

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudei, 5781
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 ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov
 Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766

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 Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765

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DEDICATED BY
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by
Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

Vayakhel

THE INTERNAL SANCTUARY – ARK AND ALTAR

The external structure of the Sanctuary parallels the internal structure of the Jew. The functions of the vessels parallel functions of the soul. The ‘internal ark’ is Torah study; the ‘internal altar’ is mitzvos. Learning Torah draws down G-d’s Essence; performing mitzvos invests G-d’s Essence in the lowest realm. Building our inner Sanctuary adds a brick to, and foreshadows the building of, the third Sanctuary by Moshiach.

This week’s Torah reading describes the construction of the Tabernacle and the various items – such as the altar and menorah – placed within it. One such object was the aron – the ark in which the Ten Commandments were placed. Let’s consider this in light of the well-known interpretation of the verse, “Make Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell in them.” The command to build a Sanctuary uses the plural pronoun, “them.” Grammatically, of course, the verse should say, “Make Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell in it.” Since G-d says He will dwell “within them,” our Sages explain that “them” refers to the Jewish people. By making the Sanctuary, the Divine Presence will dwell within each and every Jew.

Accordingly, the concept of a Sanctuary is two-fold. On the one hand, it refers to a physical structure, whether the Tabernacle in the wilderness or the Temple in Jerusalem. Here, sacrifices were brought. All the various utensils – the altar, the menorah, etc. – served to assist the process. Through the sacrifices and accompanying procedures, G-d’s presence became manifest in the Sanctuary.

On the other hand, the Sanctuary is an internal structure, the conduct and thought of the individual. Every Jew can build

a personal, inner Sanctuary; there, too, the Divine Presence will dwell. By analogy, what exists in the outer, physical Sanctuary – the building and its utensils – also exists within every Jew. Once we understand the function and purpose of a particular item in the Temple, we can discover its equivalent within ourselves.

This parallel teaches us an important lesson. We know that Moshiach will rebuild the Temple. Indeed, that, along with gathering in the exiles, identifies Moshiach with absolute certainty. Surely the lesson of our Sages extends this far: the Divine Presence dwells within the internal Sanctuary of every Jew, just as it dwells within the physical structure of the Temple. An individual's efforts to sanctify himself, to internalize the holiness of the Divine Presence, parallel the vessels and activities of the Temple, as prescribed by the Torah. What happens internally, to the individual Jew, corresponds to what happens externally, to the Temple. The Temple was destroyed and the Jewish people are in exile. In some way, our internal Sanctuary can be destroyed. But, just as the Temple in Jerusalem can and will be rebuilt, so too we can reconstruct our internal sanctuaries.

In fact, it may be said that by rebuilding our internal sanctuaries, by awakening the spark of Moshiach within us, we act as a collective catalyst for Moshiach, bringing Redemption into the open. By enabling the Divine Presence to dwell openly within us, together we cause the revelation of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the Temple.

With this in mind, let's look more closely at the function of the ark and the altar. In some ways, these are the two central vessels of the Sanctuary. The ark housed the Torah; but through the sacrifices, the Jewish people demonstrated their relationship and subservience to G-d. Sacrifice is a prototypical mitzvah. After all, "mitzvah" means both commandment and connection – and both mitzvos and sacrifices are man's initiative to become closer

and connect to G-d. Thus, through the mitzvos – exemplified by the sacrificial service – the Divine Presence came to dwell in the Temple.

We can speak of two places: first, the Sanctuary itself, the place of mitzvos – as embodied in the sacrifices – where the Divine Presence dwelled; second, the ark, the place of the Ten Commandments, where the Torah dwelled.

What is the difference between the altar and the ark, between mitzvos and Torah? Of equal importance, how do we metaphorically rebuild the ark and altar within ourselves? By reconstructing our “inner Temple,” so to speak, we prepare our part of the world for the coming of Moshiach.

Generally speaking, a Jew is united with G-d in one of two ways: through learning Torah or through performing mitzvos. When learning, once we thoroughly and completely understand the subject, we become completely and totally united with the Torah. The Jew and Torah become one entity.

On the other hand, when we do a mitzvah we perform G-d’s Will. The person becomes a “chariot” or “vehicle.” However, the individual is not united with the mitzvah. The mitzvah and the Jew remain two separate things.

The Sanctuary must contain both Torah and mitzvos – both the ark and the altar. We must remember why the Sanctuary was built – to provide a dwelling place for the Divine Presence. This dwelling, this Sanctuary – whether the physical structure in Jerusalem or the internal structure of heart, mind and action – has two aspects. First, G-dliness must be openly revealed, demonstrating the inner unity of the Divine Presence and its Sanctuary. This is the aspect of Torah. Second, the Divine Presence must dwell in the lower realm, the place of the physical. This is the aspect of mitzvos, which are clothed in material objects.

This distinction between Torah and mitzvos – between the ark and the altar – derives from their fundamental nature. As the *Zohar* declares, Torah and G-d are one. On the other hand, mitzvos are called the “limbs of the king.” The limbs of the body are subservient to the soul, but are not united with it. So when a Jew learns Torah, he becomes attached to and unified with G-dliness. When a Jew does a mitzvah, although this is G-d’s Will and he is subservient to G-d, he and G-dliness do not merge into a single existence.

We can now understand why our task requires both Torah and mitzvos. In order to make this physical world a dwelling place for G-dliness, both aspects are necessary. Obviously, with the coming of Moshiach the purpose of Creation will be realized. Just as obviously, Moshiach cannot come and build the Third Temple in Jerusalem until we have built our inner Temple. Doing so entails constructing both an ark and an altar.

In other words, in order to transform this lowest of worlds into a dwelling place for the very Essence of G-dliness, two things are necessary: Something to draw down G-d’s Essence, and something to insure that G-d’s Essence is drawn into the lowest realm.

Learning Torah draws down G-d’s Essence since G-d and Torah are one. But Torah by itself remains higher than the world; it does not enclothe G-d’s Essence within physical objects. On the other hand, mitzvos, which must be performed with something physical – leather for tefillin, parchment for a mezuzah etc. – purifies and refines the object, drawing G-dliness within the material substance.

Of course, there are times when learning Torah and doing mitzvos don’t seem very easy. Indeed, anyone can transgress a commandment, regardless of his level of learning or observance. When the soul enters the body, it faces temptations and distractions. This hazard even a great scholar encounters. What, then, can be

said of the ignorant Jew or the one steeped in transgressions? What protection – what sanctuary – does he have? With what will he build a Temple?

Our Sages tell us that every Jew is as full of mitzvos as a pomegranate is full of seeds. We must recognize that our sins and transgressions are temporary and external. A Jew's real existence is the Torah and mitzvos he or she possesses. Through our learning – and learning leads to action – we construct, brick by brick, as it were, our internal Sanctuary. And thus with every mitzvah, we add a brick to the Third Temple. When Moshiach comes, we will see our handiwork.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 16, pp. 434-442)

Pekudai

COUNTING TO REDEMPTION

Counting connects the last Torah reading of Exodus to the first. Although the theme of Exodus is Redemption, it begins with an accounting of Jacob and his family and ends with an accounting of the donations and vessels of the Sanctuary. By connecting counting and Redemption, the limited and the limitless, the Torah reading teaches that the true goal is to reveal the Infinite within the finite.

This, the last Torah reading of the book of *Exodus*, starts with an accounting of the contributions towards the Tabernacle, then details its vessels and utensils, concluding with its construction. The culmination of the process was the descent of the Divine Presence: “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the L-rd filled the Tabernacle.” So powerful was the Divine Presence, that even Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting.

Since Moses refrained from entering, G-d had to call him. Thus begins the book of *Leviticus*, with G-d calling Moses, inviting him inside the Tent of Meeting to hear about the sacrifices. The transition makes sense: the last half of *Exodus* describes the construction of the Tabernacle, and *Leviticus* begins by defining the sacrifices offered there.

However, *Exodus* doesn't end with this successful raising of the Tabernacle, indicated by the descent of the Divine Presence. Rather, it concludes by explaining the role of the Cloud of Glory. The presence or removal of this Cloud determined the movements of the Jewish people. When it rested on the Tabernacle, they encamped. When it was removed, they began to journey. The placement of the Cloud determined when they wandered and when they rested.

This interlude seems out of place. Apparently, the text flows smoothly without it – from building the Tabernacle in *Exodus* to using it in *Leviticus*. Why interrupt that? Besides, later on, in Numbers, the Torah describes all the journeys of the children of Israel. Why give an abbreviated version here, out of order?

There's another question: What connection does the end of *Exodus* have with the beginning? In general, the book of *Exodus* concerns the Redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. Yet it begins with a list of names and ends with an accounting and inventory of the Tabernacle. In fact, the Hebrew name for the book, *Shmos*, means "names." The name of the last Torah reading, *Pekudai*, means accounting.

So *Exodus*, which focuses on the Redemption, begins and ends with numbering – whether the names of the children of Jacob or the money and material given to the Tabernacle. Accordingly, the concept of Redemption is connected with the concept of numbering.

But these seem to be contradictory concepts. Counting indicates limitation: there is precisely this amount of money, this number of people, etc. Redemption, on the other hand, indicates a departure from limits; one is not restricted by particular boundaries, physical or spiritual.

This paradox of combining the numbered and the innumerable we find within the two Torah readings as well. The first Torah reading names the children of Israel who went into Egypt, then says they multiplied and increased exceedingly, as if without limit. The last Torah reading begins with an accounting of the vessels of and donations to the Tabernacle, but concludes with the indwelling of the Divine Presence. G-d, the Infinite, comes to reside in the confines and structure of the Tabernacle.

So, the content of the first and last Torah readings of *Exodus* concern counting, a limitation, while the book as a whole concerns

Redemption, the limitless. And this paradoxical combination of the finite and infinite, of the numbered and the innumerable, is also found **within** the first and last Torah readings.

This pattern of the book of *Exodus* serves as a paradigm. The purpose of both the individual and of creation as a whole is Redemption, a level without limitations on spiritual growth and awareness. We must rise above the measurements and boundaries of the world. But this must be done **within** the world, within the confines and borders of physical existence. There must be a conjunction and union of the finite and the infinite, the limited and the limitless. The book of *Exodus*, which provides the prototype for Redemption and teaches the concept of Moshiach, exemplifies this fusion of opposites, of the infinite within the finite.

This strange truth about reality can be viewed a different way: Creation occurred because G-d desired a dwelling place in the lower realms. This requires two things: First, an actual **dwelling**, a place of G-dliness. Second, there must be a **lower realm**. The dwelling must be located in this physical realm, the lowest of all possible worlds.

The practical expression of these two aspects is the difference between the Jewish people and the world. The dwelling place of G-dliness is the Jewish soul, since, as the *Zohar* states, The Holy One, Blessed be He and Israel are entirely one. Where is this dwelling? Where are Jewish souls found? In the physical world, the lower realm. When a Jew is a proper dwelling, then the world does not prevent a revelation of G-dliness. Rather, G-dliness can now also reside within the domain of the physical.

The book of *Exodus* reveals that the world was created "for the sake of Torah and the sake of Israel." It begins by counting the children of Israel, to show that they are united with and beloved by G-d. It concludes with the construction of the Tabernacle, the utilization of the physical world for a spiritual purpose.

This explains the connection between the beginning of *Exodus* and its conclusion. Redemption is the process of bringing the Divine Presence into the physical world, of revealing the Infinite within the finite. Hence, the connection between numbering the innumerable: At first, the children of Israel are named. But they are not limited to the seventy souls that entered Egypt, for the children of Israel, one with the Infinite, will be as countless as the stars. At the end, the articles associated with the Tabernacle are counted. The physicality of the world is emphasized. But because the Tabernacle is built by the Jewish people, the material is transformed into the spiritual, and the Divine Presence dwells there – openly.

What of our original question, why *Exodus* concludes with a digest of Israel's journeys? Is this not an interruption between the Tabernacle of *Exodus* and the sacrifices of *Leviticus*?

Actually, no. The sacrifices of *Leviticus* parallel the Cloud-directed journeys of *Exodus*. Both fulfill the purpose of the Tabernacle, built to house the Divine Presence. The Tabernacle was not a goal in itself; building it provided the means to transform the entire world into a Divine dwelling. G-dliness penetrates the world in one of two ways: by bringing the physical into the Tabernacle or by bringing the Tabernacle to a place currently devoid of the Divine Presence. Sacrifices subjugate the animal and materialistic to the spiritual. Journeying through the wilderness extends the dominion of holiness to locations as yet unredeemed.

Like our ancestors, we must be prepared to travel among the nations, into a spiritual desert. For the wanderings in the desert allude to the wandering among the nations during exile. Our travels in exile purify the environment, transforming the wilderness of the nations into a residence for the Tabernacle, a place where sacrifices can be offered.

The removal of the cloud from above the Tabernacle metaphorically implies a concealment of G-d's presence, a darkness in the world,

even a personal darkness. Yet when G-d's presence is removed, elevated beyond perception, it is also time to move forward with our Divine service. True, while traveling, while in exile, we have no direct perception of G-dliness. But only by transporting the Tabernacle can we reach our destination, bring the Redemption. For we do not roam aimlessly through exile, but move inexorably forward towards the days of Moshiach.

As in those days, when the Cloud of Glory rested on the Tabernacle at journey's end, so too will we, along with the world transformed by our mitzvos, see G-dliness revealed in the Third Holy Temple.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 16, pp. 475-480)

IN LOVING MEMORY OF A DEAR FRIEND
Horav Avrohom Aharon ben Reb Yitzchok ע"ה
Plotkin

Passed away on Shabbat Parshat Nasso, 14 Sivan, 5780

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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On the occasion of his birthday, 18 Adar, 5781

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