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SINAI OR SANCTUARY?

By Yossi Goldman

And in the beginning, G-d was homeless, and so G-d asked His people to set Him up with some digs. Where does it say that? Well, nowhere, actually. But it does say that G-d instructed Moses to tell the people, “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.”Now the question is, was G-d really homeless? Wasn’t He already dwelling with the people? Why, it was just the other week that we read of the revelation at Sinai, where G-d came down from heaven to earth. So why suddenly the need for a Sanctuary for Him? The answer is that there is a fundamental difference between Sinai and the Sanctuary. Sinai represents a revelation thrust upon the people from above. G-d initiated and activated that encounter. In this experience, the Jewish people were somewhat passive. All the thunder and lightning, physically and spiritually, came at them from on high. The Sanctuary, however, had to be built by the people themselves. They had to take the initiative. From the fundraising campaign to collect the raw materials needed for the sanctuary, down to the nuts and bolts of construction, the Mishkan was a human-made edifice. At Sinai the heavens opened for the greatest sound-and-light show on earth, leaving a nation mesmerized and awe-inspired. But they themselves were passive recipients of this unique, never-to-be-repeated gift from above. To build a Sanctuary took a whole building campaign. Men and women, young and old, everybody rolled up their sleeves. It took weeks and months of hard labour, meaningful contributions by every individual, planning and programming, designing and then actually building a holy house for G-d. We made it happen. And thereby, it was the people who brought G-d down to earth. Apparently, it was important for the Jews to appreciate the value G-d attaches to self-help and to DIY projects of a spiritual nature. It is not good enough to sit around waiting for the extraordinary revelations, those once-in-a-lifetime supernal visits the good L-rd might bestow upon us. It is necessary for us to create the infrastructure, to take the building blocks in our hands and “make me a Sanctuary.”To put it simply, are we waiting for G-d, or is G-d waiting for us? Who makes the next move?I met a guy not long ago and, as often happens to rabbis, the discussion turned to religion. He was pretty blunt about it. “Not for me, rabbi,” he said. “If G-d wanted me to be religious, he’d have made sure I was born in Bnei Brak, or at least into a religious family here.” I told him he reminded me of the comedian who had a terrible fear of flying and argued that “if G-d intended man to fly, he’d have given him wings—or at least made it easier to get to the airport!” So he says, “If G-d wanted me to be an angel, he'd have given me wings too.”The fact is, G-d did give us wings. That’s what Sinai was all about. He gave us a dose of revelation, of spiritual shock-and-awe that has saturated us with an eternal capacity to fly high, to touch the divine. But those were just the tools; now we have to learn to fly. We may have been endowed with the potential to develop our connection to G-dliness, but after Sinai it’s up to us to make it happen and to actually bring our innate power to the fore.True revelation is rare. While there certainly are those special moments when we witness the unmistakable presence of G-d in our lives, we cannot wait for lightning to strike. We need to build our personal sanctuaries for G-d in order to embrace Him and bring Him into our homes and families.The Rebbe of Kotzk was once asked by his teacher, “Where is G-d?” He answered, “Wherever you let Him in.”

A PORTABLE HOME
By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Shabbat Times
Candle Lighting 5:02pm
Shabbos ends 6:14pm

The parasha of Teruma describes the construction of the Tabernacle, the first collective house of worship in the history of Israel. The first but not the last; it was eventually succeeded by the Temple in Jerusalem. I want to focus on one moment in Jewish history which represents Jewish spirituality at its lowest ebb and highest flight: the moment the Temple was destroyed.

It is hard to understand the depth of the crisis into which the destruction of the First Temple plunged the Jewish people. Their very existence was predicated on a relationship with G d symbolized by the worship that took place daily in Jerusalem. With the Babylonian conquest in 586 BCE, Jews lost not only their land and sovereignty. In losing the Temple, it was as if they had lost hope itself. For their hope lay in G d, and how could they turn to G d if the very place where they served Him was in ruins? One document has left a vivid record of the mood of Jews at that time, one of the most famous of the psalms:

By the waters of Babylon we sat and wept as we remembered Zion...How can we sing the songs of the L rd in a strange land?

It was then that an answer began to take shape. The Temple no longer stood, but its memory remained, and this memory was strong enough to bring Jews together in collective worship. In exile, in Babylon, Jews began to gather to expound Torah, articulate a collective hope of return, and recall the Temple and its service.

The prophet Ezekiel was one of those who shaped a vision of return and restoration, and it is to him we owe the first oblique reference to a radically new institution that eventually became known as the Beit Knesset, the synagogue: "This is what the sovereign L rd says: although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet I have become to them a small Sanctuary [Mikdash me'at] in the countries where they have gone." The central Sanctuary had been destroyed, but a small echo, a miniature, remained.

The synagogue is one of the most remarkable examples of an itaruta de'letata, "an awakening from below." It came into being not through words spoken by G d to Israel, but by words spoken by Israel to G d. There is no synagogue in Tanakh, no command to build local houses of prayer. On the contrary, insofar as the Torah speaks of a "house of G d" it refers to a central Sanctuary, a collective focus for the worship of the people as a whole.

We tend to forget how profound the concept of a synagogue was. Professor M. Stern has written that "in establishing the synagogue, Judaism created one of the greatest revolutions in the history of religion and society, for the synagogue was an entirely new environment for divine service, of a type unknown anywhere before." It became, according to Salo Baron, the institution through which the exilic community "completely shifted the emphasis from the place of worship, the Sanctuary, to the gathering of worshippers, the congregation, assembled at any time and any place in G d's wide world." The synagogue became Jerusalem in exile, the home of the Jewish heart. It is the ultimate expression of monotheism – that wherever we gather to turn our hearts towards heaven, there the Divine Presence can be found, for G d is everywhere.

Where did it come from, this world-changing idea? It did not come from the Temple, but rather from the much earlier institution described in this week's parsha: the Tabernacle. Its essence was that it was portable, made up of beams and hangings that could be dismantled and carried by the Levites as the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness. The Tabernacle, a temporary structure, turned out to have permanent influence, whereas the Temple, intended to be permanent, proved to be temporary – until, as we pray daily, it is rebuilt.

More significant than the physical structure of the Tabernacle was its metaphysical structure. The very idea that one can build a home for G d seems absurd. It was all too easy to understand the concept of sacred space in a polytheistic worldview. The G ds were half-human. They had places where they could be encountered. Monotheism tore this idea up at its roots, nowhere more eloquently than in Psalm 139:

Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Where can I flee from Your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
If I make my bed in the depths, You are there.

Hence the question asked by Israel's wisest King, Solomon: "But will G d really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much less this temple I have built!"

The same question is posed in the name of G d by one of Israel's greatest prophets, Isaiah:

Heaven is My throne,
and the earth is My footstool.
Where is the house you will build for Me?
Where will My resting place be?

The very concept of making a home in finite space for an infinite presence seems a contradiction in terms. The answer, still astonishing in its profundity, is contained at the beginning of this week's parsha: "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell in them [betokham]." The Jewish mystics pointed out the linguistic strangeness of this sentence. It should have said, "I will dwell in it," not "I will dwell in them." The answer is that the Divine Presence lives not in a building but in its builders; not in a physical place but in the human heart. The Sanctuary was not a place in which the objective existence of G d was somehow more concentrated than elsewhere. Rather, it was a place whose holiness had the effect of opening hearts to the One worshipped there. G d exists everywhere, but not everywhere do we feel the presence of G d in the same way. The essence of "the holy" is that it is a place where we set aside all human devices and desires and enter a domain wholly set aside for G d.

If the concept of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, is that G d lives in the human heart whenever it opens itself unreservedly to heaven, then its physical location is irrelevant. Thus, the way was open, seven centuries later, to the synagogue: the supreme statement of the idea that if G d is everywhere, He can be reached anywhere. I find it moving that the frail structure described in this week's parsha became the inspiration of an institution that, more than any other, kept the Jewish people alive through almost two thousand years of dispersion – the longest of all journeys through the wilderness.

PARSHA SUMMARY

The people of Israel are called upon to contribute thirteen materials—gold, silver and copper; blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool; flax, goat hair, animal skins, wood, olive oil, spices and gems—out of which, G-d says to Moses, “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell amidst them.”On the summit of Mount Sinai, Moses is given detailed instructions on how to construct this dwelling for G-d so that it could be readily dismantled, transported and reassembled as the people journeyed in the desert.In the Sanctuary’s inner chamber, behind an artistically woven curtain, was the ark containing the tablets of testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; on the ark’s cover stood two winged cherubim hammered out of pure gold. In the outer chamber stood the seven-branched menorah, and the table upon which the “showbread” was arranged.The Sanctuary’s three walls were fitted together from 48 upright wooden boards, each of which was overlaid with gold and held up by a pair of silver foundation sockets. The roof was formed of three layers of coverings: (a) tapestries of multicolored wool and linen; (b) a covering made of goat hair; (c) a covering of ram and tachash skins. Across the front of the Sanctuary was an embroidered screen held up by five posts.Surrounding the Sanctuary and the copper-plated altar which fronted it was an enclosure of linen hangings, supported by 60 wooden posts with silver hooks and trimmings, and reinforced by copper stakes.

HAFTORAH SUMMARY

I Kings 5:26-6:13.This week's haftorah describes the construction of the Holy Temple under the direction of King Solomon, echoing this week's Torah portion which discusses the construction of the Desert Tabernacle. The haftorah discusses the manpower – both Jewish and non-Jewish – that Solomon recruited for the building of the Holy Temple. Also discussed are the hewing and transportation of the stone, the laying of the foundation, as well as the dimensions of the Holy Temple, its components and materials. The haftorah ends with G-d's word to King Solomon: "This house which you are building, if you walk in My statutes, and execute My ordinances, and keep all My commandments to walk in them; then will I establish My word with you, which I spoke to David your father. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people, Israel."

WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK CHAIM ARUCHIM

Lane, Shirley mother Don, Sylvia Tzivia bas Moshe Monday 22/2/21 Adar 10, 5781
Kempner, Daniel mother Kempner, Jean Sarah bas Binyomin Monday 22/2/21 Adar 10, 5781
Austin, Elaine mother Barnett, Priscillia Pesha bas Zev Tuesday 23/2/21 Adar 11, 5781
Conway, Nigel stepmother Conway, Dinka Dinka bas Wednesday 24/2/21 Adar 12, 5781
Freedman, Louise mother Yershon, Linda Rebecca Rivkah bas Moshe Thursday 25/2/21 Adar 13, 5781
Lavender, Sharon father Koppel ben Chaim Friday 26/2/21 Adar 14, 5781

JEWISH HUMOUR

Fifteen-year-old Jacob Horowitz came bounding into the house and found his mom Brenda in bed. He asked if she were sick or something. He was truly concerned.“As a matter of fact,” Brenda replied, “I don't feel too well.”Well, don't worry a bit about dinner,” Jacob responded. “I'll be happy to carry you down to the kitchen so you can cook.

Rachel goes to The Abrahamavitz Farm and asks David, the manager, if they have any vacancies. David tells her that the only job available is for a part-time lemon picker. Rachel says she'll take the job.After David asks her some questions about her education and previous jobs, he tells her, "You're really far too qualified for such a lowly position.""But I would still like the job," says Rachel. "I would be very good at it.""Do you have any experience in picking lemons?" David asks her."You bet," replies Rachel. "I've been divorced three times."

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

A barrel of water weighs 60 pounds. What must you put in it for it to weigh 40 pounds?

Answer for last week by

Coffin

STORY TIME

The Rizhiner Rebbe had thousands of Chasidim in Ukraine while Czar Nicholas sat on his throne. It was during this period that the opponents of Chasidism made terrible accusations against Chasidim which reached even the highest gentile authorities.One time the Czar was told that the Rizhiner Rebbe considered himself a king and that he did not recognize the authority of the Russian crown. Incensed, the Czar decided to dispatch an infiltrator to make an investigation.The infiltrator was a high-ranking officer, a renegade Jew happy to turn informer. Arriving in Rizhin, he asserted that he wanted to ask the tzadik (holy, righteous person) for his blessing for business endeavours. To ingratiate himself with the Chasidim, he bought refreshments. Then he began discussing his business, attacking the government for making laws and restrictions. The infiltrator was surprised that not one voice was raised in his favour. He repeated this performance several times, but each time was met by total silence from his listeners.One afternoon he was ushered into the Rebbe's room. The spy began to tell the Rebbe how, as a wealthy merchant, he was suffering from the terrible decrees and regulations imposed by the government.The Rebbe looked deeply at his visitor and said, "I will tell you a story.In a small village lived a Jewish innkeeper who had an only son named Yossel. Because the village was so isolated, Yossel had no Jewish friends. His best friend was Stepan, the son of the gentile handyman who worked for his father. Stepan had a quick mind and enjoyed sitting in on Yossel's Torah lessons. In fact, Stepan was quicker than Yossel to grasp the lessons.Years passed, and it was time to look for a bride for Yossel. A matchmaker came to the little village to interview him. Stepan sat together with Yossel as the matchmaker questioned him on Jewish topics. Each time a question was posed, however, Yossel was silent, while Stepan supplied the answer. It was clear to the matchmaker that this boy was not a good prospect and he left. The innkeeper decided to separate his son from Stepan.After much thought, he decided to send away both father and son. When the handyman heard, he protested: 'Why should I be punished on account of my son? Let him go out into the world.' And so Stepan left the inn.For many months Stepan went from one study hall to another masquerading as a Jewish orphan and receiving hospitality from Jews wherever he went. Eventually, he tired of that life and decided to move to a large city, where he enrolled in a university and excelled in his studies. When he completed his courses he began searching for a good opportunity.One day, arriving in a very distant city, he heard that the citizens were about to choose a new ruler, something they did every three years. All candidates were to present themselves at the palace where their suitability for kingship would be determined. Stepan rushed to the palace. With his outstanding intelligence, he was chosen, king.Soon after his coronation the new king inexplicably began making terrible decrees against the local Jews. The most devastating was that the Jews would have to leave the realm at the end of twelve months!The Chief Rabbi declared a public fast, during which the people begged G-d to soften the king's heart. On the fourth day, he called a meeting of the seven most prominent members of the community at which he related to them his strange dream. He dreamed that in a faraway land there was a young innkeeper named Yossel who would be able to change the decree of the king. Strangely enough, each man present had had the exact same dream.Messengers were dispatched at once to bring the innkeeper to their city. They related their strange tale and begged him to accompany them and Yossel agreed. The prominent Jews of the city managed to arrange a meeting with the king, and Yossel was ushered into the royal throne room. Stepan was overjoyed to see his old friend, and they embraced each other warmly."What is this I am told about the evil decrees you have made against the Jews of this realm?" asked Yossel."I really don't have anything against the Jews," Stepan replied. "In fact, they have always treated me very kindly, but as soon as I became king, I felt that I had to make these new decrees. I don't entirely understand why."The Chief Rabbi explained: "Your majesty, our Torah teaches that the hearts of kings and rulers are in the hand of G-d. When Jews keep the Torah they farewell. But when they rebel against G-d, He hardens the heart of their king and they fall prey to evil decrees. Nonetheless, they do not pray for another king, for they know that it is their own actions that shape their destiny and not the will of the king."Having concluded his story, the Rizhiner looked into the eyes of the informer and said: Go and tell those who have sent you that the accusations against the Jews are untrue. They are loyal citizens and pray for the welfare of their rulers and the country in which they live.

FOOD 4 THE SOUL

Everyone agrees with all the wonderful advice and ethics written in the books of the sages. Everyone agrees that this is the way to run your life. Yet each of us has our escape route, to avoid bettering our lives by changing ourselves. We ask, “Were those words truly meant for me, or perhaps for someone else in another time and another place?

”If it is truth, it is meant for you, here, now.