

Shabbat Kodesh: A Weekly Reader from Kodesh Press

Parshat Terumah

THE TABERNACLE

Rabbi Hayyim Angel

When dedicating the First Temple, King Solomon expressed concern. If God is everywhere, how can He be contained in a specific place (I Kings 8:27)?

Rabbi Marc D. Angel explained that this manifestation is analogous to focusing the sun's rays with a magnifying glass. The sun does not change at all, but we experience a higher concentration of rays. Similarly, God's Presence is felt more directly in the Temple than elsewhere.

Some midrashim and later commentators argue that God commanded Israel to build the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) to address human limitations. Israel's building of the Golden Calf demonstrated that they were unable to handle a purely abstract relationship with God (Exodus Rabbah 33:3; Rashi). In a similar vein, Rambam (Guide for the Perplexed III:32) explains that the Tabernacle and the sacrificial service were steps in weaning the people away from paganism, but the goal was for people eventually to be able to worship God without any physical intermediaries.

In contrast, Ramban (on Exodus 25:2) explains that the Tabernacle was an ideal, symbolizing the daily re-enactment of the Revelation at Sinai. Both Sinai and the Tabernacle had a tripartite division of holiness: (1) The mountain's summit is analogous to the Temple's Holy of Holies, accessible only to Moses or the High Priest. (2) The middle of the mountain is analogous to the Temple's Holy section, accessible only to the elders or the priests. (3) The base of the mountain is analogous to the Temple courtyard, where all people could gather to experience God's revelation and service.

In addition to Ramban's association with the Revelation at Sinai, several midrashim ascertain connections between the Temple and the Garden of Eden. Ideally, Adam and Eve were supposed to follow God's commands and remain in the Garden. Instead, they sinned and were expelled, and God guarded the Tree of Life with Cherubim. Later on, the Torah replaced the magical Tree of Life with the Ark of the Covenant. Cherubim were placed above it, to guard it. This is the only other reference to Cherubim in the Torah, and the Book of

Proverbs refers to Torah and Wisdom as the Tree of Life: "She is a tree of life for those who grasp her" (Proverbs 3:18) (Midrash HaGadol Genesis 3:24).

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (To Heal a Fractured World, 2005, pp. 192–193) observes that the Torah takes 34 verses to describe the creation of the universe. It affords between 500 and 600 verses to describe the building of the Tabernacle. Of course God can construct a home for people. The ultimate question is whether people will construct a home for God.

TWO MEANINGS OF THE SHULHAN AND THE LEHEM HAPANIM

Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The Torah twice discusses the Table of the Showbread, the Shulhan Lehem HaPanim. In our parasha, one gets the impression that the Shulhan is the focus. Seven of the eight pesukim (25:23–29) about the table and the bread focus on the table. Only in the last pasuk (25:30) do we read, "And on the table you shall set the bread of display, to be before Me always." It seems that the main purpose of the table is to provide further proof of God's presence in the Mishkan. Like the Aron and the Menora, they give the structure the feel of a house. Seferno says, "After making the Aron, which is like a chair for the Divine Presence...He commanded the Shulhan and the Menora, just as one prepares for honored guests. This

ONKELOS CORNER

Rabbi Jack Abramowitz

5. reddened ram skins, multicolored skins, and acacia wood. (Shemot 25:5)

The Hebrew "tachash" has been variously identified as a seal, a narwhal, a giraffe, et al. Onkelos renders it "sasgona," meaning "it delights in its colors."

— *Adapted from The Complete Targum Onkelos*

is like the Shunamite woman who said, 'Let us...place a bed, a table, a chair, and a lampstand' (II Kings 4:10).'

However, the Shulhan is revisited in Sefer Vayikra, and there it is treated differently. We learn, to our surprise, that not one loaf of bread but "twelve loaves" are to be put "on the pure table...to be arranged upon it" (Lev. 24:5-6). This is reminiscent of the shoulder straps of the hoshen, the breastplate of the kohen: "Then take two lazuli stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel. Six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth" (Ex. 28:9-10). The stones are described as "stones for remembrance of the Israelite people, whose names Aharon shall carry upon his two shoulder-pieces for remembrance before the Lord" (28:12). Similarly, the ritual of the loaves is a remembrance before God: "With each row you shall place pure frankincense, which is to be a token offering for the bread, as an offering by fire to the Lord. He shall arrange them before the Lord regularly every Shabbat day. It is a commitment for all time on the part of the Israelites" (Lev. 24:8). The bread does not symbolize food for God, but the food of the Jewish people, blessed by God every week. It does not come as a surprise that the lehem hapanim is not sacrificed, but eaten by the kohanim, as representatives of the people: "They shall belong to Aharon and his sons, who shall eat them in the sacred precinct; for they are his as most holy things from the Lord's offerings by fire, a due for all time" (Lev. 24:9).

The Shulhan, like other furnishings of the Mishkan, embodies the dual nature of the place. On the one hand, the Mishkan is the symbolic house of God, where the Divine Presence rests among the Jews. On the other hand, it is a place where the Jews are remembered before God. There God recalls them and their needs, and blesses them.

MAIMONIDES AND NAHMANIDES' UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEMPLE

Rabbi Alec Goldstein

But the custom which was in those days general among all men, and the general mode of worship in which the Israelites were brought up, consisted in sacrificing animals in those temples which contained certain images, to bow down to those images, and to burn incense before them; religious and ascetic persons were in those days the persons that were devoted to the service in the temples erected to the stars, as has been explained by us. It was in accordance with the wisdom and plan

of God, as displayed in the whole Creation, that He did not command us to give up and to discontinue all these manners of service; for to obey such a commandment it would have been contrary to the nature of man, who generally cleaves to that to which he is used; it would in those days have made the same impression as a prophet would make at present if he called us to the service of God and told us in His name, that we should not pray to Him, not fast, not seek His help in time of trouble; that we should serve Him in thought, and not by any action. For this reason God allowed these kinds of service to continue; He transferred to His service that which had formerly served as a worship of created beings, and of things imaginary and unreal, and commanded us to serve Him in the same manner; namely, to build unto Him a temple; e.g., "And they shall make Me a sanctuary" (Exod. 25:8); to have the altar erected to His name, e.g., "An altar of earth shall you make for Me" (Exod. 20:21); to offer the sacrifices to Him, e.g., "If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord" (Lev. 1:2), to bow down to Him, and to burn incense before Him. He has forbidden to do any of these things to any other being, e.g., "One who sacrifices to gods, except the Lord alone, shall be destroyed" (Exod. 22:19); "For you shall bow down to no other God" (Exod. 34:14). He selected priests for the service in the Temple, e.g., "And they shall minister unto Me in the priest's office" (Exod. 28:41). He made it obligatory that certain gifts, called the gifts of the Levites and the priests, should be assigned to them for their maintenance while they are engaged in the service of the temple and its sacrifices. By this Divine plan it was effected that the traces of idolatry were blotted out, and the truly great principle of our faith, the Existence and Unity of God, was firmly established; this result was thus obtained without deterring or confusing the minds of the people by the abolition of the service to which they were accustomed and which alone was familiar to them (*Guide* 3:32).

NOTES: Nahmanides does not believe the tabernacle was remedial, but rather optimal: "They are now holy, in that they are worthy that there be amongst them a Sanctuary through which He makes His Divine Glory dwell among them. Therefore He first commanded concerning the Tabernacle, so that He have amongst them a house dedicated to His name, from where He would speak with Moses and command the children of Israel. Thus the main purpose of the Tabernacle was to contain a place in which the Divine Glory rests, this being the ark..." (on Exod. 25:1).