model.

Additionally, it seems that the second distinction between the two institutions – the inversion of the relationship between the vessels and the building – reflects a more fundamental difference between them. The vessels as independent works of art, as the candelabrum is described in *Shemot*, serve the goal of bringing God close to man; they are like an ornament that attests to the closeness between the two. This point is stated explicitly in the famous *midrash* about the candelabrum, which states that “it is testimony to mankind that the *Shekhina* rests upon Israel.” However, it applies more generally as well, for the vessels were used inside the *Mishkan*, whereas the structure was prominent from afar. Accordingly, to the extent that the holy vessels have significance beyond their functional role, it is to testify that the *Shekhina* rests upon Israel.

To summarize, there are significant differences between the *Mishkan* and the Temple: the former conveyed intimacy and modesty, while the other expressed strength and power; the former placed greater emphasis on the quality of love, while the latter emphasized the quality of fear; the former turned inward and was directed exclusively at Israel, while the latter looked out to all of humanity. Therefore, in the *Mishkan* the building is simple and functional, whereas in the Temple it is a monumental work of art.

Were we to formulate this in more popular language and translate the matter with a metaphor taken from our own religious world, we might say that the Temple reflects building in the style of the Great Synagogue of Jerusalem, while the *Mishkan* is more like a modest *shtiebel*. The first has an impressive presence, while the second lacks any architectural feature beyond its four walls, but has much human warmth and in it the worshiper feels at home. Such a formulation presents us with a critical question: Was a spiritual price paid for building the Temple in the grandiose architectural style selected for it? There are many who enjoy the impressive form of major synagogues and see in their construction an architectural-spiritual achievement. But there are also large sectors of the public who tend to identify the small and vibrant neighborhood *shtiebel* as a warm and welcoming place of prayer, while the grandiose synagogues convey a certain sense of alienation and distance toward those who enter their gates. Assuming that this feeling does, in fact, exist, and that its existence is not desirable – and one can challenge both claims – we must ask whether such a problem or feeling existed in the Temple as well.

In this context, two points should be noted: 1) In the account of the dedication of the Temple in the next chapter of *Melakhim*, there is a strong emphasis on the personal encounter between man and God, and this idea replaces the symbolic architectural dimension that dominates our chapter. 2) It is fitting to note, in the framework of this discussion, a *midrash* cited in *Yoma* that portrays in sharp and bold manner the relationship between man and God in the Temple, based on a verse in the next chapter of *Melakhim*, as an intimate and embracing relationship:

“And the ends of the staves were seen” ... How so? They pressed forth and protruded as the two breasts of a woman, as it is stated: “My beloved is unto me as a bag of myrrh, that lies between my breasts” (*Shir Ha-shirim* 1:13). Rav Katina said: “Whenever Israel came up to the Festival, the curtain would be removed for them and the *keruvim* were shown to them, whose bodies were

intertwined with one another, and they would be thus addressed: 'Look! You are beloved before God as the love between man and woman.'" (*Yoma* 54a)

In light of this, it may be argued that the design of the Temple was meant to reach a double objective: To the outside, it displayed splendor and majesty, but the innermost chamber of the Temple contained the ultimate representation of affection and intimacy before God – like the love between man and woman. It seems, however, that the combination itself, like most attempted spiritual combinations, created a certain tension in each of the two principles it tried to fulfill. Even when spiritual fertilization is achieved, the cost is that neither of the two principles is realized in full. The intimacy is compromised by the addition of splendor and majesty, just as the feeling of awe and sublimity is knowingly tempered through the process of closeness and intimacy that exists parallel to it. But the combination of these two principles of fear and love, though imperfect, expresses a richer religious and spiritual world. However, this constitutes a significant change from the model that existed in the *Mishkan*, in which different balances were found.

Why did this transition from *Mishkan* to Temple occur? We might suggest that the construction of the *Mishkan* played a role in a given historical context and should be viewed in the framework of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, from Mount Sinai to the Land of Israel. At the time, emphasizing the dimension of intimacy and closeness to God was a spiritual step that was necessary for that generation, and therefore the *Mishkan* highlighted that experience. On the other hand, the Temple, which is God's "eternal house," presents spiritual balances that are not dependent on time and place. For example, it is possible to view the choice of the intimate experience of the *Mishkan* as stemming from the connection between the construction of the *Mishkan* and the giving of the Torah. It was important to emphasize the closeness of God to man following the awesome splendor and grandeur of Mount Sinai. It should be mentioned that placing the *Mishkan* in the historic setting of its time and understanding its spiritual ramifications as stemming from the reality in which it was supposed to operate is certainly necessary according to those commentators who say that the construction of the *Mishkan* came into the world as a response to the sin of the golden calf, for the historical context is what underlay its very construction.

In conclusion, the *haftara* presents the model of the Temple in Jerusalem as starkly different from the *Mishkan* in the wilderness. The Temple represented a spiritual vision of strength and majesty, an element that was missing from the compact and portable *Mishkan*.

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