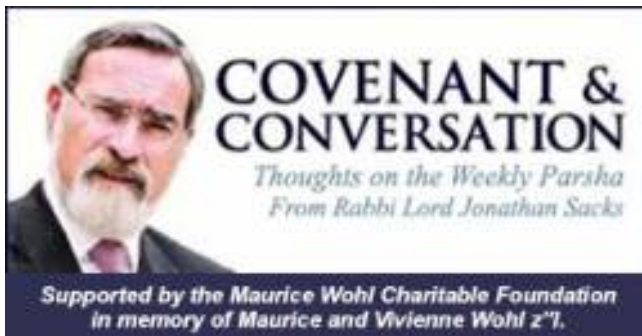


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## Encampments and Journeys

Right at the end of the book of Shemot, there is a textual difficulty so slight that it is easy to miss, yet - as interpreted by Rashi - it contains one of the great clues as to the nature of Jewish identity: it is a moving testimony to the unique challenge of being a Jew.

First, the background. The Tabernacle is finally complete. Its construction has taken many chapters to relate. No other event in the wilderness years is portrayed in such detail. Now, on the first of Nissan, exactly a year after Moses

told the people to begin their preparations for the exodus, he assembles the beams and hangings, and puts the furniture and vessels in place. There is an unmistakable parallelism between the words the Torah uses to describe Moses' completion of the work and those it uses of God on the seventh day of creation:

And Moses finished [*vayechal*] the work [*hamelakhah*].  
And God finished [*vayechal*] on the seventh day the work [*melakhto*] which He had done.

The next verse states the result:

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.

The meaning is both clear and revolutionary. The creation of the sanctuary by the Israelites is intended to represent a human parallel to the Divine creation of the universe. In making the world, God created a home for mankind. In making the Tabernacle, mankind created a home for God.

From a human perspective, God fills the space we make for His presence. His glory exists where we renounce ours. The immense detail of the construction is there to tell us that throughout, the Israelites were obeying God's instructions rather than improvising their own. The specific domain called "the holy" is where we meet God on His terms, not ours. Yet this too is God's way of conferring dignity on mankind. It is we who build His home so that He may fill what we have made.

In the words of a famous film: "If you build it, he will come."

Bereishit begins with God making the cosmos. Shemot ends with human beings making a micro-cosmos, a miniature and symbolic universe. Thus the entire narrative of Genesis-Exodus is a single vast span that begins and ends with the concept of God-filled space, with this difference: that in the beginning the work is done by God-the-Creator. By the end it is done by man-and-woman-the-creators. The whole intricate history has been a story with one overarching theme: the transfer of the power and responsibility of creation from heaven to earth, from God to the image-of-God called mankind.

That is the background. However, the final verses of the book go on to tell us about the relationship between the "cloud of glory" and the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle, we recall, was not a fixed structure. It was made in such a way as to be portable. It could quickly be dismantled and its parts carried, as the Israelites made their way to the next stage of their journey. When the time came for the Israelites to move on, the cloud moved from its resting place in the Tent of Meeting to a position outside the camp, signalling the direction they must now take. This is how the Torah describes it:

When the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, the Israelites went onward in all their journeys, but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in

the sight of all the house of Israel in all their journeys.[1]

There is a small but significant difference between the two instances of the phrase *bechol mas'ehem*, "in all their journeys". In the first instance the words are to be taken literally. When the cloud lifted and moved on ahead, the Israelites knew they were about to travel. However in the second instance they cannot be taken literally. The cloud was not over the Tabernacle in all their journeys. On the contrary: it was there only when they stopped travelling and instead pitched camp. During the journeys the cloud went on ahead.

Noting this, Rashi makes the following comment:

A place where they encamped is also called *massa*, "a journey" ... Because from the place of encampment they always set out again on a new journey, therefore they are all called "journeys".

The point is linguistic, but the message is anything but. Rashi has encapsulated in a few brief words - "a place where they encamped is also called a journey" - the existential truth at the heart of Jewish identity. So long as we have not yet reached our destination, even a place of rest is still called a journey - because we know we are not here forever. There is a way still to go. In the words of the poet Robert Frost:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

To be a Jew is to travel, and to know that here where we are is a mere resting place, not yet a

home. It is defined not by the fact that we are here, but by the knowledge that eventually - after a day, a week, a year, a century, sometimes even a millennium - we will have to move on. Thus, the portable Tabernacle, even more than the Temple in Jerusalem, became the symbol of Jewish life.

Why so? Because the gods of the ancient world were gods of a place: Sumeria, Memphis, Moab, Edom. They had a specific domain. Theology was linked to geography. Here, in this holy place, made magnificent by *ziggurat* or temple, the gods of the tribe or the state ruled and exercised power over the city or the empire. When Pharaoh says to Moses: "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go" [2] he means - here, I am the sovereign power. Egypt has its own gods. Within its boundaries, they alone rule, and they have delegated that power to me, their earthly representative. There may indeed be a God of Israel, but His power and authority do not extend to Egypt. Divine sovereignty is like political sovereignty. It has borders. It has spatial location. It is bounded by a place on the map.

With Israel an old-new idea (it goes back, according to the Torah, to Adam and Cain, Abraham and Jacob, all of whom suffered exile) is reborn: that God, being everywhere, can be found anywhere. He is what Morris Berman calls the "wandering God." Just as in the desert His cloud of glory accompanied the Israelites on their long and meandering journey, so - said the rabbis - "when Israel went into exile, the Divine presence went with them." God cannot be confined to a specific place. Even in Israel, His presence among the people depended on their

obedience to His word. Hence there is no such thing as physical security, the certain knowledge that here-I-am-and-here-I-stay. As David said in Psalm 30:

When I felt secure, I said, "I will never be shaken."... but when You hid Your face, I was dismayed.

Security belongs not to place but to person, not to a physical space on the surface of the earth but to a spiritual space in the human heart.

If anything is responsible for the unparalleled strength of Jewish identity during the long centuries in which they were scattered throughout the world, a minority everywhere, it is this - the concept to which Jews and Judaism gave the name *galut*, exile. Unique among nations in the ancient or modern world, with few exceptions they neither converted to the dominant faith nor assimilated to the prevailing culture. The sole reason was that they never mistook a particular place for home, temporary location for ultimate destination. "Now we are here," they said at the beginning of the seder service, "but next year, in the land of Israel."

In Jewish law (Yoreh Deah 286:22), one who hires a house outside Israel is obliged to affix a *mezuzah* only after thirty days. Until then it is not yet regarded as a dwelling-place. Only after thirty days does it become, *de facto*, home. In Israel, however, one who hires a house is immediately obligated *mishum yishuv eretz Yisrael*, "because of the command to settle Israel." Outside Israel, Jewish life is a way, a path, a route. Even an encampment, a place of rest, is still called a journey.

There is a marvelous scene in the 19th chapter of the First Book of Kings. The aged Elijah encounters God on the mountain, in the "still small voice" that follows the wind, the earthquake and the fire. God tells him that he must appoint Elisha as his successor. He does so:

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye," he said, "and then I will come with you." "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?" So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the ploughing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

Elisha was not expecting the call. Yet without delay, he abandons everything to follow Elijah. Almost as if terrified at the sheer starkness of the demand he is making of the younger man, Elijah seems to change his mind at the last moment: "Go back. What have I done to you?" (There is an echo here of an earlier passage in which Naomi tries to persuade Ruth not to follow her: "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home ... Return home, my daughters, why would you come with me?" In both cases, Ruth and Elisha prove their calling by refusing to be dissuaded). At the end of his essay, *The Lonely Man of Faith*,

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik gives a deeply moving analysis of the encounter:

"Elisha was a typical representative of the majestic community. He was the son of a prosperous farmer, a man of property, whose interests were centred around this-worldly, material goods such as crops, livestock, and market prices ... What did this man of majesty have in common with Elijah, the solitary covenantal prophet, the champion of God, the adversary of Kings, who walked as a stranger through the bustling cities of Shomron...?"

What bond could exist between a complacent farmer who enjoyed his homestead and the man in the hairy dress who came from nowhere and to finally disappeared under a veil of mystery? [Yet] he bade farewell to father and mother and departed from their home for good. Like his master, he became homeless. Like his ancestor Jacob he became a "straying Aramean" who took defeat and humiliation with charity and gratitude ... Elisha was indeed lonely, but in his loneliness he met the Lonely One and discovered the singular covenantal confrontation of solitary man and God who abides in the recesses of transcendental solitude."

That scene was repeated time and again during the years 1948-51 when one after another of the Jewish communities in Arab lands - the Maghreb, Iraq, Yemen - said goodbye to homes they had lived in for centuries and left for Israel. In 1990, the Dalai Lama, who had lived in exile from Tibet since 1951, invited a group of Jewish scholars to

visit him in North India. Realising that he and his followers might have to spend many years before they were allowed back, he had pondered the question, "How does a way of life sustain itself far from home?" He realised that one group above all others had faced and solved that problem: the Jews. So he turned to them for advice (the story is told in Roger Kamenetz' book, *The Jew in the Lotus*).

Whether the Jewish answer - which has to do with faith in the God of history - is applicable to Buddhism is a moot point, but the encounter was fascinating none the less, because it showed that even the Dalai Lama, leader of a group far removed from Judaism, recognised that there is something unparalleled in the Jewish capacity to stay faithful to the terms of its existence despite dispersion, never losing faith that one day the exiles would return to their land.

How and why it happened is contained in those simple words of Rashi at the end of Shemot. Even when at rest, Jews knew that they would one day have to uproot their tents, dismantle the Tabernacle, and move on. "Even an encampment is called a journey." A people that never stops travelling is one that never grows old or stale or complacent. It may live in the here-and-now, but it is always conscious of the distant past and the still-beckoning future. "But I have promises to keep / and miles to go before I sleep."

1. Shemot 40:36-38.
2. Exodus 5:2.



## Making One's Own Name

**Shemos, 35:30:** "And Moshe said to the Children of Israel, 'see, Hashem has called by name, Betzalel son of Uri son of Chur, of the Tribe of Yehudah.'"

**Midrash Tanchuma, Vayakhel, Os 1:** "...You find that there are three names that a man is called: One is what his father and mother call him; and one is what people call him; and one is what he acquires himself. The best of them all is the name that he acquires for himself."

Moshe tells the people that God has called by name Betzalel to build the Tabernacle. The Midrash on this verse teaches that each person has three names – the one that his parents call him; the one that others call him, and the one that he acquires for himself. It concludes that the one that he acquires for himself is the best. What exactly is the meaning of this Midrash and how does it connect to the fact that God called Betzalel by name?

We know that unlike other languages, names in the holy tongue of Hebrew represent the essence of a being or item. For example, the Torah relates

that Adam gave names to the animals. This doesn't mean that he gave arbitrary names to each animal, such as dog or cow. Rather, he was able to perceive their essence and define them. Indeed, the word for name, 'shem' is the root of Neshama, one's soul, because one's name demonstrates their essence.

When the Sages say that a person has three names, they don't literally mean that his name changes, rather that there are three formulative influences on a person that define his essence in different stages of his life. After a person is born, his parents raise him. His parents form the character traits that he possesses for a part of his life. This means that the 'name' which represents the qualities of the soul implanted in a child during his formative years by his parents is the first 'name' a child is given. A child's parents, values and aspirations profoundly shape the first 10-15 years, or whatever amount of time, of his life.

As the child reaches teenage-hood, any parent can testify that there comes a time when a parent's influence on a child begins to weaken and he is more influenced by the people around him. This is the second 'name' that a person has. This means that the influence the friends have on the essence of the person's personality, values, and way of thinking is critical to his essence and they too, at a certain stage in his life, largely define who he is.

However, the Midrash continues that all of this only goes so far. Ultimately, a person must ultimately define who he is for himself. Thus, the Midrash says that a person's third and final name is the one he gives himself. This is defined by

what he does with the gifts and talents and building blocks that he has acquired during the early part of his existence.

The Midrash concludes that the most important 'name' a person has is the 'name' he gives himself, representing who he becomes, because this is the only name through which a person can reach his full potential, unencumbered by external influences.

This idea is beautifully brought out by an explanation of the verse in Ecclesiastes written by King Solomon: "A good name is better than precious oil".<sup>1</sup> King Solomon is extolling the value of a good name by favorably comparing it to oil. Rabbi Zev Cohen<sup>2</sup> asks why specifically is a good name compared to oil and not another valuable substance like wine or honey? He explains that other liquids, such as wine, when mixed with water, get absorbed into the water and do not remain separate. In contrast, when oil mixed with another liquid such as water, it rises to the top and remains distinct. In this way, oil refuses to be absorbed, and it asserts its identity. King Solomon, then, is teaching that a "good name" is the one that a person develops for himself and it is even better than oil in that it demonstrates that a person has developed his own sense of self, which is not defined by the influences of family or society.<sup>3</sup>

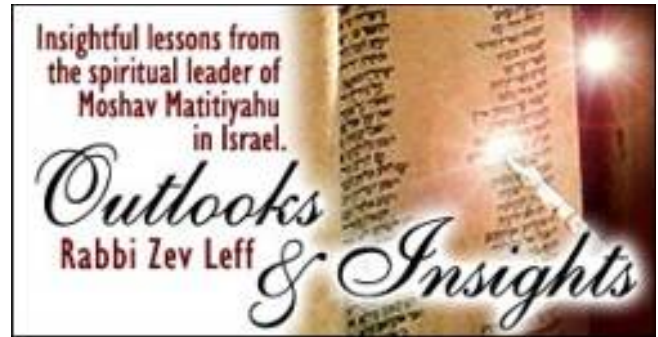
Returning to Betzalel – he had tremendous yichus – he was a great-grandson of Miriam, and a grandson of Chur. Yet in Vayakhel he reached his own personal by attaining the level where he could build the Tabernacle. Accordingly, the Midrash about acquiring a good name is stated

when Betzalel is called by his name, indicating, his reaching his personal potential.

In recent times, a shining example of this idea of finding one's own role through his talents and desires, is the great Rav Yitzchak David Grossman. Born into a prestigious rabbinic dynasty in Jerusalem, it would have been natural for him to follow a well-trodden path of scholarly leadership. However, after witnessing the spiritual disconnection of Jewish youth, he decided to make an effort to bring them back. He ended up in the secular neighbourhood of Migdal Ha'Emek, even getting the name 'the Disco Rabbi' as the place where he found the youth was in discotheques. Out of this radical empathy, he eventually founded Migdal Ohr, a network of schools and outreach programs that have transformed tens of thousands of lives. By refusing to be defined by his family's reputation or the religious establishment's norms, he accessed a deeper layer of the root of his soul and his 'name' has become synonymous with love and empathy, and he proves that finding one's own purpose in life is the correct approach.

May we all merit to attain our own true name.

1. Ecclesiastes, 7:1.
2. Asher LeShlomo, Iyun 31.
3. One may ask that according to this explanation, a good name should be equal to oil, but not better than it. Perhaps the answer is that, based on the idea that a person has three names, the ultimate name – the one that a person develops himself, does not come naturally to a person, rather he must make intense effort to find his own identity. In contrast, oil naturally separates from other liquids.



## Two Aspects of the Mishkan

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonasan: The name Betzalel indicates his wisdom, for when God told Moses to tell Betzalel to make a Mishkan (tabernacle), an Ark, and the other vessels, Moses reversed the order and said to him, "Make an Ark and the vessels and the Mishkan."

Betzalel then said to him, "Moses, the way of the world is to build a house and then bring into it the vessels, but you told me to first make the vessels and then the Mishkan. Where will I put the vessels that I make? Perhaps God told you to make the Mishkan first and then the Ark and vessels."

Moses responded, "You are called Betzalel - (literally) in the shadow of God, for you knew precisely how to interpret God's words as if you were there, in his shadow." (Talmud - Brachot 55a)

To understand this difficult piece of Talmud requires an appreciation of the Mishkan and its

vessels. That in turn depends on understanding the relationship of our bodies to our souls.

We live in a physical world, and our soul is confined in a physical body. For that reason, says *Sefer Hachinuch*, that which we experience physically makes a stronger impression on us and, in turn, motivates our hearts and souls. Thus, for instance, the eating and drinking on Yom Tov is designed to bring out the spiritual joy of our souls. The performance of actions associated with happiness, and not the mental contemplation of happiness, engenders that emotional state.

The proper external actions are, according to *Sefer Hachinuch*, the means by which one reaches the proper inner intention. For that reason, one must occupy himself in the study of Torah - even not for its own sake, for learning will eventually bring him to Torah for its own sake.

The majestic and awe-inspiring Mishkan similarly was a physical environment which exercised the most profound effect on all who beheld it. The physical impression it created was transmuted into a powerful inner feeling.

Physical actions have another purpose beyond arousing the proper inner attachment to God. Our task in this world is to place our spiritual beings in control of our physical beings. When we act in conformity with our deepest spiritual perceptions, we are actualizing our inner potential.

Nachmanides explains (Genesis 22:1) that the essence of the tests to which God subjects *tzaddikim* is that it allows them to realize their spiritual potential in action. Actions performed with the proper intention infuse all realms of the world with spiritual power.

The Sages derive from the command to gild the Holy Ark from both the inside and outside with gold, that a Torah scholar must be the same inside and outside (*tocho ke'baro*), seemingly implying that his inner state must be brought into conformity with his external state.

If we examine the commandment of gilding the Ark, we notice something interesting. There is first a general command to gild the Ark: "*You shall gild it with pure gold*" (Exodus 25:11). Then the Torah specifies, "*from within and without you shall gild it.*" The first general command relates to the outside of the Ark, the physical which engenders the inner emotions. Then after mentioning the internal covering, the Torah again mentions the covering of the outside. This symbolizes the external expression that must be given to the perfected inner intention, the realization of the inner potential.

This same dynamic relation between external action and inner intent is symbolized by the Mishkan itself. Prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, the Mishkan was not needed for God's presence to devolve upon the Jewish people (see Sforno to Exodus 20:21): "*...in all places where I record my name I will come unto you, and I will bless you*" (Exodus 20:21). With the sin of the Golden Calf, however, the people showed that they needed a physical entity upon which to focus their attention in order to experience God's presence. The Mishkan served this need, and hence only there could God's Presence be felt in its full intensity.

The commentary *Meshech Chochma* notes that in Parshas Ki Tisa the discussion of Shabbos follows the discussion of the Mishkan. In Parshas

Vayakhel, the order is reversed. Shabbos strengthens our belief in God as the Creator of the Universe. As originally conceived prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, the Mishkan was meant to give external expression to that belief in God. But it was not needed to engender that belief, since God's presence already dwelt on each Jew wherever he was. Since the Mishkan was only to enhance our belief in the same way that Shabbos does, there would at that time have been no conflict between the activities of the Mishkan and Shabbos. Hence, in Parshas Ki Tisa, prior to the sin, the Mishkan precedes Shabbos.

After the sin of the Golden Calf however, the Mishkan was needed for God's presence to rest on the Jewish People. Construction of the Mishkan was no longer an expression of Divine service, but a precondition for that service. As such, the activities of the Mishkan and attendant construction work could no longer be permitted on Shabbos. This is hinted to in the fact that in Parshas Vayakhel, after the Sin of the Golden Calf, the discussion of Shabbos precedes that of the Mishkan, from which we learn that the activities of the Mishkan are prohibited on Shabbos.

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We can now answer a famous question: If the Mishkan was an atonement for the Sin of the Golden Calf, why does the command to build the Mishkan in Parshas Trumah precede the account of the sin of the Golden Calf in Parshas Ki Tisa? The answer is that the Mishkan served two purposes. The first - the actualization of the spiritual strivings of the Jewish people - preceded

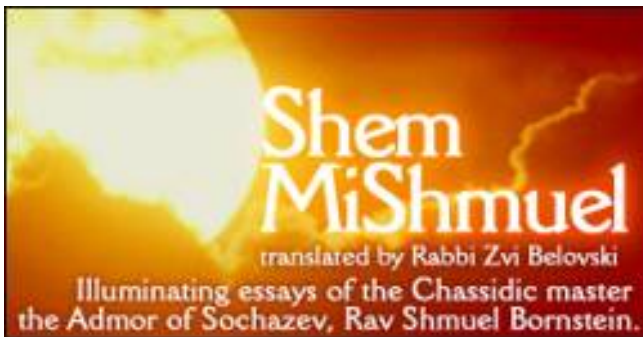
the sin of the Golden Calf. Only the second purpose - the creation of a dwelling place for the Divine presence - followed the sin of the Golden Calf.

Moses was first told of the Mishkan before the sin of the Golden Calf. At that time, the structure of the Mishkan itself was of secondary importance, and the vessels through which man would actualize his feelings for God were the principal aspect of the Mishkan. Therefore, Moses mentioned the vessels first. The Jews were then far above the natural order of the world in which the house precedes the vessels. They needed no majestic structure to house the holiness of God's Presence.

Betzalel, however, received the command to build the Mishkan after the sin of the Golden Calf. He realized that God's intention now was to create an environment to inspire inner spiritual feelings which would be actualized through the vessels. Betzalel understood what Moses did not - that God's original command was specific in its order because God knew that the Jewish people would sin and require the Mishkan in order to experience His Presence.

The word "Mishkan" is repeated at the beginning of Parshas Pekudei: *"These are the accounts of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of witness."* The original purpose of the Mishkan (with the definite article) was to enable the Jewish people to express and actualize their inner emotions and beliefs. After the Sin, the Mishkan became the *"Mishkan of witness,"* the place where God's Presence would be felt.

There is an important message here for us. We must not feel hypocritical if we do the mitzvot without the fullest intentions that we know should accompany these activities. As long as we aspire to attain that intention, our actions will bring us to that goal. Also we must remember that even at the height of spiritual inspiration, we must not minimize the importance of the meticulous observance of the physical Mitzvot, for they are the true culmination of those spiritual feelings. Without them, the potential is unrealized.



## The Mishkan

The end of the Torah portion describes the erection of the *Mishkan*:

And it was in the first month, in the second year, on the first of the month, that the *Mishkan* was erected. Moshe erected the *Mishkan*, and he fastened its sockets and set its boards and inserted its bars and erected its pillars. He spread the tent over the *Mishkan* and set the covering of the tent over it, as God commanded Moshe. (Shemos 40:17-19)

When we are told here that "Moshe erected the *Mishkan*," this refers to the lower curtains, for the Sages tell us:

Only the *Mishkan* itself is called *Mishkan*; the beams are not called *Mishkan*. (Shabbos 28a)

The word *mishkan* does not refer to the beams themselves, but to the first layer of material that covered the beams. This is confirmed by Rashi's commentary on the phrase "he spread the tent," which he claims refers to the goat-hair covering which was laid on top of the lower curtain. Thus, by this stage in the verse, those lower curtains were already in place. So the order of the erection of the *Mishkan* now becomes clear: first the lower curtains were spread, and only then were the beams put in place, after which the upper goat-hair covering was spread. The Seforno confirms this sequence of events:

Moshe erected the *Mishkan* - the ten skillfully woven curtains which are called *Mishkan* were erected before the beams. (Seforno, Shemos 40:18)

This is quite remarkable - the curtains were spread before the supports were placed underneath! This meant that this occurred:

...either by people holding up the curtains [while the beams were put underneath] or by miraculous means... (Ibid.)

What was the necessity for all this? Surely it would have been more practical to erect the beams and then spread the coverings over them.

What possible purpose could this obscure order of construction fulfill?

## THE PURPOSE OF THE MISHKAN

The *Mishkan* was intended to be a location where the Divine Presence rested and was more palpable than in any other place in the world. The very name *Mishkan* means "dwelling place," and, indeed, in introducing the concept of the *Mishkan*, the Torah proclaims:

Make a sanctuary for Me, and I shall dwell within them. (Shemos 25:8)

This means that every aspect of the *Mishkan* contributed to this aim - the building itself and each vessel within it needed to be designed to receive and transmit the Divine Presence. This is not dissimilar to the relationship between the body and soul within each person. The body is a vehicle for the soul's existence in this world; so, too, were the details of the *Mishkan* the means by which God's Presence could be perceived on earth.

The right of *klal Yisrael* to benefit from this wonderful *Mishkan* was a great gift from God. For after the sin of the Golden Calf, they were in a spiritually bereft state and hardly suited to such a tremendous manifestation of the Divine. However, God granted them the *Mishkan*, enabling them to perceive Him even while they were in a spiritually inferior situation. At this stage they had been spiritually animated enough to realize that they were dissatisfied with the mere hope that God would rest among them. Instead, they knew that their task in life was to be, like the vessels in the *Mishkan*, vehicles for the Divine.

This was symbolized by the order of construction that we have mentioned. For the lower coverings were spread *before* the beams were put underneath to support them. This represents the people who, after the sin of the *eigel*, were given a *Mishkan before* they were really able to support the spiritual level it represented. Only after the curtains had been spread could the beams be put underneath. So, too, after the spiritual lift provided by the construction of the *Mishkan* the people could support the level they had been granted by God.

## SOMETHING SIMILAR

A similar idea applies to the situation in which *klal Yisrael* found themselves in Egypt. It is well known that they had reached the lowest level of spiritual pollution in Egypt; just a short time longer in slavery may have meant that they would have been so immersed in Egyptian culture that they would have been irredeemable. As we know, God redeemed them then even though they were not really worthy of His attentions. But they were worth redeeming for what they could achieve: the acceptance of the Torah seven weeks later at Mount Sinai. So God took them above the level that they were on, granting them a great Exodus from Egypt, confident that they would "catch up," as it were, through their own efforts, in the seven intervening weeks.

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