

**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

**PARASHAT NASO**

**The Mishkan and the Nazir**

**By Rav Yonatan Grossman**

At the end of this week's parasha we read about the sacrifices of the Princes which were offered at the dedication of the Mishkan, an event that marks the completion of its construction. In the second half of the book of Shemot we read about the building of the Mishkan and its components, and in the book of Vayikra we read about its dedication culminating on the eighth day, when the heavenly fire descended, signifying Hashem's 'entry' into the edifice. The Book of Bemidbar now contributes a new perspective concerning this dedication - the role of the entire people.

In general, we might say that the book of Shemot describes the manifestation of God's presence, making God the protagonist of the account. In fact, the book concludes that "the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and Hashem's glory filled the Mishkan." (40:34). The book of Vayikra related the story of the Mishkan's sanctification, and stresses the service of the Kohanim. Thus, the text relates that the Kohanim had the most important role to play during the days of dedication, and Hashem's presence descended on the eighth day to the exterior ALTAR, the focal point of the Kohanim's service. The verse states that "A fire went forth from before Hashem and consumed the offerings on the altar; all the people saw and cried out, and fell upon their faces." Our section in the book of Bemidbar now adds the wider national aspect, relating the story of the offerings of the Princes of the tribes of Israel. These individuals represent the people, as the verse states: "The Princes of Israel came near, the heads of their clans; They were the Princes of the tribes, the ones who oversaw the census." (Bemidbar 7:2). This verse provides three descriptions of the Princes (the heads of their clans/the Princes of the tribes/the overseers of the census), all of which stress their communal role and relate to their capacity as representatives of the people.

Of course, the completion of the Mishkan is related in this book for another reason, and this is in fact the main one for its inclusion. The book of Bemidbar describes the journey to the land of Israel, after the people take leave of Mount Sinai. This journey

is very much a function of the Mishkan, since it is the movement of this building which determines the moment that the people are to break camp.

"When the Mishkan was completed, the cloud covered it by day, and at night a fire-like appearance covered it until morning... The people of Israel would begin a journey according to the lifting of the cloud off of the Mishkan, and they would set up camp wherever the cloud came to stop. According to Hashem's command they journeyed, and according to His command they camped, and as long as the cloud remained on the Mishkan they camped. If the cloud remained over the Mishkan for a long time, the people would observe Hashem's charge and not journey. Sometimes, the cloud would remain over the Mishkan for only a few days and then the people would journey and camp according to Hashem's will..." (9:15-23).

All this demonstrates that part of the function of the Mishkan was to signal the beginning of journeying and camping. This is the context for the appearance of the Mishkan in Bemidbar, and by relating the account of the Princes' sacrifices, here the story of the Mishkan is completed.

This invites us to read the parallel account in chapter 40 of Sefer Shemot, which also describes the dedication of the Mishkan, albeit from a different perspective. Before the account of the Princes' offerings, the parasha relates the blessings which the Kohanim are to bestow upon the people:

"Speak to Aharon and his sons saying: Thus shall you bless the people of Israel, say to them:

'May Hashem bless you and keep you.

May Hashem cause his countenance to shine upon you and give you grace.

May Hashem lift up his countenance to you and grant you peace.'

They shall place my name upon the people of Israel and I shall bless them." (6:22-27)

If we relate this passage which deals with the erection of the Mishkan to the parallel accounts recorded in the previous books, this will assist in resolving a serious difficulty that emerges from the account of the eighth day of the dedication, as related in the book of Vayikra: "Aharon lifted up his hands to the people and blessed them.

He then descended from having offered the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace-offering. Moshe and Aharon came to the Mishkan and came out to bless the people, and Hashem's glory was revealed to the multitude." (VaYikra 9:22-23).

Aharon's blessing of the people appears in conjunction with the offering of the eighth day sacrifices. What exactly was that blessing? If we read the commandment in our parasha as the background to the sacrifices of the Princes and as an integral part of the account of the dedication of the Mishkan, this cryptic blessing becomes immediately comprehensible. Moshe commanded Aharon to bless the people with the Priestly Benediction, and this was the self-same blessing that he utilized to bless the people on the eighth day of the dedication. Rashi, in fact, says just that: "He blessed them" – this refers to the priestly benediction: May Hashem bless you etc, May Hashem cause his countenance etc, May Hashem lift up his countenance (commentary to Vayikra 9:22).

According to the above explanation, the general outline of the Book of Bemidbar can now be traced: First, there is a census of the people (last week, we saw how this census was a military one in preparation for the war of conquest). The text then goes on to describe the role of the Leviim in the journey. This week, we read of the sacrifices of the Princes presented at the dedication of the Mishkan, and this forms the background for the description of the Mishkan's role in the journeys of the people. Next Shabbat, we shall finally read about the journey from Mt. Sinai that commences in the direction of the land of Canaan.

This order is quite clear and appears free of textual difficulties. However, we have overlooked a collection of mitzvot that is to be found at the beginning of the parasha. Between the account of the Leviim's role and the offering of the Princes is a collection of various laws. At first glance, these laws appear to be completely out of context, unconnected to the description of the journey to the land of Canaan. The commandments are:

1. The sending away of the Temaim (ritually unfit) from the camp
2. The guilt-offering associated with theft
3. Sota
4. Nazir

What is the connection of these mitzvot to the journey of the people of Israel in the wilderness, and why are they related specifically here?

The first mitzva can be explained locally: those people who are ritually unfit are to be sent away from the camp during the course of the journey in the wilderness. Why is this law related especially here? The fundamental law of sending away the Temaim was already mentioned in the book of Vayikra, where we read of the distancing from

the camp of the Tzarua. There, the related laws of the Zav, the Zava, the Nida, and the Yoledet were also spelled out. Why then, is the law of sending out Temaim not related in the book of Vayikra where it naturally belongs with all of the other pertinent details?

It seems to me that all these laws describe a closed unit, dealing with various social spheres that have an indirect relationship to the Mishkan.

The first law – the sending away of the Temaim – deals with an entire society that has Hashem in its midst: "Lest they defile their camp in which I dwell" (5:3). This law seeks to preserve the spiritual and religious wholeness of the camp. Therefore, the Tamei (who has come into contact with death, directly or otherwise) is not to dwell within it, since Hashem, the source of life, also dwells within this self-same camp. Thus, this mitzva stresses the unity of society, deals with its religious and spiritual aspects.

The second of the laws – the guilt offering of theft – also deals with the social dimension of the nation but here the emphasis is not on the spiritual, but rather on the ethical and moral aspect of the relationship between people. "If a man or a woman commits any of the transgressions that people do..." (5:6); in other words, transgressions which are perpetrated against one's fellow. Here, as well, the law is a function of God's presence in the camp. He is at once one of the parties 'harmed' by the theft (or by the false oath which the perpetrator takes in the aftermath of the theft) - "to commit a trespass against Hashem" - as well as the one who rectifies the wrong. "If the man cannot return the stolen article to the victim, then it shall go to Hashem, to the kohen, in addition to the ram of atonement which shall atone for him." (6:8). Thus, this second law also deals with the general social welfare of the nation, again as reflected through the prism of the Mishkan. In contrast to the first law, though, this command deals with societal relationships within the community.

The third law, the Sota, consists of a trial imposed on a woman suspected of adultery, and seems to belong to an entirely different realm. Here, it is the family unit under scrutiny and not the societal one. The text addresses the husband's charge that his wife has been disloyal to him, and provides a means of ascertaining the veracity of his suspicions. The entire process of the trial takes place within the confines of the Mishkan: "The husband shall bring his wife to the kohen... the kohen shall stand her before Hashem." (5:15-16). This third law, therefore, although concerned with the family unit and the relationship between husband and wife, also is addressed in light of its connection to the Mishkan.

The fourth law, that of the Nazir, shifts our concerns to a personal and intimate level. Here, it is not society being scrutinized or even the family unit, but rather the

individual person. Here, the Torah allows a man or a woman to take on personal vows, and here too, at the conclusion of the "days of naziriteship" the person must present himself at the Mishkan, to offer their sacrifices and to shave their hair. Again, the spiritual world of the individual is presented as a function of its connection to the Mishkan.

It seems to me that in order to understand the placement of these laws here, we must bear in mind that the Torah is addressing the various spheres of human life (society in a religious framework, society in a moral framework, the family, the individual) and emphasizing the centrality of the Mishkan in all of them. This collection of laws is thus a fitting introduction to what follows: the dedication of the Mishkan and the journey that it initiates.

However, this explanation is not sufficient. We must still search for the essential purpose of relating these commands HERE specifically. Let us arrange these laws according to a chiasmic structure:

1. the distancing of the Tamei from the camp
2. the guilt offering – "to commit a trespass against Hashem"

2a) the Sota – "she trespassed against him"

1a) Nazir

The connection between 2 and 2a is reinforced by the Torah's choice of parallel expression – 'to commit a trespass' ("lim'ol ma'al"). The Torah thus presents two consecutive cases of trespass: in the first case, one trespasses against one's fellow in one's community, and in the second the trespass is against one's life partner. Both of these crimes impact, first and foremost, upon another individual (the thief upon the victim, and the wife upon her husband). At the same time, the perpetrators also trespass against Hashem. With respect to the theft, this is stated explicitly: "to commit a trespass against Hashem" (the Sages derived from here that the thief also swore a false oath in Hashem's name). In the case of the Sota, the violation relates to "You shall not commit adultery."

What is more surprising is the connection between the Tamei sent out of the camp and the Nazir. Of course, these are actually two forms of ISOLATION from the camp, one in a negative light (the Tamei) and the other in a positive light (the Nazir). We send the Tamei out of the camp against his will, since Hashem's presence is in the camp and cannot abide with the Tamei. The Nazir, in contrast, freely accepts isolation from humanity upon himself. He cannot participate in moments of communal sadness and mourning (being charged to refrain from contact with death), or in moments of

communal joy and celebration (since he is prohibited to partake of wine). He must let his hair grow, as if to declare that he is not part of the society at large. We regard the Nazir as a person who has chosen a life (or a period) of voluntary isolation in order to foster personal spiritual development.

These two individuals, the Tamei and the Nazir, are separated from the usual communal life. The Tamei has fallen from his spiritual level (though it may have been inadvertent), and the Nazir seeks to rise to a higher spiritual level. They both reflect non-normative cases of individuals who have withdrawn from social life and community intercourse.

We are now in a position to answer why these commands appear specifically here. The first connection, as we have stated, is to the Mishkan. Here though, we are not presented with concepts of holy and profane, with the focus on the service on the altar as was the emphasis in the Book of Vayikra. Here, the connection to the Mishkan is expressed in terms of the Mishkan's ability to maintain proper modes of living outside of the edifice, within the camp as a whole. The Mishkan affords the opportunity for a person who has transgressed against his fellow to achieve atonement, and also allows for the maintenance of the family unit (2 – 2a).

In consonance with this, the Mishkan maintains the sanctity of the camp as a whole. Unlike the Book of Vayikra where only the individuals who enter its precincts are addressed, here the typical Israelite can also conduct himself like a kohen. In fact the term used to describe the nazir as one "who wears the crown of his God upon his head" is very reminiscent of the description of the High Priest "who has the crown of the anointing oil of his God upon his head." Thus, the camp as a whole must maintain a certain base level of sanctity, and the individual Israelite is able to approach the status of the Kohen Gadol by accepting the relevant commands of the Torah. This also explains other parallels between the nazir and the Kohen Gadol, such as the prohibition of coming into contact with death, as well as the dedication ceremony that the nazir undertakes at the completion of his term which resembles the dedication of the Mishkan, etc.

The purpose of the commands that appear in this week's parasha is therefore to expand the role of the Mishkan, so that it addresses the life of the typical Israelite who resides in the camp. Even though such a person does not minister at the altar, nevertheless the Mishkan has an active role to play in his life, impacting on its communal, familial, and personal aspects. These commands are presented here on the eve of the journey into the wilderness, to impress upon us the role of the Mishkan in the daily life of the person in Israel. Here, the Mishkan has a central role to play in the achievement of communal perfection of the Jewish people, as well as in the personal spiritual growth of all Israelites, even those who are not kohanim!

(Translated by Michael Hattin)

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