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Parshat HaShavua
Yeshivat Har Etzion

PARASHAT TERUMA

The Mishkan and Its Kohanim - The Earthly Reflection of The Heavenly Revelation

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I) The Parsha Classification

Parshiot Teruma, Tetzaveh, and Ki Tisa delineate the commandment to build the mishkan. The Torah defines the mishkan as the Shekhina's (Godly spirit) base within the desert camp - "Ve-asu li mikdash ve-shakhanti betokham (25:7)." ("They shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them.")

The lengthy commandment can be sub-divided based on the Torah's return towards the end of parashat Tetzaveh to this opening theme.

"I will sanctify the Communion Tent and the altar and I will also sanctify Aaron and his sons to be priests to Me. I shall dwell among the Israelites (Ve-shakhanti betokh benei Yisrael) and I will be a God for them. They will realize that I am Hashem their God, who brought them out of Egypt to dwell among them (le-shokhni betokham) - I am Hashem their God." (29:44-6)

The lengthy description encased by the parallel verses (all of parashat Teruma and most of Tetzaveh) outlines the process required to effect the Shekhina's presence. The continuation in chapter 30 (mostly parashat Ki Tisa) describes how to act in the presence of the Shekhina.

The additional sub-division of the encased unit into parshiot reflects the fact that parashat Teruma describes the structure and vessels, while parashat Tetzaveh relates chiefly to the kohanim. This distinction is stressed by the verses heretofore quoted, which distinguish between the sanctification of the building/vessels and that of the kohanim by separately repeating the verb form "KDS." Our examination of the two parshiot will show that the two differ not only in technical details, but in purpose as well.

II) Parashat Teruma - Modeled After Sinai

Following the ceremony mentioned at the end of parashat Mishpatim, God summons Moshe back to Har Sinai. Although the Torah has already described God's presence on the mountain in great detail (chapter 19), it dwells on it again here:

"The cloud covered the mountain. God's glory rested (va- yishkon) on Mount Sinai and it was covered by the cloud for six days ... And the sight of the glory of God was like a consuming fire on the mountain top, before the eyes of benei Yisrael." (24:15-17)

This repetition is distinguished by the introduction of a term used here for the first time in reference to God - "shakhan." In anticipation of Moshe's reception of the mishkan commandment, the Torah re-describes the descent of God's spirit on Sinai, describing it with the term "shakhon" to indicate that the new earthly mishkan is a re-creation of the Sinaitic.

The Torah's accounts of the Shekhina's descent on the completed mishkan confirms the Sinai parallel. The depiction of God's cloud over the mishkan at the end of Sefer Shemot parallels the Sinaitic description:

"The cloud covered the Communion Tent, and God's glory filled the Tabernacle ... And fire was in it by night, before the eyes of benei Yisrael in all their travels." (40:34-8)

As at Sinai, the mishkan fire is a consuming one (parashat Shemini):

"God's glory was then revealed to all the people. FIRE came forth from before God and CONSUMED the burnt offering and the choice parts of the altar." (Vayikra 9:23-4)

The parallel between the mishkan and Sinai relates specially to the building and vessels. The Torah establishes this linkage at the parasha's outset:

"They shall make Me a mishkan and I shall dwell among them. According to the plan of the mishkan and the plan of all its vessels, so shall you do it." (25:7-8)

Although this verse does not specify the vision's origin, the verses that conclude each sub-section of the building plan ascribe it to Sinai:

"See and do, according to the plan which you were shown on the mountain" (25:40 - the vessels). "Put up the mishkan according to the proper way which you were shown on the mountain" (26:30). "... as you were shown on the mountain, so shall you do" (27:8 - the conclusion to the courtyard vessels)

The commentaries stressed the afore-mentioned verses' strange passive usage of the verb form - "re'ei" ("shown"). If God showed Moshe the figures, why does the Torah not simply say so? The Seforno (25:9), based on numerous sources in Chazal (see Menachot 29a), explains that the figures were not artificially constructed for the purpose of enlightening Moshe. Rather, they were the "natural" reflection of God's presence on the mountain. The mishkan is an earthly representation of the Divine presence that descended on Sinai.

Man's construction of a base for God's presence can lead to a misinterpretation of his role. Although God demanded human involvement in the building process as a sign of appreciation of the Shekhina, the building plan was of heavenly origin. Following the

heavenly ordained minute details insured that people understood their effort and contribution to be of mere symbolic significance. This kept those involved from mistakenly viewing themselves as defining the nature of God's presence.

III) Parshat Tetzaveh - Kohanim - The Human Element

Parshat Tetzaveh introduces a basic element not found in the Sinaitic revelation - the kohanim and their service. The parallel introduction and conclusion of the parasha define the significance of this added element. Although the parasha deals chiefly with the priestly garments (chapter 28) and their sanctification (29:1-37), it opens with a short reference to the menorah and concludes by discussing the korban tamid. These two sections share a striking resemblance:

Menorah (27:20-1):

"Shemen zayit zakh...
le-ha'alot ner TAMID
BE-OHEL MO'ED mi-chutz
la-parokhet me-EREV ad BOKER
LIFNEI HASHEM
chukat olam LE-DOROTAM..."

Korban Tamid (29:38-42):

"Kevasim benei shana
shenayim la-yom TAMID.
Et ha-keves ha-echad ta'aseh
va-BOKER ve-et ha-keves ha-sheini
ta'aseh bein ha-ARBAYIM
olat TAMID LE-DOROTEIKHEM
petach OHELI MO'ED LIFNEI HASHEM"

The service described by these units was consistently (day and night forever) performed "before God." This constant activity symbolized the vibrant presence of the Shekhina. The Torah implies this by linking between God's presence and the service performed before it:

"[It shall be offered] before God at the entrance to the Communion Tent, the place where I commune with [all the people] by speaking with you there. It is there that I will continue with the Israelites, and [the tabernacle] will thus be sanctified with My glory." (29:42-3)

In order for man to view the mishkan as the medium between himself and God, he must see it as infused with God's spirit. The priestly service allow for this human perception of life.

The Sinaitic revelation was totally of divine origin. Although it expressed itself in the physical form of an earthly home (aron, menorah, shulchan, and mizbe'ach), it included no human element. The mishkan, on the other hand, although an imitation of the heavenly revelation, was built by man as the eternal epicenter of his own camp. It, therefore, needed to meet his standards of vitality. The kohanim supplied this vitality.

V) Two Aspects of Avodat Hashem

In summation, the mishkan incorporated two seemingly contradictory expressions of God's presence. On the one hand, the structure and vessels mimicked the minute details of the Sinaitic revelation. On the other hand, the kohanim served to infuse the structure with a human sense of vitality.

The mishkan's dual nature serves as a paradox of proper religious service. Notwithstanding the significance of one's comprehension of, and, thus, identification with, the mitzvot, his fulfillment must be rooted in a sense of 'commandedness' - of "kabalat ol malkhut shamayim." The details of the mitzvot are the litmus test of one's observance. Since the details cannot always be rationalized within one's general understanding of a mitzva, their meticulous observance reflects a genuine kabalat ha-Torah quite similar to that of the mishkan - "ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe."

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