

Sefer Melakhim: The Book of Kings
By Rav Alex Israel

Dedicated in memory of both Zissel Bat Yitzchak Gontownik, and Avraham Ben Yosef Halevi Gontownik, on the occasion of his tenth yahrzeit, by his children, Anne and Jerry Gontownik, and Sidney Gontownik, and his grandchildren, Ari and Shira, Zev and Daniela, Yonatan, Ranan, Hillel, and Ezra Gontownik.

Shiur #8: Chapter 8-9 - The Dedication of the Mikdash

This week, we will take a look at the rich depiction of the ceremonial dedication of the *Mikdash*. This was a fourteen day celebration for the entire nation, "joyful and glad of heart," and attendees hailed from Mesopotamia to Egypt. The festive throngs offered an extraordinary number of *korbanot*, so numerous that the king had to temporarily sanctify the entire courtyard of the Temple so that it could also be used for sacrificial purposes!¹ The story is structured in the following way:

A Narrative: gathering and dedication ceremony (8:1-11)
 B Shlomo "blesses the assembly of Israel" 8:12-21
 C: Shlomo Ha-Melekh's prayer (8:22-53)
 B Shlomo "blesses the assembly of Israel" (8:55-61)
8: Narrative: dedication ceremony and departure (8:62-9:2)

9:2-9: God's response to Shlomo

PARALLELS

"Then Shlomo gathered... and all the men of Israel were gathered to Shlomo" (8:1-2) **This teaches us that the *Shekhina* does not rest other than upon the entire community.** Similarly [at the dedication of the *Mishkan* in *Vayikra* 9:24], "And all the people saw," ... and at the giving of the Torah it states, "For on the third day God will descend in view of the entire nation" (*Shemot* 19:11). (*Seder Olam* ch.15)

This *midrash* parallels three events: The dedication of the *Mishkan*, the dedication of the *Mikdash*, and *Matan Torah*. What do they have in common? The *midrash* indicates that the first critical similarity is the collective, national dimension of all three - the mass gathering. Here, at the opening of the

¹ The details of this paragraph are taken from the ending of the chapter; see 8:62-66.

Mikdash, the text specifies how the entire nation mobilizes and convenes for this historic event, reminiscent of the experience at Sinai.²

A second feature of these three events is the *Gilui Shekhina*, the tangible and evident presence of God at these foundational moments. It is fascinating that the details of our story in *Sefer Melakhim* directly mirror those of the *Mishkan*. Two specific textual parallels stand out.

Let us begin with the scene from our chapter in *Sefer Melakhim*:

When the *kohanim* came out of *Kodesh*,

The cloud filled the House of God.

The *kohanim* could not remain and perform the service **because of the cloud,**

for the presence of God filled the entire house of God. (8:10-11)

This is a direct reflection of the *pesukim* that end the dedication of the *Mishkan* in *Sefer Shemot*:

The cloud covered the tent of meeting,

and the presence of God filled the *Mishkan*.

And Moses could not enter the tent of meeting

because the cloud rested upon it,

and the presence of God filled the *Mishkan*. (*Shemot* 40:34-5)

The elements are identical: the cloud fills the *Mishkan* or *Mikdash*, indicating that God's intense presence occupies the *Mishkan/Mikdash*. This results in the restriction of access to those who are meant to enter – Moshe or the *kohanim* - to perform the service.

The description of Shlomo's inauguration of the *Mikdash* in *Divrei Ha-Yamim* highlights and mirrors yet another moment in the *Channukat Ha-Mishkan*:

When Shlomo completed his prayer,

fire descended from heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and the *zevachim*

² There is some tension between verse 8:1, which indicates a gathering of "the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the princes of the ancestral houses," and 8:2, which talks about "all the men of Israel." Likewise, vs.3 mentions only the leadership, but vs.5 mentions the entire collective. Who was invited, the leaders or the entire population?

The Malbim assumes that once the leaders came for this auspicious occasion, all of Israel arrived uninvited to witness this historic moment!

But on the basis of this parallel between *Har Sinai* and *Channukat Ha-Mikdash*, everything works out neatly. At Sinai, the leadership had a special role; see, for example, *Shemot* 24:2, 9-11, in which God allows "Aharon, Nadav and Avihu and the 70 elders of Israel" to gain greater access to the act of revelation. There is evidently a stratified access, giving the leadership a special place in the proceedings, while the entire nation shares a role. Maybe *Ma'amad Har Sinai* is a model for *Melakhim* ch.8!

...**all the Children of Israel saw as the fire descended...** and they bowed with their **faces to the ground** praising God, "For he is good, for his kindness is eternal." (*Divrei Ha-Yamim* II 7:1-3)

In the desert, a similar scene unfolded at the dedication of the *Mishkan*:

Fire came forth from before God
and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar.
And **all the people saw**, and shouted, and **fell on their faces.** (*Vayikra* 9:24)

Clearly, these descriptions aim to demonstrate symmetry between the two occasions, emphasizing the manner in which the presence of God in Shlomo's *Mikdash* was equivalent to that of the *Mishkan*.³

One further parallel is particularly poignant. On the eighth day, the culmination of the seven-day *Mishkan* dedication, Aharon blesses the nation immediately after completing the complex order of *korbanot*:

Aharon lifted up his hands towards the people and he blessed them and descended [from the altar] from performing the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the *shelamim*. Moshe and Aharon entered the Tent of Meeting; they emerged and **blessed the people.** (*Vayikra* 9:22-23)

This feature also finds its reflection in Shlomo's dedication:

And when Shlomo finished his prayer to God ...he arose from before the altar, from kneeling on his knees with his hands outstretched to heaven. **He stood and blessed the entire community of Israel...** (*Melakhim I* 8:54-55)

In both stories, we have leaders with hands extended (admittedly with different functions) at the altar, who conclude the ceremony with a blessing to the nation.

Thus far, we have compared the dedication of the *Mishkan* with that of the *Mikdash*. But *Seder Olam* notes that another event must be included in the series of revelational events about which it may be said, "The *Shekhina* does not rest other than upon the entire community." That experience is the revelation at Sinai, in which there is also a cloud, fire, and God's descent or tangible presence among the community of Israel:⁴

³ Furthermore, it would seem that *pesukim* such as 8:9, which underscore the similarity between Moshe's *Mishkan* and Shlomo's *Mikdash* add to this equivalence.

⁴ The *pesukim* from *Shemot* chapter 24, describing the giving of the Torah, are starkly reflected in *Shemot* ch.40, describing the *Mishkan*, as well as in the *pesukim* that we quoted from *Divrei Ha-Yamim*: "And Moshe ascended the mountain... and GOD'S PRESENCE rested upon Mt. Sinai, and the CLOUD enveloped it for six days, AND HE CALLED TO MOSHE on the seventh day from the cloud... and Moshe entered the cloud and ascended the mountain" (24:15-18). However, these verses deal with Moshe and not the nation in its entirety.

Moshe led the people out of the camp towards God ...
Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke, for **God had descended upon it in fire** ...and the mountain trembled ...**and all the people saw** the thunder and lightning and the sound of the *shofar* ... and stood at a distance.
(*Shemot* 19:18; 20:15)

These three foundational national events of collective revelation are grouped together. The *Mikdash* dedication, then, far from being yet another in a series of royal or national ceremonial events, now finds itself in a far more significant grouping. As we have indicated in a previous *shiur*,⁵ the building of the *Mikdash* is a national milestone of momentous significance, on par with *Matan Torah* and the dedication of the *Mishkan*.⁶

The following two *Midreshei Tannaim* reflect our two respective points of reference. Both are based on the same phrases in *Shir Ha-Shirim* 3:11, which refer to Shlomo Ha-Melekh:

"On the day of his wedding" – that is *Matan Torah*
"On the day of his bliss" – that is the day of the building of the *Mikdash*.
(*Mishna Ta'anit* 4:8)

"On the day of his wedding" – that is the seven days of the *milu'im*⁷
"On the day of his bliss" – that is the day of the building of the *Mikdash*
(*Seder Olam* ch.15)

SHLOMO'S PRAYER – HOUSE OF PRAYER

I think that the most striking aspect of Shlomo's prayer relates to the following *pesukim*:

But will God really reside upon earth? Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You, how much less this House that I have built! Yet turn, O Lord my God, to the prayer and supplication of Your servant, and hear the cry and prayer which your servant offers before you this day. May your eyes be open day and night towards this house, towards the place of which you have said, "My name shall abide there," to listen to the prayer that your servant will pray towards this place. (8:27-29)

Virtually every phrase in this passage is critical, but if we may summarize, we can state the following. First, in Shlomo's view, God is not contained by the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*. It is not God's residence. At the very most, it is a place at

⁵ See *Shiur* #6, Chapter 6 and the reference to 480 years from the Exodus.

⁶ See *Da'at Mikra* pp. 197-8, where he develops this theme of covenantal moments in the context of our chapter.

⁷ The *milu'im* are the seven days of the dedication ceremony of the *Mishkan* described in *Shemot* ch.29 and *Vayikra* chs.8-9. It is highly probable that Shlomo's celebration specifically for seven days (and then an eighth – see *Divrei Ha-Yamim*) is built upon the pattern set in the wilderness with the *milu'im*.

which "**My name** shall abide there," a place which REPRESENTS God but does not, in fact, enclose or confine Him.

Thus, we may ask what the point is. If this is NOT God's residence, then how does the *Mikdash* function? This is Shlomo Ha-Melekh's second point. The *Mikdash* is, quite simply, a house of prayer. It is the portal through which our prayers find God and through which God hears our prayers. God dwells "in the heavens," but his eyes and ears are focused upon this spot.

Shlomo articulates these principles in the theological preamble to his speech, quoted above. However, in the body of his speech, these emphases are restated in a deliberate and well ordered list, organized by a refrain of sorts, a recursive formula. Here Shlomo presents a sevenfold menu of scenarios which would necessitate prayer. He articulates the appeal by the petitioner followed by God's reaction or response - God hearing Israel's prayers and issuing forgiveness. The section (8:31-53) follows the same frame or pattern tightly:

- A - When X happens [a curse/military defeat/drought/plague/the foreigner/going out to war/exile⁸]
- B – They offer "prayer and supplication to you in this house."
- C – "O hear in your heavenly abode, and take action..."
- D – And forgive your people⁹

As we mentioned, the implications of this are significant: That God dwells not in the *Mikdash*, but "on High," and that the primary function of the *Mikdash* is prayer.

ALL ISRAEL TURNING THEIR HEARTS TO A SINGLE PLACE

One ramification of this philosophy is the centrality of Yerushalayim and the *Mikdash* as the conduit for ALL prayer, from near or far. This finds expression even in the *Halakha* of the orientation of prayer. The *gemara* discusses the instruction to always pray facing the *Mikdash*.¹⁰

If one is standing outside of Israel, a person should focus one's mind (*yechaven libo*) towards *Eretz Yisrael*, as it says, "**And pray unto You towards their land**" (*Melakhim I 8:48*).

⁸ The notion that a sovereign ruler should even entertain the prospect of Exile is quite remarkable. I can only suggest that this entire prayer as replete with the language of *Sefer Devarim* and hence follows its predictions and threats nonchalantly. For parallels with *Sefer Devarim*, a few examples may include:

"In the heavens above and the earth below" found in v.23 and also Devarim 4:39; 5:7

The notion of a house for God's "Name to be there" v.16 and 29, is a reflection of the phrase in *Devarim* 12:11, 14:23, 16:2,6 and others.

And so, similarly the notion of exile is mentioned in *Devarim* in the same phraseology as Shlomo's prayer. See the comparison between 8:46-48 and *Devarim* 4:29 and 30:1-4.

⁹ Not relevant for scenario 1 – a curse, or 5 – the foreigner.

¹⁰ For Halakhic discussion of this, see the *shiur* at <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/tefila/67-26tefila.htm>

If he stands in *Eretz Yisrael*, he should focus his mind towards Yerushalayim, as it says, **“And they pray unto the Lord, toward the city which You have chosen” (ibid. 44).**

If he is standing in Yerushalayim, he should focus his mind towards the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*, as it says, **“If they pray toward this house” (Divrei Ha-Yamim II 6:26).**

If he is standing in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*, he should focus his mind towards the Holy of Holies, as it says, **“If they pray toward this place” (Melakhim I 8:35).**

... Consequently, if he is in the east, he should turn his face to the west; if in the west, he should turn his face to the east; if in the south, he should turn his face to the north; if in the north, he should turn his face to the south. **In this way, all Israel will be turning their hearts towards one place.**

R. Avin and others say R. Avina said: What is the meaning of the verse (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 4:4), “Your neck is as the tower of David, built like Talpiot?”¹¹ – It means **a hill towards which all mouths turn.** (*Berakhot* 30a)

As you read this piece from the *gemara*, you will surely notice that all the Biblical quotes, the support texts, have their origin in this inauguration of the *Mikdash* and in particular, Shlomo Ha-Melekh's speech. When we pray towards Jerusalem, we are invoking the concept articulated by Shlomo. And the result is a beautiful expression of global Unity: "All Israel turning their hearts to one place."

TWO VIEWS OF THE MIKDASH

From a philosophical perspective, it is worthwhile to consider that Shlomo's prayer raises an ancient *machloket* regarding the role of the *Mikdash*. Is the *Mikdash* a place for God or a place for Man? Is it God's resting place on earth, the seat of the *Shekhina*, or alternatively, merely a facility to give humans the opportunity to approach *Hashem*? We find this discussion arising with regard to the *Mishkan*. The Ramban is of the opinion that:

It is befitting a holy nation that there be within their midst **a sanctuary so that God's presence may dwell among them...** The central focus of the *Mishkan* - the place of God's presence - is the *aron*, as it states, **“There**

¹¹ The word "Talpiot" attributed to the Tower of David has no parallel outside of *Shir Ha-Shirim*. Its precise meaning has eluded traditional interpretation and modern translation. The *midrash* here adapts it into two words: *Tal* = Tel, a hill, and *Piot* = mouths. Hence, Talpiot, which is associated with the Tower of David, i.e. Jerusalem, becomes a figurative image as "a hill which all mouths turn towards." In other words, the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* is the focus for all our prayers.

I would add parenthetically that the Tower of David spoken of in *Shir Hashirim* has no relationship to the structure that is today called the Tower of David. That structure, built on the remains of Herod's magnificent palace, is a crusader fortress. It is highly unlikely that David had any connection whatsoever with the site considering that David's city is about a kilometer from that spot.

will I meet you, and I will speak with you from above the *kapporet*... [all that I will command you concerning the Children of Israel] (25:21). (Ramban, Introduction to *Parashat Teruma*)

For the Ramban, God's presence is in residence over the *aron* in the *Mikdash*. "They should make me a *Mikdash* AND I SHALL RESIDE AMONG THEM" (*Shemot* 25:8). "*Mishkan*" is from the root SHKH"N, indicative of a habitation, a home.

But Rambam (Maimonides) expresses the purpose of the *Mikdash* differently:

It is a positive command to make a house for God, **facilitating the sacrificial service**, and [the nation] celebrates there three times a year, as it states, "You shall make for me a sanctuary" (*Shemot* 25:1). (Laws of the Temple, Chap 1)

In Maimonides' perspective, the *Mishkan* or *Mikdash* has a different focal point. The main point is not GOD's residence, but OUR SERVICE of Him. For the Rambam, the most central *kli* of the *Mishkan* is the *mizbe'ach*, the altar. For the Ramban, it is the *aron*. Of course, this argument about Temple furniture expresses a deeper disparity in perspective. The *aron* is where God resides among Israel; the *mizbe'ach* is where Israel approaches God. The *mizbe'ach* is where we bring *korbanot*, *korban* is from the root KR"V, drawing near or approaching God. Does the *Mikdash* represent God's presence or does it facilitate our opportunity to access God?

Taking this further, it is possible that the two names for the *Mishkan* represent these two perspectives. *MISHKAN* designates the residence of God; *OHEL MOED* – Tent of Meeting – indicates that we are invited to meet with God there, to convene with Him. Of course, BOTH approaches are well represented in our Torah and our tradition. The *Mishkan* as described in *Sefer Shemot* clearly seeks God's presence as immanent in the *Mishkan*, whereas *Sefer Vayikra* focuses upon the *korbanot*, the sacrifices upon the *mizbe'ach*.¹²

Interestingly, it was David Ha-Melekh, Shlomo's father, who viewed the *Mishkan* very much as God's residence:

The king said to the prophet Natan, "Here I am dwelling in a house of cedar, while the ark of God abides in a tent!" (*Shmuel* II 7:2)

Later, he says:

I wanted to build a resting place for ark of the covenant, for the footstool of God. (*Divrei Ha-Yamim* I 28:2)

¹² See more on this in my *shiurim*, <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/intparsha/shemot/19-59teruma.doc> and <http://tinyurl.com/yb4shun>

And as we read about Shlomo's *keruvim* and about the *Yam* and the *mekhonot*, we certainly gain the sense that the *Mikdash* designated as a place of *Hashra'at Shekhina*, as God's abode. Shlomo affirms this perspective in 8:13, when he says:

I have built a stately house for you, a place where you may dwell forever

And yet, in Shlomo's prayer we hear Shlomo expressing the other side of the coin as well.¹³ The dominant feature of the chapter is the service of God, the *korbanot*, as "King Shlomo and the whole community of Israel... were offering sheep and oxen in abundance that they could not be numbered" (8:5). Furthermore, the sense of the *Mikdash* in this *perek* is not a place for God to reside, but a place in which man can sacrifice and pray to even a transcendent God, approach Him, and God will hear and respond:

Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You, how much less this House that I have built! Yet turn, O Lord my God, to the prayer and supplication of Your servant.

THE FOREIGNER

Another striking feature of Shlomo's prayer that we have mentioned in a previous *shiur* (*shiur* #5) bears restating here. Shlomo emphasizes the access that the non-Jews may gain to the *Mikdash*:

If the foreigner who is not of your people Israel comes from a distant land for the sake of your name – for they shall hear about your great name and your mighty hand... (8:41)

Shlomo perceives the *Mikdash* as open to the non-Jewish world. He believes that many foreigners, gentiles, will hear about God and come to find our more, to pay homage to the Almighty. Shlomo repeats this point later in his prayer:

That ALL the peoples of the world may know that the Lord alone is God, there is no other. (8:60)

Shlomo is surely not alone in this perspective of the *Beit Hashem*. This universal exposure finds itself in many other prophets as well, especially in relation to the Messianic era:

... As for the foreigners who attach themselves to the Lord to be His servants ... and hold fast to My covenant, I will bring them to My holy mountain and let them rejoice in My house of prayer, their burnt offerings and sacrifices shall be welcome on My altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. (*Yishayahu* 56:6-7)

¹³ In our "*Kedusha*" prayer which draws on verses from the *Neviim*, we confirm this dialectic. On the one hand we say: 'His presence fills the world,' – God is everywhere - but on the other hand, we affirm that, "Blessed be the presence of God from His place" – affirming God as attached to a particular place, but also extending to all places.

All the nations... shall make a pilgrimage year by year to bow down to the King, Lord of Hosts, and to observe *Sukkot*." (*Zekharia* 14)

But I believe that Shlomo is the first figure in Tanach to have really stated out loud that gentiles are welcome to join us in the service of God.

THE HOUSE OF DAVID

A further prominent component of Shlomo's speech, especially in his preamble (8:12-21) is the special relationship between God and the House of David. Shlomo, goes into the family history, and God's promise that David's son will build the Temple. It is almost as if Shlomo has to justify his legitimacy in instituting a permanent *Mikdash*. After all, if his father was restricted from building it, why should he be allowed?

We shall deal with this unique relationship in a few weeks from now, when we discuss the dissolution of Shlomo's kingdom in the revolt of Yerovam.

GOD'S RESPONSE (9:1-9) – CONDITIONAL PROMISES

God's response confirms His agreement and consent to Shlomo's requests.

I consecrate this house which you have built.
I set my name there forever.
My eyes and heart shall be ever there. (8:3)

This is quite a statement, indeed, a statement which we believe holds true to the present time.

Nonetheless. God adds a critical caveat, namely that ALL the promises – the royal House of David, the promise of tenure in *Eretz Yisrael*, the very continued existence of the Beit Ha-Mikdash – are all conditional upon Shlomo's personal dutiful fulfillment of the *mitzvot*.

If you walk before Me as David your father walked; wholeheartedly and with uprightness, doing all that I command you and keeping my statutes and judgments. (9:4)

The nation too, is warned that diversion from God's commands, and in particular, the worship and following of foreign gods will bring calamity and ruin upon the nation.

On the one hand, this prophetic message is an incredible achievement. God has affirmed his sanctification and approval of the *Mikdash*!

And yet, we must pay some attention to the manner in which God is communicating with Shlomo. In this prophecy, the volume of threatening verses clearly outweigh the *pesukim* that commend and affirm God's approval. Moreover, look at the opening verse: "God appeared a second time to Shlomo, as he appeared at Givon." (9:1) what was he told at Givon? At that

prophecy (3:5-14) the promises are also predicated upon absolute commitment to Torah:

...If you will walk in My ways and observe My laws and commandments as your father David (3:14)

If we recall that Shlomo received a further warning at the mid-point of his building of the Mikdash (see 6:12 '...if you follow my laws etc.') we now have three explicit warnings to Shlomo as to what may befall him and his nation if he should fail to live in accordance with God's *mitzvot*.¹⁴

Why, we wonder, does Shlomo need such mentoring? Is God seeing something that we are not, that gives him cause to warn Shlomo with such regularity?

We shall discover some answers in our upcoming *shiur* that will discuss the sins of Shlomo, his divine condemnation, and the decline of his kingdom.

Points for further discussion and thought:

- Posture and Prayer: Shlomo prays on his knees, with his hands outstretched. This unusual posture may have been standard in ancient times. See also in *Yishayahu* 1:15 and 45:23. One wonders whether the arms were fully outstretched or just palms extended, as the way in which the Muslims pray.
- Shlomo in his prayer or speech emphasizes himself and his own role in building the *mikdash* in a prominent and repetitive manner. Shlomo discusses his own royal House, and the ceremony ends, the people bless Shlomo. Is this to be expected as the position of king necessitates the central and pivotal position of the monarch, or is this excessive?

¹⁴ Shlomo is clearly aware of this. See his own explicit reference in both the personal and national spheres: 8:25, 61.