

PARSHAS TERUMAH

תשפ"ב

We now begin a series of four parshiyos which describe the building of the Mishkon. We need to understand that every word of the Torah is measured. We deduce countless halachos from each letter of the Torah. When it comes to the Mishkon, the Torah spends much space on it. There is what to learn from every letter. What is so important about this topic, that the Torah devoted four parshiyos to it?

Moshe came down from Har Sinai for the third time on Yom Kippur when Klal Yisroel received full atonement for the sin of the golden calf. Now life begins anew. Hashem instructs Klal Yisroel to build a Mikdosh for Him, so He can dwell among them – in the hearts of every one of them. It is a very strange statement. If Hashem is telling them to build a Mishkon, isn't the point to dwell in the Mishkon?

There is a midrash which explains that the entire concept of building a Mishkon for Hashem is difficult. Moshe asked Hashem – how can a mere physical structure made by Klal Yisroel contain Hashem's presence if all the Heavens cannot contain You? Hashem is infinite and beyond any physical limitations of time and space! This is what Shlomo Hamelech remarked about the Beis Hamikdosh as well. Hashem responded that all I need are 20 boards in the north and 20 boards in the south and I will contract My Shechinah there and dwell in the hearts of the people.

True, Hashem is beyond time and space. But at certain times of the week and the year, like Shabbos and Yom Tov, and in certain places, Hashem makes it easier for human beings to connect to Him. This is essential that there are times and places that are special and different than the ordinary – they have kedushoh because we connect to Hashem in a more intense way at those times and in those places.

Shabbos is a day of menuchah and kedushoh. The Rosh points out that Shabbos wasn't given the quality of simchah – it is not a day of social gathering like Yom Tov and Chol Hamoed, where there is a din of simchah – when it is permitted to carry. Shabbos is designed to be a day where people focus on their avodas Hashem and not to go out and about to socialize.

There is a strange concept today called "mekomos hakedoshim" in Israel, which is an absurdity. The mishnah says the world has 10 levels of kedushoh – going up level by level as you get closer and closer to the Kodosh Hakodoshim. These are the places where Hashem makes Himself available. It is essential for us because it centralizes our avodah and concentrates our tefillos in one place. Even if we can't physically be in the Beis Hamikdosh, we face in that direction and imagine ourselves to be there in our minds. Shlomo Hamelech says all the tefillos in the world are directed towards the Beis Hamikdosh before they go up to shomayim.

The Rambam writes that one of the reasons we face the Beis Hamikdosh, no matter where we are on the globe, is so that all Klal Yisroel face the same place. We all have one joint tefillah – wherever a Jew may be. We are united in our tefillah.

The sanctity of the Beis Hamikdosh is replicated to some extent in our shuls and places which we set aside as special domains which are dedicated exclusively for avodas Hashem. It gives these places kedushoh and Hashem makes Himself more accessible there. It is easy to connect to Him there more intensely and our tefillos are elevated to a higher level.

The construction of the Mishkon: Klal Yisroel are instructed to construct

items precisely as Hashem described, and at the same time there is tremendous creativity – very intricate designs in fabrics and ornate precious metal works and embroidery. It required tremendous talent and ingenuity to construct these vessels and designs. Some people think creativity means being unrestricted and spontaneous – chasing every wild and crazy idea that pops in your head. It isn't true. In Torah, creativity means something else. We are given precise boundaries and limitations, and we express our creativity within those bounds and guidelines.

Chazal asked a question: where did Klal Yisroel get the knowledge to make such delicate works of fine craftsmanship? While they were in Egypt, the Jews were busy with coarse labor in the fields or dealing with bricks and mortar. They never worked with gold and silver and fine wool and linen! The gemara answers that Betzalel was given the wisdom of the Torah of tziruf osios. Embedded in the Torah there is the wisdom of all creation. Betzalel knew all these chochmos from within the Torah and he was able to transmit it to the chachmei lev. Who were the chachmei lev? Those who have deep understanding and could absorb the subtle wisdom embedded in the Torah.

When you understand the Torah on the deepest levels, you can understand every aspect of this world. Unfortunately, this deep understanding of the Torah is not accessible to us nowadays. But here and there, we are given glimpses of this wisdom of the world from the Torah. The midrash asks – why did the Torah include the exact dimensions of the teivoh that Noach built? Why couldn't Hashem write that Noach built the teivoh according to Hashem's instructions? The midrash answers that the Torah is giving us a fact about the world. These dimensions of the teivoh are in fact the most sea-worthy dimensions of any type of sea vessel.

It is an incredible statement by Chazal. None of them went to engineering school to study maritime engineering. Chazal knew this from the Torah. All true wisdom of the world is embedded somewhere in the Torah. Sometimes the Torah makes this a little more apparent. But everything else about the world is in the Torah as well. Over the past 200 years people have been doing maritime experiments in shipyards all over the world. They found that the dimensions of the teivoh are in fact the most sea-worthy.

Similarly, Betzalel and the chachmei lev got the chochmah of how to build the Mishkon and all its vessels and embroidery work from the Torah. But the Ramban still had a problem. You can have all the understanding in the world, but you still need hands-on training in order to get the mechanical skills and experience needed to actually make such fine, delicate works of craftsmanship. How did they get these skills? The Ramban gives a fascinating answer. He says that when you sincerely dedicate yourself to doing avodas Hashem, you will be successful without any formal training.

This is based on another idea of the Ramban in his work on emunah and bitachon. He tries to define bitachon. It can't be that I just trust that Hashem will do whatever I desire and it will magically materialize. He quotes the posuk which says when you are sincerely trying to achieve a goal in avodas Hashem and you are dedicated to doing it and you have a realistic chance of succeeding, Hashem will guarantee that you will be successful. But when it comes to material needs, there is no guarantee that you will get what you want just by relying on Hashem that you will get it.

Here too in the case of the Mishkon, there are two levels. The wisdom of how to construct the Mishkon out of the materials that were necessary, and the technical expertise of how to do the actual craftsmanship. The knowledge came from the Torah, and the skills came from their sincerity and dedication. They trusted Hashem to help them fulfill His will by giving them the skills they needed. How skilled were they in the end? The gemara in Shabbos says these chachmei lev were such expert weavers that they took the wool and spun it into thread and fabric while still connected to the body of the living sheep and goats! How many people know how to do this today?

Another point that needs to be made. If you go through the order of the parshiyos, you see that the aron kodesh is commanded first. Why is the aron so critical that it has to be first? It is because this was the vessel into which the luchos were put, and it had a shelf inside for the sefer Torah that Moshe himself wrote. What does this teach us? Building a place for Hashem's Shechinoh, there are all kinds of vessels in the Mishkon symbolizing the different forms of avodas Hashem. But there will not be real hashroas haShechinoh without Torah. Torah is the primary form of connecting to Hashem and it comes first – before all the other ways.

Another important characteristic of the aron – four rings were placed for poles to be inserted for carrying the aron. I can understand the need for poles to be inserted when the Mishkon is dismantled and the aron needed to be carried. But the verse says explicitly that you cannot take these poles out of the rings of the aron at any time – even while resting in the Kodesh Hakodoshim. There is an issur in the Torah to remove them, ever! Why?

It is to teach us that the Torah is inherently portable – it needs to be taken everywhere. Torah must always be taken along to wherever a Jew may find himself. Torah doesn't rely on being in any particular place on the globe in order to be relevant to us. Torah is the center of our lives, wherever we are in the world. This also explains why the Torah was given at Har Sinai specifically – in the middle of the desert. We don't even know where Har Sinai is! This is because it's not important where the Torah was given. The Torah isn't tied down to the place it was given. It goes anywhere the Jew goes and dictates the values and goals of his life in every society and every environment.

Chazal tell us that in the second Beis Hamikdosh, there was no aron kodesh. Why? When they realized that the first Beis Hamikdosh was about to be destroyed, the aron and the luchos were hidden in some secret underground cavern under Har Habayis. Why? The luchos, the sefer Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu have to be uniquely in our domain. It could not be taken into golus. They could not fall into non-Jewish hands. This is why the second Beis Hamikdosh could have any other vessel replaced, but the aron could not be made again if there weren't luchos and the sefer Torah of Moshe inside it. In order to be an aron, it

had to be an aron of eidus.

There is a deeper reason for this. There is an amazing statement of Chazal which startled me when I first read it. It changed my entire way of looking at Jewish history. The Jews who came back to Yerushalayim to rebuild the second Beis Hamikdosh were hesitant. They didn't want to have it destroyed again because of avodo zoro. So the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah davened to Hashem to have the yetzer for avodo zoro eliminated from the world. They were granted this request, but it came at a price. In the second Beis Hamikdosh, a number of important elements were missing. There was no aron with luchos, no Urim VeTumim, no nevuah, and no ruach hakodesh.

Anshei Knesses Hagedolah became nervous that without all these things, we are now lacking the major ways of connecting to Hashem that we had during the first Beis Hamikdosh. How are the masses going to connect to Hashem? They requested that all the secrets and wellsprings of Torah Shebaal Peh be opened up and be accessible to the Jewish people as a whole before they agree to build the second Beis Hamikdosh. And although the gemara records various halachos innovated by Dovid and Shlomo Hamelech and others throughout the period of Nevi'im, there was an explosion of Torah Shebaal Peh starting with the era of Bayis Sheni. They knew that when we lack all these things we had during Bayis Rishon, we need another way of connecting to Hashem. Torah Shebaal Peh stood in to fill the vacuum and allowed the second Beis Hamikdosh to stand as long as it did.

And when the second Beis Hamikdosh was about to be destroyed, Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakkai asked for Yavneh and her chachomim to be spared. Why? Because he knew that when we will lose the Beis Hamikdosh, the people will need something to take its place in keeping Klal Yisroel unified and connected to Hashem in golus. And we find that every time there is a reduction in Klal Yisroel's level in ruchniyus, and Hashem's presence is lessened in the world, there is a special command to increase Torah learning as a way to compensate for the loss.

While Moshe Rabbeinu was alive, and he was communicating the Torah directly from Hashem, there could be nothing greater. When Moshe dies and Yehoshua takes over, Hashem gives an extra command to be involved in Torah, day and night. The last sefer of Nevi'im is from the last novi – Malachi. At the end of his prophecy – when prophecy is about to disappear from the world – Hashem tells us "זכרו תורת משה" עבדי. After the churban Bayis Rishon, Yirmiyahu writes in Eichah to rise in the night to learn Torah. At each level of Hashem's departure, Hashem tells us to connect to Him through limud haTorah.

There are certain times and places where it is easier to connect to Hashem. The Rambam says there is a special mitzvah to use the Beis Hamikdosh as a derech avodoh. But one can connect to Hashem through Torah in all times and in all places.