

## "May Our Eyes Behold Your Return to Tzion"

By Dr. Brachi Elitzur

For a total of nearly 1310 years, the sacrificial service in the *Mishkan* or the Temple was part of the religio-cultural life of *Am Yisrael*: the *Mishkan* lasted for 480 years, the First Temple stood for 410 years, and the Second Temple – 420 years.[1] Thus, the Sanctuary, seemingly the central cultural symbol of religious worship, has actually been absent for the greater part of Jewish history.

The contemporary debate over the importance of building the Temple, and of preparations for renewal of its order of service, is familiar to the general public mainly in the form of news items: there are attempts by Temple activists to visit the site, along with the responses of those opposed to such activity. There are reports and articles about real preparations such as the preparing of vessels so that they will be ready at a moment's notice, as soon as the signal is given to build the Third Temple. There are also interviews with various public figures who share their religious views concerning the importance of the Temple in our time. But what was the attitude towards the Temple, or its absence, in earlier generations? Did the longing for its rebuilding, as reflected in the traditional prayers – "Return in Your mercy to Your city, Jerusalem... and rebuild it speedily in our days"; "May our eyes behold Your return to Tzion" – express the innermost wishes of the congregations of worshippers, or was Rabbi Yehuda Ha-levi's charge of hypocrisy actually leveled at the previous generations collectively?

If we say: "Worship at His holy hill," "worship at His footstool," and "He Who restores His glory to Tzion" (*Tehillim* 99:9, 5) and other words, it is simply like the chattering of the starling and the nightingale. We do not realize what we are saying by these words, nor others, as you have rightly observed, O King of the Khazars. (*Ha-kuzari, ma'amar* 2, chapter 24)

In this *shiur* we shall try to review testimonies concerning the attitude towards the building of the *Mishkan* and the Temple, and the Divine service performed in them, among those generations in which the issue was of immediate pertinence. We will examine the attitude of the generations that had to decide whether or not to build a Sanctuary in their days. We will examine the degree to which the Sanctuary was central in the lives of those generations that merited the existence of a Sanctuary in their time. Finally, we will look at testimonies describing the responses of the people to the reality of the Destruction. While our findings will reflect mainly the attitude towards the Sanctuary during the First and Second Temple periods, they may serve as a basis for an understanding of why in our days, too, the importance of building a Temple at the present time is not a matter of consensus throughout the religious Jewish spectrum in Israel and worldwide.

In our *shiur* on *parashat Tetzaveh* we noted the emphasis in the description, in *parashat Vayakhel*, of the enthusiastic mobilization of the people to build the *Mishkan*:

And they came – every person whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit made him willing, and they brought God's offering for the work of the Tent of Meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. And they came, men and women alike, all willing of heart, bringing bracelets and earrings and rings and bracelets and all jewelry of gold, and every person who had offered an offering of gold to God. And every person who had in his possession blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, and red skins of rams, and *Tachash* skins brought them. Everyone who offered an offering of silver and

brass brought God's offering, and everyone who possessed *shittim* wood, for any of the work of the service, brought it. And all the women who had wisdom of heart spun with their hands, and brought that which they had spun – of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine linen. And all the women whose heart stirred them with wisdom spun goats' hair. And the princes brought *shoham* stones and the stones for setting in the *efod* and for the breastplate; and the spice and the oil for anointing and for the incense of spices. Benei Yisrael brought as a willing offering to God – every man and woman whose heart prompted them to bring for all of the work which God had commanded to be done, by the hand of Moshe." ([Shemot35:21-29](#))

And Betzalel and Aholiav and every wise-hearted man to whom God had given wisdom and understanding to know how to perform all the manner of work for the service of the Sanctuary, did according to all that God had commanded. And Moshe called Betzalel and Aholiav and every wise-hearted man in whose heart God had given wisdom – everyone whose heart stirred him up to come forward to the work, to perform it. And they took from before Moshe all of the contribution which Benei Yisrael had brought for the work of the service of the Sanctuary, with which to do it; and they were still bringing him freewill offerings each morning. And all the wise men who were carrying out all of the work of the Sanctuary, came from the work which he did... ([Shemot36:1-4](#))

This wave of enthusiasm created a situation where, at some stage, it became necessary to halt the flow of contributions:

... And they said to Moshe, saying, "The people are bringing much more than enough for the service of the work which God has commanded to do." And Moshe gave the command, and a proclamation was made throughout the camp, saying: "Let neither man nor women do any more work for the offering of the Sanctuary." So the people were restrained from bringing. But the material which they had was sufficient for all of the work needing to be done, and beyond. ([Shemot36:5-7](#))

It seems, then, that the project of the *Mishkan* was perceived by the nation – the generation that had left Egypt – as the ultimate form of Divine worship. The aspiration for the Divine Presence in the midst of the camp was an existential need for this generation, which had become accustomed to a tangible, immediate form of Divine guidance from the moment that their religious consciousness had awoken to the concept.

The place of the *Mishkan* in the life of *Am Yisrael* during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness finds no direct expression in the text. The *Mishkan* is mentioned as the place where the *kohanim* and *levi'im* perform their service, and there is a description of the manner in which the *Mishkan* is carried on the journey. However, there is no narrative that has at its core any tension relating to the status of the *Mishkan* or those chosen to serve in it. On the contrary, from a story describing an episode from this time, we may deduce that being chosen to serve in the *Mishkan* was not perceived as any particular indication of superiority: Moshe's rebuke of Korach, pointing out that he merited to serve God in the *Mishkan*, in no way eases Korach's sense of discrimination. Apparently, he does not regard this status as reflecting any sort of advantage:

Is it a small thing for you that the God of Israel has chosen you, from the congregation of Israel, to bring you closer to Him, to perform the service of God's *Mishkan* and to stand before the congregation, to serve them? He has brought you and all your brethren, the children of Levi, along with you – and yet you seek the priesthood?! ([Bemidbar 16:9-10](#))

During the period of the conquest and settlement of the land, Gilgal and Shilo are mentioned as places where Yehoshua dwelled, and as the place where the people gathered for the settling of religious and fateful questions,<sup>[2]</sup> but there is no evidence of any activity initiated by the people concerning the *Mishkan*. In fact, there are even verses suggesting that the location of the *Mishkan* aroused no competition among the tribes. There are two groups of people who express dissatisfaction with the inheritance that falls to them by lot (the tribe of Yehuda – on behalf of Calev and the sons of Yosef) and seek an addition to their portion (Calev ben Yefuneh asks for Chevron, and the sons of Yosef request an additional portion of land). Nevertheless, there is no hint of any aspiration to inherit an area close to the *Mishkan* or to the future Temple.

*Benei Yisrael* initially suspect that the building of an altar by the tribes settled on the eastern side of the Jordan arises from a desire to move the *Mishkan* to their territory.

However, if the land of your possession is impure, then pass over to the land of God's possession, where God's *Mishkan* dwells, and take possession among us. But do not rebel against God, nor rebel against us, in building an altar for yourselves besides the altar of the Lord our God. ([Yehoshua 22:19](#))

But it becomes immediately apparent that this is not the purpose of the construction:

That it be a witness between us and you, and our generations after us, that we might perform God's service before Him with our burnt offerings and with our sacrifices and with our peace offerings, so that your children will not say to our children in the time to come, "You have no part in God." ([Yehoshua 22:27](#))

The marginal place of the *Mishkan* in Shilo during the period of the Judges is indicated by a verse, formulated in a surprising way, which describes an ancient custom in Shilo:

Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the Lord every year in Shilo, which is to the north of Beit El, on the eastside of the highway that goes up from Beit El to Shekhem, and to the south of Levona. ([Shoftim 21:19](#))

The need for the extensive detail in describing the location of Shilo, seemingly the city most central to the tribes of Israel, reveals its less-than-central status. This proof joins the absence of any mention of Shilo as the place of the nation's worship during the period of the Judges. Mount Efraim, where the city of Shilo is located, is mentioned in the context of religious worship – but not the worship of the *Mishkan*; it is mentioned instead in connection with the attractive idol that belongs to Mikha and which is stolen later on by people from the tribe of Dan. The only mass prayer gathering mentioned in *Sefer Shoftim*, in the context of the story of the concubine in Giv'a, takes place in Beit El, and the text takes pains to note that the Ark of God is located there:

Benei Yisrael arose and went up to the house of God, and they asked of God, and Benei Yisrael said: "Who of us shall go up first to war against the children of Binyamin?"... And all of Benei Yisrael, all of the people, went up, and came to Beit El ("the House of God"), and wept and sat there before God, and they fasted on that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God. And Benei Yisrael asked of God – for the Ark of God's Covenant was there in those days." (*Shoftim 20:18-27*)<sup>[3]</sup>

The description of Elkana's ascent to Shilo, at the end of the period of the Judges, is explained by *Chazal* as an unusual gesture of religious devotion:

Rabbi Zeira said... "Elkana would lead Israel and bring them up to Shilo. And each year he did not take the same path that he had taken in a previous year; rather, each year he would go up on a different road, so as to raise awareness of Shilo amongst Israel. Therefore the text specifies him in such detail: 'There was a certain man from Ramatayim-Tzofim, from Mount Efraim, and his name was Elkana, son of Yerucham, son of Elihu, son of Tochu, son of Tzof, of Efrat.'" (*Midrash Shmuel, parasha 1*)

"And this man went up" – signifying that he went up, but others did not.

The destruction of Shilo is not mentioned explicitly in *Sefer Shmuel*, and it is doubtful that we would even know of the transfer of the *Mishkan* to Nov, were it not for the story of Sha'ul having killed the *kohanim* of Nov.

The *Mishkan* existed for 480 years, and other than descriptions of its routine service and its identity as a place of gathering at times of crisis, there is no evidence of it playing a central role in the lives of the generations of the wilderness, the conquest and settlement of the land, and the Judges. In fact, the accounts of acts of religious worship outside of the framework of the *Mishkan* service<sup>[4]</sup> lend further support to the impression of a weakening of the connection to the *Mishkan* and a preference for alternative forms of worship.

The first stirrings towards the building of the Temple, and preparations in anticipation of it, are found in the time of David. One of his first actions is to conquer Jerusalem from the hands of the *Yevusim* (*II Shmuel 5*), followed immediately by a festive public ceremony in which the Ark of God is brought up to David's house in Jerusalem (*II Shmuel 6*), and David raises the issue of building a Temple with Natan the prophet (*II Shmuel 7*). Natan's answer –

that it is David's son who will build the Temple – in no way dampens David's enthusiasm, and he continues with his preparations, eventually purchasing the threshing-floor of Arauna, the *Yevusi*, and building an altar there (*I Shmuel 24*).

Shlomo's Temple-building endeavor is central to the religious and economic reality of all sectors of the nation. There is a universal tax, as well as days of labor, which contributed to the construction. When the building is complete, the entire nation takes part in the fourteen festive days of inauguration, where they hear of the purpose of the Temple and the dates when they are to gather there. Does this intensive partnership in the project create a strong connection on the part of the people to the Divine service in the Temple?

The answer to this question is rather complex, for there is no doubt that the long years of construction planted the seeds of the rebellion that erupted under Yerav'am and the laborers of the house of Yosef in Shlomo's kingdom. This is emphasized most clearly in the text, in the words of Yerav'am and those who join his rebellion:

This was the reason why he [Yerav'am] lifted his hand against the king: Shlomo had built the Millo, and had repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. And the man Yerav'am was a mighty warrior, and Shlomo, seeing that the young man was industrious, had made him ruler over all of the labor of the house of Yosef. (*I Melakhim 11:27-28*)

They sent and called him, and Yerav'am and all the congregation of Israel came, and spoke to Rechav'am, saying: "Your father made our yoke heavy; you, now – lighten your father's heavy labor and our heavy yoke which he put upon us, and we will serve you." (*I Melakhim 12:3-4*)

There was perhaps a sense of being fed-up with a project which had demanded such a heavy economic and personal price. On the other hand, however, we see that Yerav'am's first move following the splitting of the kingdom is to build the two golden calves, in Dan and in Beit El, establishing a form of worship that is an alternative to the Temple. These actions reflect Yerav'am's fear that Temple loyalists, even if they supported his reign, would eventually drift back to Jerusalem because of their connection with that central place of worship.

The First Temple period was characterized by a strong connection to the Temple. Kings of Yehuda are described as investing in renovations of the Temple (Yoash) and in cleansing it (Chizkiyahu and Yoshiyahu). There is also a king whose religious desire exceeds the bounds of his prescribed authority, and he is punished for assuming the role of offering the incense, which is reserved for *kohanim* alone (Uzziyahu). The pilgrims of the First Temple period are described as punctiliously observing the laws of the Temple service and as believing that the Temple would protect them from the nefarious plans of their enemies. Notably, though, the testimonies regarding the depth of this connection are actually attributed to those who were opposed to it, viewing it as a hindrance to the repairing of moral injustices that characterized those who devoted themselves to the Temple service. The prophets of the First Temple period, and especially Yishayahu, Mikha, and Yirmiyahu, describe the distortion in the people's view of the hierarchy of observance of religious commandments:

"For what do I need the multitude of your sacrifices," says the Lord; "I am sated with the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I have no desire for the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When you come to appear before Me, who asked this of you, to trample My courts? Bring no more vain offerings; they are incense of abomination to Me; as for new moons and *shabbatot*, and the calling of assemblies – I cannot bear iniquity along with convocation. My soul hates your new moons and your appointed festivals; they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of enduring them. And when you spread your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers I do not hear; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, purify yourselves, put away the evil of your actions from before My eyes; cease to do evil. Learn to do good; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." ([Yishayahu 1:11-17](#))

Hear now, I pray you, heads of the house of Yaakov and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice, and pervert all uprightness; who build up Tzion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. Its heads judge for bribes, and its *kohanim* teach for hire, and its prophets divine for money – yet they rely upon God, saying, "Is God not in our midst? No evil can come upon us." Therefore Tzion will be ploughed like a field, because of you, and Jerusalem shall become heaps of rubble, and the Temple mount – like the high places of the forest. ([Mikha 3:9-12](#))

Do not put your trust in lying words, saying, "The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord" are these... Behold, you put your trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and burn incense to Ba'al, and go after other gods whom you do not know, and come and stand before Me in this House, which is called by My Name, and say, "We are saved" – that you may commit all of these abominations? Has this House, which is called by My Name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I Myself have seen it, says the Lord. ([Yirmiyahu 7:4-11](#))

According to the prophets, prioritizing the Temple service over social justice is what will condemn the people to a fate of destruction and exile. The only period, thus far, in which we see that the people had demonstrated keen interest and a strong desire to visit God's House and to participate in its service, was the period leading up to the Destruction. The total devotion to the Temple was the undoing of the Temple worshippers, since it represented a distortion of the judgment of the kingdom's citizens with regard to God's will.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the returnees from the Babylonian exile, whose elders still remembered the First Temple and the rebuke of the prophets, display a certain degree of apathy regarding the matter of rebuilding the Temple. It is only the urging and threats of punishment by the prophet Chaggai that lead to a renewed effort to rebuild:

And the word of the Lord came by Chaggai, the prophet, saying: "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your well-covered houses, while this House lies waste? And now, so says the Lord of Hosts: consider your ways. You have sown much but brought in little; you eat, but are not satisfied; you drink, but are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no-one is warm; and he who earns, puts his wages in a bag with holes. So says the Lord of Hosts: consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the House; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, says the Lord. You looked for much, but it came to little, and when you brought it home, I blew upon it – why? says the Lord of Hosts. Because of My House that lies waste, while you run, each to his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is restrained from giving dew, and the land is restrained from giving its produce. And I called for a drought upon the land, and

upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon that which the ground brings forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all labor of hands." (*Chagga* 1:3-11)

The enthusiasm of the contributors to the *Mishkan*, as recorded in *parashat Vayakhel*, and the dedication of Shlomo's kingdom to the building of the First Temple, belong to the past. The bitter memory of the First Temple, and the absence of any memories of the *Mishkan* or any other Sanctuary, which might have mitigated their impressions, leave Jerusalem a waste and the Temple desolate:

And I came to Jerusalem, and I was there for three days. And I arose in the night, I and a few men who were with me, and I told no-one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem; and there was no beast with me, other than the beast upon which I rode. And I went out by night by the valley gate, before the dragon's well, to the dung gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I went on to the fountain gate, and to the king's pool, but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. And I went up in the night by the wadi, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the valley gate, and so returned... Then I said to the m, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire; come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, so that we will no longer suffer insult." (*Nechemia* 2:11-17)

The Temple coffers are empty, and the contributions and tithes that are supposed to support those performing the Temple service do not reach their destination, as we conclude from the stipulations in Nechemia's covenant:

Also we lay ordinances upon ourselves, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God; for the showbread, and for the continual meal-offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the *shabbatot*, of the new moons, for the appointed seasons, and for the holy things, and for the sin-offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. And we have cast lots – the *kohanim*, the *levi'im*, and the people – for the wood-offering, to bring it into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at the appointed times, year by year, to burn upon the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the Torah; and to bring the first-fruits of our land, and the first-fruits of all fruit of all manner of trees, year by year, to the house of the Lord; also the first-born of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the Torah, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, to the *kohanim* who minister in the house of our God; and that we should bring the first of our dough, and our heave-offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, the wine and the oil, to the *kohanim*, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our land to the *levi'im* - for they, the *levi'im*, take the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. And the *kohen*, the son of Aharon, shall be with the *levi'im* when the *levi'im* take tithes; and the *levi'im* shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasury. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the heave-offering of the corn, of the wine, and of the oil, into the chambers, where the vessels of the Sanctuary are, and the *kohanim* that minister, and the porters, and the singers; and we will not forsake the house of our God." (*Nechemia* 10:33-40)

Here we find, in all its glory, the endeavor on the part of the leaders at the time of the Second Temple to mold the revived memory of the Temple service and its place in religious consciousness. The chapters of *Sefer Divrei Ha-yamim* that are devoted to the Temple extol the importance of Jerusalem and praise those who perform its service. The history of the period of David and of the First Temple is retold with significant additions, testifying to the

importance attached by these later generations to the performance of the Temple service and the participation of all sectors of the people – first in the construction, and then in the joy accompanying the functioning of the Temple. We shall look at just three examples, representing a sample of the approach characterizing *Divrei Ha-yamim* as a whole:

1. God's choice of Jerusalem is hinted at in *Sefer Shmuel*, when the angel of God receives a Divine command to halt the plague when it reaches Jerusalem. The author of *Divrei Ha-yamim* does not suffice with this veiled hint, and adds verses alluding to other stories of "chosen-ness" in *Tanakh*: the re-choosing of Avraham after the binding of Yitzchak; the choosing of Yaakov at Beit El; the choosing of Eretz Yisrael hinted at in the revelation of the angel to Yehoshua (*Yehoshua* 5:13); and the choosing of *Am Yisrael*, hinted at in the allusion to the story of Bil'am and his donkey.[5]

<i>II Shmuel</i> 24:16	<i>I Divrei Ha-yamim</i> 21:15 – 22:1
And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem, to destroy it, God relented of the evil, and He said to the angel that was destroying the people: "Enough; stay now your hand." And the angel of God was at the threshing-floor of Aravna the <i>Yevusi</i> .	And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; and as he was about to destroy, God saw, and He relented of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed: "Enough; stay now your hand." And God's angel stood at the threshing-floor of Aravna the <i>Yevusi</i> .
	And David lifted his eyes and he saw an angel of God standing between earth and heaven, a sword drawn in his hand, stretched over Jerusalem. Then David, and the elders, who were dressed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces... And David said, "This is the House of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel."

2. Encouragement of the people to make contributions to the Temple is mentioned in the accounts of the inventory taken by Yoash. The author of *Divrei Ha-yamim* adds to the historical record the words supposedly spoken in the days of Yoash, but which are clearly directed also at the people of his own generation:

<i>II Melakhim</i> 12:5-6	<i>Divrei Ha-yamim</i> 24:5
Yeho'ash said to the <i>kohanim</i> : "All the money of the dedicated things which is brought into the House of the Lord, in current money, and the money of persons, by assessment of every man, and all the money that <u>any man is prompted by his heart to bring into the House of the Lord</u> – let the <i>kohanim</i> take it, each from his acquaintance, and let them repair the breaches of the House, wherever any breach is found."	And he gathered the <i>kohanim</i> and the <i>levi'im</i> and he said to them: " <u>Go out to the cities of Yehuda, and collect money from all of Israel to repair the House of your God from year to year, and make haste in the matter...</u> "

3. The author of *Divrei Ha-yamim* also elaborates on Chiram's response to Shlomo's request in a manner meant to indicate universal recognition of the importance of the Temple:

<i>I Melakhim</i> 5:21	<i>II Divrei Ha-yamim</i> 2:10-11
And it happened, when Chiram heard the words of Shlomo, that he rejoiced greatly, and he said: "Blessed is the Lord this day, who has given to David a wise son <u>over this great people.</u> "	And Churam, king of Tzor, answered in writing, and he sent to Shlomo: "Out of the Lord's love for his people, He has made you king over them." And Churam said, "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, Who made the heavens and the earth, Who has given King David a wise son, <u>endowed with prudence and understanding, so as to build a</u>

The degree of success attained by the leaders of the Return to Zion is evidenced by the glorious period of the Second Temple, when the Temple was at the focus of life for the Pharisees, and the *Kohen Gadol* served as the head of a *de facto* Judean autonomy. Exceptional figures, such as the *Kohen Gadol* Shimon Ha-tzaddik, left their mark in the form of Talmudic legends describing their nobility and stature. However, this golden period, too, came to an end, when forces with extraneous motives seized control over the order of the service in the Temple. Thus the connection between Pharisee Judaism and the Temple with its service was once again weakened. Nevertheless, the profound mourning over the Destruction is extensively documented in many different places in rabbinical literature. One of the most powerful traditions in this context is the description of how some of the sages of that period felt unable to continue living their everyday lives, in view of the agonizing memory of a Temple service that was no more:

When the Second Temple was destroyed, ascetics proliferated amongst Israel, who would not eat meat and would not drink wine. Rabbi Yehoshua addressed them. He said to them, “My children – why do you not eat meat?” They said to him, “Shall we then eat meat?! Each day, the daily sacrifice was offered upon the altar, and now it is no more!” He said to them: “So we shall not eat. And why do you not drink wine?” They said to him, “Shall we then drink wine?! Each day wine was poured upon the altar, and now this is no more!” He said to them: “So we shall not drink.” And he said to them, “If it is so, then we shall not eat bread, for they used to bring the two loaves, and the showbread. We shall also not drink water, for they used to pour water on the festival of Sukkot. We shall not eat even figs and grapes, for they used to bring the first fruits of these species on Shavuot...” And they were silent. (*Tosefta, Sota 15*)

The history of the Temple reflects an ambivalent attitude on the part of the generations that lived with it. On the one hand, the Temple offered a tangible means of Divine service, which sat well with the forms of religious worship of the surrounding nations at the time of the *Mishkan* and during the First and Second Temple periods. On the other hand, the Temple service does not allow for religious release and giving oneself over to religious ecstasy. The Temple service involves rigid, detailed laws which, if not meticulously obeyed, lead to the descent of God's fire to consume the sinners. Even those who are careful in their obedience to all the rules of the service will not thereby become better servants of God unless they take care, at the same time, to nurture their moral qualities, and treat their immediate and more distant environment in accordance with religious rules which are no less important than the Temple service itself. Thus, the Temple service is extremely demanding, and the experience of God's closeness is possible only for those who meet the demanding standards.

A renewed longing for the Temple can arise if, alongside our wariness in the face of the strict laws surrounding it, we are able, like the leaders of the beginning of the Second Temple period, to mold the memory of the Temple around unquestionably important elements of Jewish national life which are possible only in the reality of a Temple. This vision is reflected in the memories of the psalmist:

I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the House of the Lord.” Our feet stood within your gates, Jerusalem. Jerusalem, built as a city that is joined together. There the tribes used to go up, the tribes of the Lord; a testimony for Israel, to give thanks to the Name of God. For there are set the thrones of justice, the thrones of the house of David. Seek peace for Jerusalem; those who love you will prosper. May there be peace within your walls and prosperity in your palaces. For the sake of my brothers and friends I will say now, May there be peace within you. For the sake of the House of the Lord our God I will seek your good. (*Tehillim 122*)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

[1] The 480 years of the *Mishkan* extend from the second year after the Exodus until the establishment of the First Temple, as recorded in *Melakhim* 6:1. The duration of the First and Second Temple periods are in accordance with *Avoda Zara 9a* and *Arakhin 12b*, contrary to the accepted view in historical research which maintains that the Second Temple stood for 585 years.

[2] Note, for example, the setting up of the twelve stones in Gilgal; the observance of Pesach in Gilgal; the decision as to the status of the Giv'onim; the lots for the inheritance of the land, and the like.

[3] Radak proposes that "Beit El" is not meant here as a geographical name, but rather to indicate the role of Shilo as the house of God: "And they came to Beit El" – it appears to me that this refers to Shilo, since that is where the Ark was. It is called 'Beit El' and 'Beit Hashem' in the same way as 'I am going to the house of God,' for nowhere do we find that they had brought the Ark to Beit El, which is Luz..." However, even Radak himself is not convinced of his own argument, as we see from the continuation: "We might also perhaps explain that the Ark had indeed been brought to Beit El, for Beit El is close to Shilo [...] and they brought it there in order to pray there, and God answered them [...]. But the verse does not mean that they transferred the Ark to there at this time, for the verse reads, 'for the Ark of God's Covenant was there in those days' – implying that the Ark was already stationed there, not that they brought it only at that time, while the Ark was usually located in Shilo [...]" (Radak, *Shoftim* 20:26).

[4] Note, for example, the idol of Mikha; the altar to Ba'al belonging to the family of Gid'on; the going astray after the *efod* which Gid'on created out of the spoils of war.

[5] "And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder standing on the ground, with the top reaching to the heavens; and behold, angels of God ascending and descending upon it... And he was afraid, and he said, 'How awesome is this place; this is none other but the House of God, and this is the gateway to heaven'" (*Bereishit* 28:12,17).

"And the donkey saw the angel of God standing on the way, his sword drawn in his hand, and the donkey turned aside from the way, and went into the field; and Bil'am struck the donkey to turn it to the way" (*Bamidbar* 22:23).

"And it happened, when Yehoshua was at Yericho, that he lifted his eyes and he saw, and behold, a man stood over against him, his sword drawn in his hand, and Yehoshua went to him and said to him, 'Are you for us or for our adversaries?' And he said, 'No, but I am captain of God's host; I have now come.' And Yehoshua fell upon his face to the ground, and he bowed down, and said to him: 'What does my lord say to his servant?' And the captain of God's host said to Yehoshua, 'Remove your shoe from your foot, for the place upon which you stand, is holy.' And Yehoshua did so" (*Yehoshua* 5:13-15).