



The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

Teruma: Meeting God

This week's *parsha* describes how the Children of Israel create a space for God. They construct a *Mishkan*, a Tabernacle or portable temple. The word *Mishkan* means residence. But God doesn't need a house; in the words of King Solomon as he dedicates the Temple in Jerusalem: "Does God truly dwell on earth? Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You, how much less this House that I have built!" (I Kings 8:27)

If this is not God's "residence" in the plain sense of the word, what is the purpose of the *Mishkan*?

The Children of Israel had just experienced the revelation at Sinai, a powerful and overwhelming encounter with God. Nachmanides notes a fascinating comparison between the choreography of Mount Sinai and the architectural zoning of the *Mishkan*:

At Sinai there were three zones:

1. The top of the mountain – Only Moses could ascend to the summit. God communicates His commandments to the people (through Moses) from the top of the mountain.
2. The mountain itself – This zone is out of bounds for the people. Priests have access. (Ex.19:22; 24:1,10-11)
3. The foot of the mountain – This zone is for the nation. Here they build an altar and offer sacrifices to God. (24:4-5)

The *Mishkan* also has three distinct sectors mirroring the three zones at Mount Sinai:

1. The innermost chamber – "Holy of Holies" – Moses enters this chamber to listen as God communicates His commands to Israel: "I will meet with you there and speak to you...from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the Pact, all that I will command...the Israelite people. (25:22)
2. The covered structure – "*Kodesh*" – This zone is out of bounds for the people. Priests have access.
3. The courtyard – This zone is for the nation. A sacrificial altar stands here.

The Tabernacle imitates and, to some degree, replicates Mount Sinai. It even has a pillar of fire over it and cloud surrounding it exactly like Mount Sinai! (See Ex 40:35-38.) The Tablets of Stones, received by Moses at the summit of Mount Sinai, reside in the Ark at the epicenter of the *Mishkan*.

Nachmanides writes:

After God communicated the Ten Commandments to Israel “face to face”...and Israel accepted to do all that He would command them...He made a covenant with them...From that time forth, Israel are His people, and He is their God...it is only suitable that there should be a Temple among them for His presence to reside among them.

The secret of the Tabernacle is that the glory of God that was manifest on Mount Sinai, will be present in a discreet way in the Tabernacle.

Sinai was an overwhelming, frightening, once-in-history event. The *Mishkan* facilitates an ongoing relationship with God within the confines of the Camp of Israel.

There are many things that happen in the *Mishkan*. It is an arena for Israel to come closer to God by means of *korbanot*, sacrifices. It creates a space for God to command Israel, with His presence and speech particularly focused over the Ark of the Covenant, which contains the Tablets of Stone. But more than anything else, the *Mishkan* expresses the togetherness of God and Israel, and its purpose as a “Tent of Meeting,” an earthly manifestation of the continuing God/Israel encounter.

So let's discuss:

- What is the difference between the Sinai encounter and the *Mishkan* encounter?
- Why would Israel want or need a structure in the epicenter of the camp that expresses God's desire to “dwell among them [Israel]” (Ex. 22:8)?
- What sort of encounter or “meeting” was fostered by the “Tent of Meeting”? What act generates that sense of “meeting”?
- For you, what is most evocative? The *Mishkan* as:
 1. A place where God can guide Israel by law and teaching
 2. A place where Israel can sense God's intense presence
 3. Some other aspect of the *Mishkan*
- Most importantly, where do you encounter God in your lives? Is it in the Synagogue – termed a “mini-Temple”? (It also contains an Ark with the Law, but is it a place where we “feel” God?) Can you encounter God in nature? With people? Where is your “Tent of Meeting”?

Shabbat Shalom!