

## Divine Assessment of the Tabernacle

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Parashat Naso

### ***Seeking a context for the last verse in the Parasha.***

The last verse of Parashat Naso (BaMidbar 7:89), appears to be a non sequitur in the sense that its connection to what has just been stated, i.e., the sacrifices and donations to the Mishkan by the heads of the various tribes, and what is discussed at the beginning of Chapter 8, i.e., Aharon's responsibilities vis-à-vis the maintenance of the Menora, is unclear. What does "And when Moshe would come into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, he would hear the Voice Speaking to him from upon the cover that was on the Aron of Testimony, from between the two cherubs,<sup>1</sup> speaking to him" have to do with either the preceding or the following topic?

### ***The need for an indication of Divine Acceptance of the construction of the Tabernacle.***

Chizkuni understands that Moshe's immediate ability to receive prophecy in the Mishkan that has just been dedicated, is an indication that HaShem approves of its construction and the sacrifices that have been offered, (paralleling Shemot 40:34-5 describing how when the Mishkan was first erected, a Divine Cloud descended upon it, and VaYikra 9:24, where a Divine Fire ignited the wood that had been arranged on the Copper Altar.)<sup>2</sup> "Since the Tora is referring to the dedication of the Altar, we derive from this verse that the Divine Presence was Dwelling within the Mishkan, and it was from there that the Voice emanated." In this commentator's view, it was important that the people receive feedback regarding the efficacy of all of their efforts, i.e., had they used the proper materials, were the various artifacts fabricated in the proper manner, was everything erected and placed in an acceptable fashion, were the sacrifices offered—both in terms of what was sacrificed, as well as the thoughts and actions of the Kohanim conducting the sacrificial rites—in accordance with Divine Directives, was the timing correct, etc.? When one considers how many variables there were, and just how many things could possibly go wrong, the trepidation of the people as a whole, and Moshe in particular, is understandable. Furthermore, if something had not been done correctly, what would have been the means for correcting the situation—would the entire process, beginning with amassing new raw materials and then rebuilding and remaking everything have been repeated, or would there have been some indication regarding what in particular was at fault, and only that singular aspect replaced or repeated? Additionally, what would have been done with the failed Mishkan—was it Hekdesh (dedicated to God's Purposes, and therefore off limits for any other usage) or could some or all of it be salvaged in some manner? Happily, since such an exercise did not prove necessary, neither of these two possibilities became an issue. Much in the way that the entire Jewish nation was extremely relieved every Yom HaKippurim, when the Kohen Gadol would emerge from the Holy of Holies after praying on the people's behalf,<sup>3</sup> Moshe's receiving Divine Prophecy at the conclusion of the Mishkan's dedication put everyone's mind to rest that they had carried out their responsibilities precisely, something which while they couldn't be sure until some empirical evidence was provided, the biblical text had already indicated that all had been done properly when it stated, (Shemot 39:32) "And the Jewish people did everything in accordance with what HaShem Commanded Moshe, so they did."

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<sup>1</sup> The different components of the Aron are described in Shemot 25:10 ff. and 37:1 ff.

<sup>2</sup> I Melachim 8:10-1 describes a similar phenomenon when Shlomo first completes and dedicates the Temple.

<sup>3</sup> Yoma 7:4; Mussaf of Yom HaKippurim—the liturgical poem "Mareh Kohen" ArtScroll Machzor, pp. 570 ff.

***Comparing the dedication of the Tabernacle and what immediately followed, with that of the Temple.***

Sephorno, echoes Chizkuni's approach, but also puts it into an historical context when he reflects upon the relative sanctities of the peripatetic Mishkan on the one hand, and the two permanent Mikdash's that were eventually to be built by Shlomo and Ezra, on the other.

This concluded the dedication of the Altar, something that when taken as a whole was dwarfed by comparison with the dedication of the First Temple with respect to the latter's manifold vessels, their significant monetary worth, and the great number of sacrifices involved. Although this (the dedication of the Mishkan) was extremely minor in comparison to the dedication undertaken by Shlomo, nevertheless when Moshe enters the Tent of Meeting, he hears the same Voice that he heard prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, something that never took place during the First Mikdash, let alone in the time of the Second Mikdash. (During the periods of the Temples) no prophet went to the Mikdash to receive prophecy in such a manner that he would immediately, while still at the Mikdash, receive the prophecy he sought. This was because this dedication (the Mishkan) was extremely desirable to God as were those bringing the offerings, and Moshe, who was in charge of all that was taking place.

Conventional wisdom would probably maintain that the Mishkan was a less holy context than the Mikdash, if for nothing else, its location, or rather lack thereof. Zevachim 119a interprets Devarim 12:9 "Because until now you have not come to the 'Menucha' (resting place) and the 'Nachala' (place of inheritance) that the Lord, your God is Giving to you," 'Menucha' represents Yerushalayim; <sup>4</sup> 'Nachala' represents Shilo. Even though Shilo was not destined as the final location of the Aron and the rest of the vessels of HaShem's Holy Place, it still was more stable than the frequent relocations in the desert, hence the appellation "Nachala". In Devarim, Moshe is speaking from the perspective of the Jews still being in the desert, a time when they hadn't even established a semi-permanent place to maintain the Mishkan, the encampment being on the move throughout their 40 years of wandering—see BaMidbar 33:16 ff. Aharon Mirsky, in Da'at Mikra—Devarim<sup>5</sup> explains R. Shimon's view (R. Yehuda in Zevachim reverses the association) that 'Menucha' represents specifically Yerushalayim due to textual parallels to Tehillim 132:13-4 "For the Lord has Chosen Zion, He has Declared it for His Habitation. This is My RESTING PLACE forever, here will I Dwell, for I have Desired it," and BaMidbar 11:25 "And it was when there RESTED upon them the Spirit, and they prophesied and they didn't continue/stop".<sup>6</sup>

***Distinguishing between the Tabernacle during the desert wanderings, and its purpose once Canaan is entered and conquered by the people.***

When R. Shimon's view re the meaning of Devarim 12:9 is combined with the Sephorno's comment concerning BaMidbar 7:89, we are left with the strange paradox that the impermanent Mishkan allowed for a higher level of prophecy than the Mikdash, located in the most spiritual of places, Yerushalayim. Perhaps in order to account for this apparent inconsistency, a distinction should be made between the Mishkan in the desert, and the Mishkan, once it is located in its various locations in Israel proper. RaMBaN on Shemot 25:1 posits that the Mishkan, in light of e.g., 1) the Heichal wherein only

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<sup>4</sup> Yehoshua 18:1.

<sup>5</sup> Mosad HaRav Kook, Yerushalayim, 5762, pp. 185-6, fn. 7.

<sup>6</sup> There are divergent views re whether the seventy elders, once they are Divinely Confirmed by means of receiving prophecy, continued to prophecy from that point onwards, or whether it was only a one-time occurrence.

Moshe could enter was located at the center of the entire Jewish encampment, 2) the many restrictions against those ritually impure residing inside the camp's boundaries, and 3) the limitations upon whom could bring sacrifices, etc., constituted a portable Har Sinai to which had applied similar prohibitions—see Shemot 19. In this way, the revelation of the Tora would be able to continue throughout the forty years of wandering in the desert.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, a clear delineation can be made between the Mishkan's purpose in the desert as opposed to its significance once the Jews crossed the Jordan and entered Israel. While they were still in the desert, the status of Sinai continued, a level of prophecy via Moshe that would forever be unequaled, as in Devarim 34:10, "No prophet ever arose again in Israel comparable to Moshe..." and therefore the Mishkan would always surpass the subsequent Mikdash's with respect to Divine Intimacy and Revelation. But once Moshe was no longer on the scene, and prophecy took place on a significantly lesser level—e.g., Shmuel I 3:1 describing the Mishkan in Shilo "...and the Word of HaShem was rare in those days, prophecy did not burst out"—then the Mishkan becomes a temporary stopgap, awaiting the permanent structure that would mark the true and lasting spiritual center of the Jewish people.

***Reflecting upon the importance of gaining a sense of where we stand vis-à-vis HaShem's Expectations for us.***

Knowing "how we are doing" in God's Eyes, whether we are conforming to His Wishes at least minimally, is always a matter of intense curiosity, and not only when the Mishkan was completed. Before we entered into the period of "Hester Panim" (God's Hiding of His Face), as described in Devarim 31:18, determining our spiritual status was less difficult, and via prophecy, symbolic events on Yom HaKippurim (e.g., the turning white of the red ribbon when the scapegoat is thrown off the cliff),<sup>8</sup> and inquiries of the Urim VeTumim (the Kohen Gadol's breastplate whose jewels would light up in different

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<sup>7</sup> In a recent volume containing R. J.B. Soloveitchik's thoughts on Parashiot HaShavua (Avishai David, Darosh Darash Yosef: Discourses of R. Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik on the Weekly Parasha, Urim, Yerushalayim, 2011), the second essay on Parashat BaMidbar, "Kedushat haMachanot of Sefer BaMidbar" cites RaMBaM, who extended RaMBaM's conception of the Mishkan's serving as a portable Har Sinai to Jerusalem proper:

Mishneh Tora, Hilchot Beit HaBechira 7:11

...The land from the entrance of Jerusalem to the Temple Mount is analogous to Machaneh Yisrael (the outer concentric square in which the majority of the Jews resided). The land from the Temple Mount to the entrance of the courtyard, which is the Nicanor Gate, is analogous to Machaneh Leviya (where the Levites whose responsibility was to serve in the Mishkan as well as carry its components from place to place, lived). From the entrance of the courtyard inward was the Machaneh Shechina (the precinct in which the Divine Presence was concentrated)...

The Rav then homiletically and metaphorically extends the concept even further, to the experience of the Jews in not only the greater land of Israel, but even the Diaspora:

This is the secret power of the Jewish people throughout the millennia. During the periods in our history that we were engulfed by the nations of the world, the fact that we never left the Temple (*as a state of mind?--yb*) protected us. The Temple is not merely an area that is circumscribed by Kedushat Mechtzot (the holiness of the barriers that separate one portion of the Temple area from the other), but we are constantly travelling with Kedushat Machanot (the holiness of the arrangement of the encampment (*I would imagine that the emphasis here is that the Shechina, as represented by the Tora, is always considered at the center of wherever we find ourselves.--yb*) Therefore, before we are introduced to Kedushat HaTora, it is critical that we read of the ongoing sanctity that accompanied us in all of our wanderings (*The Rav is accounting for the practice of reading Parashat BaMidbar in which the arrangement of the Jewish encampment is described, prior to the festival of Shavuot, i.e., before we figuratively once again receive the Tora, we have to organize ourselves in the manner that Har Sinai was arranged.—yb*)

<sup>8</sup> Yoma 68a.

sequences to spell out messages)<sup>9</sup> we were able to determine the extent to which we were in need of repentance and reconciliation. In the absence of such clear-cut indicators of Divine Pleasure or Displeasure, we have to be all that more self-critical and analytical, as well as open to constructive criticism from role models and mentors in order to know when a serious approach to repentance and significant personal change is called for. Hopefully we can properly rise to such a challenge.

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<sup>9</sup> Berachot 13b.