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בס"ד

Parashat Terumah Part I

1. Introduction

Toward the end of *Parashat Mishpatim* – after Moses and the Israelites fulfilled several of the technical details of covenant protocol – we read that Hashem summoned Moses to ascend the mountain. He told him *veheyeh sham* (“and be there”), indicating that he should expect to remain there for an extended period of time, “and I will give you tablets of stone with the teaching and the misvah that I have inscribed to instruct them” (Exod. 24:12). The inscription on the tablets refers to the Ten Commandments (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4). The extended period of time that Moses was to remain on the mountain was apparently required for extensive instructional purposes.

Moses had previously written “all Hashem’s words” (Exod. 24:4), undoubtedly including the Ten Commandments, but not on imperishable material (perhaps he wrote on parchment or papyrus). Providing a long-lasting record of a covenant’s core stipulations on stone tablets was a characteristic of ancient Near Eastern covenants, part of the finalization process.

Moses ascended partway “and the cloud covered the mountain” (v. 15) – he then had to await G-d’s further call before proceeding. The cloud covered the mountain six days “and He called to Moses on the seventh day from the midst of the cloud...Moses entered the cloud and ascended the mountain” (vv. 16-18a). The chapter is concluded with a clause that was written from a future perspective, informing us that Moses remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights (v. 18b). During those days – taking the succeeding seven chapters beginning with *Parashat Terumah* (25-31) to be in chronological order – Hashem transmitted instructions for construction of the Tabernacle (the *mishkan* or portable sanctuary), its accoutrements and service attire.

However, whether the section of Tabernacle instructions that immediately follows is located in its

chronological order or occurred after the golden calf episode but was placed where it is (for whatever reason) has been a subject of dispute. We will survey the chief proofs proffered by each side and several consequences.

2. Not Chronological

Rashi, following several *midrashim* (*Tanh. Terumah* 8, *Tissa* 31; *Exod. Rab.* 33:3), commented as follows: “There is no earlier or later in the Torah. The calf episode occurred many days before the Tabernacle instructions were given” (comments on Exod. 31:18). This view has been supported by several considerations.

When G-d asked Moses to ascend the mountain, He informed him that, “I will give you tablets of stone with the teaching and the misvah that I have inscribed to instruct them” (Exod. 24:12); He made no mention about transmitting instructions concerning a Tabernacle. This is especially noteworthy considering that almost seven chapters of instructions for the Tabernacle and related matters immediately follow (25:1–31:17).

The verse in Exodus 31:18 that narrates G-d’s giving of the tablets to Moses fits in very smoothly immediately after Exodus 24. Indeed, some maintain that it fits in there even more smoothly – its syntax more natural and grammatical – than where it is located. It reads: “He gave to Moses upon His concluding to speak with him on Mount Sinai two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, inscribed by the finger of G-d.” The verse apparently deals with a new subject, one not directly connected to the preceding passage that speaks of Shabbat and concludes the Tabernacle instructions. Nevertheless, it refers to G-d with two third-person pronouns rather than with an expected proper noun. If, however, that verse were actually the direct continuation of G-d’s summoning Moses to ascend the mountain (of chapter 24), third person usages would be appropriate.

Abarbanel and Sforno also subscribe to this view, applying the principle, “There is no earlier or later in the Torah,” to our subject. They claim that this interpretation resolves major textual problems. Sforno states as follows:

It was during the last series of forty days (subsequent to the golden calf) that Moses was first commanded regarding the Tabernacle...This is indicated by the earlier verse, “An altar of earth you shall make for Me...in every place that I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you to bless you” (Exod. 20:21) [implying that originally there were no specific and elaborate instructions regarding an altar or its location.] Now they will need designated priests, a matter indicated by “And you shall bring forth Aaron your brother and his sons” (28:1)...considering that the tribe of Levi [which contains the priests] was not chosen to serve until after the golden calf, as evidenced in Deuteronomy 10:8 (comments on Exod. 24:18).

According to him, the Tabernacle, sacrificial legislation, priesthood and associated matters would not have been part of the Torah had Israel remained faithful to the covenant. The Decalogue precepts with the associated laws would have sufficed for the nation of G-d to fulfill its mission. Apparently, there would have been increased reliance on human conscience, on enlightened precedent, and concepts of general spirituality and discipline. But after the golden calf it became evident that without a tangible symbol of G-d's presence and the establishment of institutionalized worship and sacrifice, the Israelites would not be able to maintain a high-level commitment to the covenant. Therefore, G-d granted them the Tabernacle and associated rituals to bring them to a fuller consciousness of His presence and demands.

Abarbanel supports the view that Tabernacle instructions were not part of the original lawgiving from the following passage. Jeremiah quotes Hashem telling the people that in the sinful way they were acting, *עַל־זִבְחֵיכֶם סָפוּ עַל זִבְחֵיכֶם וְאָכְלוּ בֶּשֶׂר* (“Add your burnt offerings to your [regular] sacrifices and eat meat” [Jer. 7:21]). In other words, the worshippers may just as well eat from their *‘olah* sacrifices (burnt offerings from which it is prohibited to eat) together with the *zabahim* sacrifices (from which it is permitted to eat). Hashem explains:

...for I did not speak with your fathers or command them at the time when I brought them forth from the land of Egypt concerning *‘olah* or *zabah*. But just this is what I commanded them: Harken to My voice that I may be your G-d and you may be My people, and you shall walk in all the way that I command you that it shall be well with you (Jer. 7:22-23).

Abarbanel comments:

The Rambam...wrote (*Guide for the Perplexed*, 3:32) that this passage has presented great difficulty to all whose opinion has been heard on the subject, for how can it state that we were not commanded regarding *‘olah* or *zabah*? A great number of the Torah's laws concern them! My explanation follows. After the Exodus, when Israel stood at Mount Sinai and received Torah and misvot, G-d did not command them regarding sacrifices; He only commanded them regarding proper beliefs and practices. Subsequent to the golden calf, when He saw their evil inclination, He saw fit to provide them a cure for their sickness and evil and established the laws of the various sacrifices...which would not have been commanded had they not sinned...Thus in *Parashiyot Yitro* and *Mishpatim* (prior to the golden calf) there is no mention of G-d commanding *‘olah* or *zabah* (comments on Jer. 7).

According to Abarbanel, the statements shortly after the Exodus Decalogue, “An earthen altar make for Me and sacrifice upon it your *‘olot* and *shelamim*, your cattle and sheep” (Exod. 20:21) and the continuation of that verse, “in every place that I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you to bless you,” do not present a conflict with the Jeremiah passage. Those statements that describe the status of sacrifices after the lawgiving but before the golden calf were not commands. Given that in those days some sacrifices were inevitable, whether G-d had commanded them or not, that verse should be taken as G-d saying that He does not desire elaborate altar or sacrificial rites and is not mandating them, such rituals being optional. But He will respond to sincere sacrificial service.

The unusual formulation of the one verse in *Parashat Mishpatim* that entails a law concerning sacrifices has also been proffered as support for the opinion that

views the Torah's sacrificial program as having been commanded late. The verse reads: "One who sacrifices to a god shall be proscribed, except to Hashem alone" (Exod. 22:19). The word structure may be taken to imply that a sacrifice presented to Hashem is an exception from condemnation, it is an act that is merely tolerated. Such a statement is hardly to be thought of as consistent with a mandatory sacrificial program.

In addition, Tabernacle instructions and the associated program of sacrifices and rituals appear to be of a different nature than the legislation of the Decalogue and *Parashat Mishpatim*. Finally, the legislation of the Decalogue and Exodus 21–23 seem to come to a conclusion and in chapter 24 Moses and the Israelites fulfill several covenant "closing" procedures. What was lacking from covenant protocol was inscription on stone tablets, and that was the purpose for which Hashem summoned Moses to the mountaintop. The Tabernacle and sacrificial legislation were apparently not part of the original program.

If the Tabernacle section was given after the golden calf why was it placed where it is? The answer might be that it was to attach the new legislation to the lawgiving. Once added to the Torah, it was important to ensure that it would not be viewed as inferior legislation but be seen as a continuation of the lawgiving.

Deuteronomy is extremely restrained regarding the sanctuary and cultic ritual. In Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, the term *mishkan* is attested 101 times, but in Deuteronomy it does not appear a single time. The other common term for the Tabernacle, the *ohel mo'ed* (the Tent of Meeting) is only referred to a single time in Deuteronomy (in chapter 31), and the case is similar with other terms and concepts associated with the Tabernacle. The Ramban's explanation that priests are diligent and do not require additional exhortations surely appears inadequate. According to the view that the Tabernacle and its comprehensive rituals were not part of G-d's original plan, one may wonder: Is the Deuteronomy law section focused on the original covenant formulation as it was in its pristine state, anticipating a simple central sanctuary in the promised land as it was to be prior to the prophecy prescribing an elaborate program for it?

3. Chronological

It is a widely accepted principle that Torah passages should be taken as chronological except when there is compelling evidence to the contrary (see Ramban on Exod. 35:1 and Lev. 8:2). According to the Ramban and many others, such compelling evidence has not been proffered concerning the section of Tabernacle instructions. On the contrary, there is significant evidence that favors understanding Tabernacle legislation as being in chronological order.

From the standpoint of the basic concept and purpose of the Tabernacle it appears to be a continuation of the last topic in Exodus 24. There also is significant literary linkage between those final few verses of Exodus 24 and the Tabernacle. In addition, a close reading of several passages supports the view that Tabernacle instructions preceded the golden calf.

G-d's mention toward the end of Exodus 24 that He was soon to give inscribed stone tablets to Moses necessarily prompts consideration of an appropriate receptacle for them, for they cannot be left "homeless." Hence, an ark comes to mind, and it is, indeed, the first article of Tabernacle furniture prescribed. An ark also requires a proper repository. This points to a sanctuary for it. In addition, every nation in the ancient Near East had sanctuaries and it may have been inconceivable that there would not be one for Israel, for how would worship of the Deity be conducted? Furthermore, it is a well-attested detail of covenant protocol that an official, permanent copy of the particulars be deposited in a shrine.

The final verses of Exodus 24 highlight G-d's glory as manifested on the mountain of the revelation. We are told וַיִּשְׁכֶּן כְּבוֹד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי ("Hashem's glory dwelled on Mount Sinai") followed by וַיִּכְסֶהוּ הָעָנָן ("and the cloud covered it" [24:16]). These terms are replicated at the end of the Book of Exodus in conjunction with the completed Tabernacle, pointing to a similar meaning that links the two settings. The word *vayishkon* (dwelled) is of course connected to *mishkan*, the "dwelling place" of G-d. Upon successful conclusion of the Tabernacle project it states: וַיִּכַסּוּ אֶת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד מִן הָעָנָן ("the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting") and וַיִּמְלֵא אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן ("and Hashem's glory filled the Tabernacle," 40:34). The following verse informs us that Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting עָלִיו הָעָנָן ("because the

cloud abode upon it”), just as it had stated at the end of chapter 24 when Moses was on the mountain. Once again it states, וַיִּכְבוֹד ה' מְלֵא אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן (“and Hashem’s glory filled the Tabernacle” [40:35]).

The subsequent three verses that conclude the Book of Exodus are a type of coda, looking back from a future time (40:36-38). They speak of G-d’s cloud that was upon the Tabernacle, through which He led the nation on its travels. The verse before the coda (v. 35) depicted Moses as unable to proceed because of the cloud, analogous to the situation that had obtained on the mountain. The Book of Leviticus begins with the statement that Hashem called to Moses from the Tent of Meeting (just as He had done on Mount Sinai) and began transmitting laws to him from there.

The parallelism is clear and extensive. The Tabernacle is presented as the vehicle through which G-d’s presence moved from the mountaintop to the people, to be present with them when they depart that location. As He spoke from the mountaintop He will continue to speak from the Tent of Meeting. Of course, had the Tabernacle section been added after the golden calf it could have been presented in this manner, for the nation had not yet departed Mount Sinai, but the structure as we have it does connect smoothly and there is no compelling reason to interpret it as out of chronological order.

The last verse of chapter 24, stating that Moses remained on the mountain for forty days and forty nights, seems to point to his receiving extensive and detailed instructions, such that he would require a significant period of time to learn. This seems to refer to the lengthy instructions for the Tabernacle. No other instruction is implied. Indeed, at several points a specific facet of Tabernacle instructions explicitly refers to what Moses was shown on the mountain (25:40; 26:30; 27:8), implying that there had been an extensive “teaching” program of them. The only instructions in the Torah that directly refer to those days when Moses was on the mountaintop are those relating to the Tabernacle.

After the cloud covered the mountain for six days, Hashem called to Moses on the seventh day (24:16). This is an unmistakable reference to the Sabbath, a theme closely associated with the Tabernacle as we will demonstrate in coming studies.* At the conclusion of Tabernacle instructions, just before the

account of the giving of the tablets, Hashem presents an elaboration of the Sabbath commandment (31:12-17). This is the only subject so interposed, pointing to the thematic linkage. That G-d had Moses wait six days and called to him on the seventh day to ascend further seems to make a statement in symbolic terms: just as He had created the earth and all in it to be the dwelling place for humans in six days, in these six days He prepared the plans for the dwelling place that Israel (representing mankind) is to construct for Him.**

There is a significant difference between Hashem’s formulations of the instructions concerning the Tabernacle’s construction and the Sabbath regulations as He presented them to Moses and Moses’ transmission of them to Israel. The former are joyous and optimistic, expressing the loftiest of goals, whereas Moses’ presentation is lackluster and minimalist (as we will demonstrate in our *Parashat Vayakhel* study). It seems to be another indication that the Torah’s order is chronological. G-d’s instructions preceded the golden calf. Moses did not get the chance to transmit them to the people until after the golden calf. At that point it was necessary to await proof of Israel’s true repentance before being joyous and optimistic.

Subsequent to the golden calf but before covenant restoration – before G-d would have transmitted Tabernacle instructions if they had not been given before the transgression – Moses established a religious center. He took אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (“the tent”), emphasized with the definite article, pitched it at some distance outside the camp, “and called it *ohel mo’ed*,” (“Tent of Meeting”). All who sought Hashem would go to “the *ohel mo’ed* that was outside the camp” (Exod. 33:7). That Moses “called it” *ohel mo’ed*, in contrast to the later *ohel mo’ed* that refers to the Tabernacle, which was the actual *ohel mo’ed*, a point the text seems to emphasize, sheds light on our subject. Moses had a concept of an *ohel mo’ed* that was supposed to have been established inside the camp but was now canceled. Accordingly, he provided a substitute (which apparently remained with the nation after reconciliation with G-d).

At the conclusion of the instructions concerning the ark, G-d tells Moses, “You shall place in the ark the testimony that I am going to give to you” (25:16, 21). Clearly, the “testimony” refers to the tablets. Given

that there was no statement beforehand that Moses was to provide the stone, it appears that this is the fulfillment of what G-d had previously told Moses, “And I will give you the stone tablets” (24:12). This does not appear to be referring to the second set of tablets; regarding the latter, G-d instructed Moses “Carve two tablets of stone like the first ones” (34:1). Thus, G-d transmitted Tabernacle instructions to Moses before the first set of tablets was given to him and before the golden calf.

4. Answering Several Questions

If Tabernacle instructions are in chronological order, why did G-d make no mention of them when summoning Moses to ascend the mountain, focusing exclusively on the tablets when explaining the purpose of the summons? Perhaps, since the tablets with the Decalogue inscribed on them represent the essence of the covenant and are in a category by themselves, everything else is subordinate. The subordinate cannot be cited as a purpose when the primary purpose is being presented.

Why was the verse that followed Tabernacle instructions, that informed of G-d’s giving Moses the tablets (31:18), structured as a continuation of the passage at the end of chapter 24, in which G-d informed Moses that He was going to give him the tablets? Perhaps the later verse was intended to close the “envelope” that began with G-d informing Moses that He was summoning him in order to give him the tablets. Hence, the unusual syntax of that later verse is because it does refer back to that opening passage. This renders the many intervening chapters a substructure within the larger narrative framework, a requisite digression that is parenthetical in relation to the tablets.

In our discussion on *Parashat Ki Tissa* we will marshal evidence to demonstrate that there were some additions to the instructions for Tabernacle construction subsequent to the golden calf. Instructions for the incense altar and taking the census were not included when the original instructions were transmitted. (According to the school of thought that all Tabernacle instructions followed the golden calf, it would appear necessary to posit that there were two stages of additions.) Similarly, in our *Parashat Shemini* studies we will point to an indication that as a result of the golden calf the dedication procedures of

the Tabernacle were modified from what they originally had been planned to be.

Finally, as regards the arguments made by Abarbanel and Sforno, the following may be said. Even if Tabernacle instructions are in chronological order, G-d’s plans for it and the sacrificial legislation may very well have been an addition to the lawgiving, not a part of His original covenantal program. This appears to reflect a Divine outlook similar to that described by the Rambam, that G-d did not desire a sacrificial program in the first instance but instituted one as a concession to human nature (Guide for the Perplexed, 3:32; see our study *Maimonides on Sacrifices and Related Matters Part I*). Accordingly, the laws for sanctuary and sacrifices came only after His more basic lawgiving was concluded and covenant finalization was in progress. Once instituted, the “new” legislation became an intrinsic part of the Torah, enriching the covenant.

5. In the Broader Torah Structure

Parashat Terumah (Exod. 25:1–27:19) begins a lengthy unit of the Torah that corresponds with the duration of Israel’s stay at Sinai. The Tabernacle and associated legislation extends through the rest of Exodus, all of Leviticus and into chapter 10 of Numbers, at which point the nation’s departure from Sinai is narrated.

The instructions for and the construction of the Tabernacle occupy the balance of Exodus except for the three-chapter interposition of the golden calf episode and its aftermath. Leviticus is mostly concerned with elaboration of the Tabernacle concept of bringing the consciousness of G-d’s presence more fully into the daily life of the Israelites, above and beyond the basic covenantal relationship that had been established prior to Exodus 25. Leviticus legislation constitutes, in order, regulations for sacrificial worship, investiture of the priests and laws governing their responsibilities, the purity program and the holiness code. The section of blessings and curses near the end of Leviticus – in accordance with established covenant format – essentially concludes the covenantal program.

The first chapters of Numbers deal with the camp’s organization around the Tabernacle and travel preparations based on having the representation of

G-d's presence in the nation's midst. After several supplementary applications of the purity program and the holiness code, at the end of Numbers 10 the Torah moves on to its next broad section.

6. Explanatory Remarks

1. The Tabernacle is termed מִשְׁכַּן הָעֵדוּת, (“the Tabernacle of the Testimony” [Exod. 38:21; Num. 1:50, etc.]), apparently in reference to the אֲרוֹן הָעֵדוּת, (“the Ark of the Testimony” [Exod. 25:22, etc.]) that resides within it. The ark is so called because it contains the לְחַת הָעֵדוּת (“the Tablets of the Testimony” [31:18, etc.]) within it. It surely is telling that in the section of instructions for the ark, in both references to the tablets they are termed merely הָעֵדוּת (“testimony”), plain and simple. The Tabernacle is the location of G-d's presence within the nation by dint of having within it the tablets, the symbol of and testimony to His revelation to Israel and the attendant covenant. The term *mishkan* throughout the Torah invariably refers to G-d's “dwelling place” except in connection with Korah's rebellion; in the latter case it seems to allude to a rival sanctuary that the rebels had established.

2. “They shall make for Me a *miqdash* that I shall dwell among them” (Exod. 25:8). Many have interpreted this to mean that G-d is not to be represented as dwelling in “it,” but among the people, in contrast to the concepts of the pagans, who assumed that their deities actually dwelled in their temples. However, G-d refers to His “appearing” in the Holy of Holies (Lev. 16:2), His speech is described as emanating from there (Exod. 25:22; 30:6; Num. 7:89), His “name” – a less anthropomorphic way of referring to Him – is said to dwell there (Deut. 12:11, etc.) and passages in the Prophets (Jer. 7, etc.) and Psalms speak of His dwelling in His house. Scripture assumes a religious sophistication on the part of its audience such that “dwelling” is to be understood metaphorically, unlike the pagan concepts. Thus, in Exodus 25:8 G-d may be stating that when the Tabernacle will be constructed it will be His holy abode in which He plans to “abide,” and by doing so He will be dwelling among the Israelites.

3. The Tabernacle is also the “Tent of Meeting,” where G-d “meets” Moses (as well as future leaders) and communicates to him whatever He wishes to

transmit to him or to the nation (Exod. 25:22; 29:42; 30:6; Num. 7:89).

4. G-d insisted that the materials required for the Tabernacle are to be free-willed gifts, not derived from a mandatory tax on the populace. (The *mahasit hashegel* [Exod. 30:11-16] is the exception, which we will explain in our study on that section.) This may indicate that the successful establishment of a national spiritual center requires that the public not be compelled to contribute, as that may foster the wrong type of relationship, compromising sincere receptiveness to its message.

5. The Tabernacle building instructions are transmitted in highly ordered fashion. First, the required materials are listed. Next are instructions for the articles that are placed in the Holy of Holies, which specifically represents the focus of the Divine presence: the ark, its covering and the cherubim. Then come the furnishings for the Holy section: the table and menorah (the incense altar is not mentioned in the first listing, a matter we will discuss in a coming study). The tent structure and its coverings, with the *parokhet* that divides between the two sections, are next, followed by the outside altar and the curtains around the courtyard. Then come the priestly vestments followed by procedures for priestly ordination.

6. The commands regarding construction of the Tabernacle and the ark (25:10) are expressed in third person plural – וַיַּעֲשׂוּ (“and they shall make”), whereas instructions for the many other furnishings are in second person singular – וְעָשִׂיתָ (“and you shall make”), addressing Moses. This highlights the supreme importance of the public relating to the Tabernacle, which represents Hashem's presence, and to the ark, which contains the tablets on which the Decalogue is inscribed, which represents the covenant. Ideally, everybody should be involved in the actualization of these two most major items.

Endnotes

* See our studies on *Shabbat and the Tabernacle* and *Completion of the Tabernacle* concerning the many Shabbat-Tabernacle correspondences.

** See Nehama Leibowitz, citing Buber, in *Iyunim Hadashim Besefer Shemot*, p. 350. ©2010 Sephardic Institute