



Parshat Trumah: *Asu li Miqdash veShochanti betocham.*
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In this shiur I compare the approaches of Rambam and Yehuda Hallevi to the idea that the shekhina dwelt in the mishkan.

Parshat Terumah and *parshat Tetsaveh* form one continuous whole describing the plans for constructing and dedicating the *mishkan*. *Trumah* describes the furniture and utensils of the *mishkan*, and *Tetsaveh* describes the clothes of the *kohen*, the dedication of the *kohanim* and the *mishkan*, and the *tamid* sacrifice. At the beginning of *trumah* G-d says, "Make me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them [the children of Israel]." Towards the end of *tetsaveh*, He says, "And I will dwell among the children of Israel and be their G-d. And they will know that I am the L-rd their G-d who took them out from the land of Egypt to dwell among them. I am the L-rd their G-d." (Exodus 29.45-6). These verses form a kind of frame around the two *parshiot*.

In this *shiur* I will discuss the reasons for the building of the *mishkan*, comparing the Rambam's approach with that of Rabbi Yehudah Hallevi, author of the *Kuzari*. Understanding the reasons for the *mitsvot* is important not because our observance is dependent on understanding and agreeing with them, but because we would fail to gain some of the benefits of the *mitsvot* if we did not reflect on their meaning. According to Rambam, studying the reasons for *mitsvot* is part of the third commandment, concerning love of G-d. (sefer ha-mitsvot, positive *mitzvah gimmel*). This is especially useful in the case of a *mitzvah* like building the *mishkan* or *miqdash* which is not a part of our ordinary daily life.

There are many difficulties surrounding the concept of a *mishkan* or *miqdash*. On the one hand, G-d does not need a house of any sort. On the other hand, should there be no structure dedicated to G-d? G-d commanded building a *mishkan*, but why? King David and Solomon thought it was a matter of honor. David suggested improving on the tent-like *mishkan* because he was embarrassed that he had built himself a more impressive structure, and afraid that G-d would abandon his dynasty (2 Sam. 7). But G-d reproved him, explaining that He has no need for an impressive structure, and that the dynasty is guaranteed. When Solomon actually built the Temple in Jerusalem he immediately acknowledged its unworthiness: "Shall G-d indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, neither the heavens nor the highest heavens can support you (or: contain you), much less this house that I have built for you" (1 Kings 8.27). As we will see next week, Maimonides is willing to accept that this is part of the story.

But the Jewish scholars of Andalusia faced a more difficult philosophical question. In what sense could G-d really dwell in a house? We can distinguish two main approaches to these questions, the approach of Yehudah Hallevi, and the approach of the Rambam. Both of them begin from a verse in this week's *parsha*: *asu li miqdash veshachanti betocham*, which commands us to build a sanctuary which will serve as a residence, so to speak, for G-d. Both of these scholars agreed that G-d does not need such a residence. What then is its purpose?

Yehudah Hallevi

Yehudah Hallevi offered a striking answer to this question. He argued that while the *mishkan* was not necessary for G-d, it was necessary for his *shekhina*. He

did not mean this in a metaphorical sense, but in a very literal physical sense: without the *mishkan*, G-d's *shekhina* would really not dwell in Israel.

In *Kuzari* 3.23 he explains this by means of an analogy between the *mishkan* and a living creature. This analogy has the advantage of also explaining why the Torah is so careful in describing every aspect of the building of the *mishkan* in our *parsha*, and why it goes out of its way in *parshiot vayakhel* and *piqudei* to explain that the builders built everything exactly in accordance with their instructions. First let's look at the way he describes the building of the *mishkan*, and then we can analyze his comparison to a living being:

We have already explained that one can only become close to G-d by means of G-d's *mitsvot* themselves, because He knows the measures and divisions, and times and places, and requirements, which bring acceptance and closeness to the divine when they are fulfilled. So it was in the making of the *mishkan*, where it says about each act, "and Betsalel made the Ark," "and he made the veil," "and he made the curtains," and each time it says, "as G-d commanded Moses," that is, without any addition or subtraction. But there is nothing in those acts that is grasped by our understanding and reasoning. And He concluded by saying "and Moses saw all the work, and indeed they had done it; as G-d commanded, so they did it; and Moses blessed them."

And when they were completed G-d's *shekhina* dwelt among them, since the two conditions which are the foundations of the Torah had been fulfilled, the first being that the law come from G-d, and the second that it be fulfilled by the congregation with a whole heart. And indeed, the *mishkan* was a command of G-d, and it was constructed by the entire congregation with great effort and eagerness, as it says "take my offering from everyone whose heart impels." (Exodus 25.1) This necessitated the arrival of the *shekhina*, as it is said, "and I will dwell in their midst." (Exodus 25.8)

The most important point is that that the completion of the *mishkan* necessitates the divine presence. Once the material structure is complete, a spiritual or animating principle naturally arises. Hallevi compares this to the process by which plants and animals are born. There too, a proper combination of materials causes the organism to spring to life. And he suggests the possibility of "artificially" creating a living organism:

The elements are prepared for receiving influences according to their heat and coolness, moisture and dryness, and as a result this becomes a palm and that becomes a grape-vine, this a horse and that a lion. If we could estimate the proper combinations, we would be able to create blood or fat, for example, or seed, by combining liquids in the proper combination, and we would even be able to create animals in which dwells the spirit of life...

But we have already witnessed the failure of all the chemists and astrologists who attempted one of these methods. And one can't argue from the fact that people are able to produce animals such as bees from rotten meat, and insects from wine, because this is not done by their own understanding and wisdom. [Yehudah Hallevi was proven right, since it is now known that these animals are not produced by these substances.] Similarly they have found that through the conjunction of male and female a child is born; but man's part in this is only placing the seed in matter that is prepared to receive and nourish it. But the calculation of the composition that is necessary for the human form is known only to He who created it.

Here Yehudah Hallevi suggests that through the proper arrangement of materials a living creature can be created. Although living creatures are combinations of matter and spirit, the matter is the crucial element, and once it is arranged properly, the spirit will follow. In principle this is not different from what human beings and animals do when they create life by means of sexual reproduction. There too, different materials are combined by the act of conjugation in order to produce life. Of course, the seed and egg already contain a complex combination of elements which would be difficult or impossible for us to produce on our own. But if we discovered the proper combinations, or if G-d revealed them to us, it would be possible to create life from scratch.

Like sexual reproduction, cloning also works by combining already existing biological elements -- like baking a cake from a prepared mix. The recipe for life remains almost as far from us today as it was in Yehudah Hallevi's day, and in fact the complexities that have been discovered confirm his judgment of the difficulties involved. Even if we should be able to create seeds and eggs from more basic elements, we would still be doing nothing other than re-arranging materials that G-d has provided in a pattern that he has established. By doing so, we would confirm Hallevi's argument about the spiritual potential inherent in matter.

Yehudah Hallevi offers this analogy to explain the purpose of the *mishkan* and why it is necessary to be so exacting in its construction. In his view, the *mishkan* is a kind of living organism whose soul is the divine presence, and which is created by a specific arrangement of materials on divine instructions. Just as in animals the correct arrangement of material elements necessitates the arrival of the animating spirit, so too the correct arrangement of the materials of the *mishkan* "necessitates the arrival of the divine presence." This explains why Betsalel was so careful in following the instructions down to the last letter, and why the recipe is preserved for us in the Torah with such detailed exactness.

While this may sound like a supernatural description of the *mishkan*, it is actually the opposite. In Hallevi's theory the spiritual quality of the *mishkan* is inherent in the laws of nature, and requires no miraculous intervention. No miracle is required other than the revelation of the instructions for constructing it. Once the instructions are followed, in the right spirit, the *shekhina* is the natural result.

But what is the nature of the *shekhina* that dwelt in the *mishkan*? Hallevi describes it in 2.62:

The *shekhina* was to the people of Israel as the spirit is to the body. It gave them divine vitality as well as clarity, beauty and light in their souls, bodies, garments and homes; and when it passed from them their intelligence was weakened, their bodies became ugly and their beauty was lost.

On this view, the *mishkan* had direct influence in vitalizing the Jewish people. It is not simply a practical or educational institution, but a real living being with influence on the Jewish nation. Without it we are like bodies without souls.

This approach explains the text of the Torah very well. It explains why the Torah seems to say that G-d will dwell in the *mishkan*. While not meaning G-d himself, it does mean that G-d's *shekhina* will dwell among us. This explains why on the completion of the *mishkan* it says, "And the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of G-d filled the *mishkan*." (Exod. 40.18). Although the term *shekhina* appears neither here nor anywhere else in the Tanach, Hallevi uses it as a synonym for the Biblical phrase "glory of G-d".

If we extend Hallevi's reasoning, we could offer a similar explanation for the fact that G-d talks to Moses from between the *keruvim*: like the *mishkan* itself, the *keruvim* could function as a material apparatus enabling G-d's voice to be heard, almost like a radio receiver. If so, G-d's voice in the *mishkan* would have been an audible voice, like his voice on Mount Sinai, although Hallevi never says this.

The Rambam

The Rambam takes a very different approach to the *mishkan*. He does not of course deny that the *shekhina* rested on the *mishkan*. In Laws of the Chosen Temple 6.16, for example, he says that the holiness of the Temple and of Jerusalem is more permanent than that of the rest of the land of Israel because the *shekhina* rested there. But he does not accept Hallevi's theory of the *shekhina* as a kind of spiritual or animating principle, and has to find an alternative explanation.

The difference between the two can be seen in the different ways they quote a single verse. Since the *shekhina* is the central interest for Yehudah Hallevi, he quotes only the second half of the verse, "*veshachanti betocham.*" Rambam, in his Laws of the Chosen Temple, quotes only the first half "*asu li miqdash.*" Since G-d cannot dwell in the Temple in any meaningful sense, the second half of the verse would only create unnecessary confusion.

What then does the Rambam do with the fact that G-d or the "glory of G-d" is said to dwell in the *mishkan*? He discusses the subject three times in the *Moreh*. In 1.19, he discusses a passage in which the Torah speaks of G-d's glory filling the *mishkan* (Exod. 40.34), and offers two explanation for this expression. He explains that the glory of G-d is not a physical thing, since the word *male'* (fill) does not necessarily refer to a physical object filling up a space:

The term is also employed to signify attainment of perfection to the highest degree. So, "Full with the blessing of G-d" (Deut. 33.23); "He has filled them with wisdom of heart" (Exod. 35.35); "He was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning" (I Kings 7.14). In this sense it is said "The fullness of the earth is his glory" (Isa. 6.3), meaning that the whole earth gives evidence of his perfection, that is, leads to a knowledge of it. So too, "The glory of G-d filled the *mishkan*" (Exod. 40.34). Every application of the word to G-d must be interpreted in this manner, and not that there is a body occupying space.

Does this explanation allow room for Hallevi's theory that an animating principle entered the *mishkan*? Obviously such a principle would not be a material object occupying space: the soul does not take up space in the body. And it would not be too far-fetched to describe the soul as a kind of perfection.

But the Rambam does not speak of a soul or animating principle in this passage. And he does not interpret the "glory" of the earth as an animating principle. Instead he explains that the fullness of the earth is G-d's glory because it testifies to the perfection of its creator. It would seem that the *mishkan* too should be understood as testifying to G-d's perfection. But although this is true to some extent, it not true to the same extent as it is of the creation. Perhaps for this reason Rambam suggests a second interpretation of the glory that filled the *mishkan*:

If, on the other hand, you prefer to think that in this passage "the glory of the Lord," is a certain light created for the purpose is to be understood, that such light is always termed "glory," and that such light "*filled the mishkan,*" we have no objection. (*Moreh* 1.19)

It is not clear which of these two interpretations the Rambam prefers. But when he returns to the subject in *Moreh* 1.64 he adopts the second one whole-heartedly:

Similarly, the "glory of G-d" sometimes signifies the created light which God caused to rest on a certain place in order to confer honor on that place: "And

the glory of G-d abode upon Mount Sinai and the cloud covered it” (Exod. 24.16). “And the glory of G-d filled the *mishkan*” (Exod. 40.35).

Here the Rambam has come to a clear decision: the “glory” that was found in the *mishkan* was the created light or *shekhina*. Why?

The Rambam also discusses the passage in our *parasha* where G-d says that He will dwell in the *mishkan*. In *Moreh* 25 he discusses the term *shakhan*, to dwell, explaining that in addition to referring to a living being that resides in a certain place, it can also be applied to non-living beings:

In this sense the term is employed in reference to G-d, that is to say, to denote the continuance of his *shekhina* or of his providence in some place where the divine presence manifested itself permanently, or in some object which was always protected by providence: “And the glory of G-d dwelt on Mount Sinai” (Exod. 24.16); “And I will dwell among the children of Israel” (Exod. 29.45); “And for the good will of He who dwells in the bush” (Deut. 33.16). Whenever the term is applied to G-d, it must be taken in the sense of the permanence of the *shekhinah* -- I mean his created light -- in a certain place, or of the continuance of his providence protecting a certain object, each time in accordance with the context.

Here the Rambam rejects the idea that G-d himself dwelt in the *mishkan*, and instead offers us two alternatives: G-d’s providence or the *shekhina* or created light.

It is clear why the Rambam wants to deny that G-d dwelt in the *mishkan*. He does not believe that G-d can be compared to any entity we know, spiritual or material. In *Moreh* 1.70 he discussed the Rabbinic interpretation of the phrase, *rokhev ba‘aravot*,

Consider well that they [our Sages] use the expression “dwelling on it [on the highest heaven, or ‘aravot],” and not “dwelling in it.” The latter expression would have implied that G-d occupies a place or is a power in the sphere, as was in fact believed by the Sabaeans, who held that God was the soul of the sphere. By saying “dwelling on it,” they indicated that God was separate from the sphere, and was not a power in it.

G-d cannot be the soul of the sphere since this would imply His finitude. If G-d cannot be the soul of the highest sphere, he obviously cannot be the soul of the *mishkan* either.

The Rambam and Hallevi

But although these points are well taken, they do not imply that Rambam has to reject Hallevi’s theory. Hallevi never claimed that G-d was the soul of the *mishkan*, but only that the *shekhina* was. From a theological point of view, this is a perfectly acceptable theory, since it does not say anything false about G-d. There is no theological problem with describing the *shekhina* as a kind of soul rather than as miraculously created light. Why then, despite his well-known preference to avoid unnecessary miracles, does Maimonides insist on the latter description?

It is possible that Rambam was worried that calling the *shekhina* a spiritual principle or soul could lead to a mistaken impression that G-d himself was somehow dwelling in the *mishkan*. But it seems likely that in addition to the theological issues he was also worried about a scientific problem. In his view, it is simply impossible for a spiritual principle to dwell in a structure of wood and cloth. Saying that this is possible gives a false impression of the natural laws that G-d created, and leads to intellectual misapprehensions about the nature of the physical universe. In

Maimonides' view, not everything that can be imagined is possible (see chapter 2 of the *Shemonah Peraqim*). Since providence is dependent on the intellect (*Moreh* 3.17), intellectual misapprehensions can have very serious effects. Hallevi's theory might lead people to abandon the pursuit of virtue in favor of the illusory effects of the rebuilding of the sanctuary.

For this reason also, Maimonides prefers to minimize miracles. But invoking miracles in the case of the *mishkan* is preferable to offering a mistaken scientific theory. Miracles are perfectly possible, and do not lead to a mistaken description of the natural order. Invoking the miraculous can actually help preserve the integrity and rationality of the laws of nature. And this explanation also helps reduce the risk that anyone would abandon the pursuit of virtue as the ultimate service of G-d.

The Purpose of the Mishkan

These two approaches imply very different opinions about the purpose of the *mishkan*. For Hallevi, the purpose is clear: it allows the *shekhina* to rest on the Jewish people and contributes to their spiritual and physical perfection. Since it plays this valuable role, it is easy to understand why Hallevi was so eager for the return to Zion and the rebuilding of the Temple. While there may be lessons to be learned from the *mishkan*, the most important thing is to build it eagerly and exactly.

But if the *shekhina* is a miraculously created light, created directly by G-d and not by the construction of a *mishkan*, why do we need a *mishkan*? I will answer this question in more detail in the following weeks; here I can only sketch the outlines. For the Rambam, the *mishkan* is primarily an educational tool. Its aim is to educate the Jewish people in true opinions: to reject irrational beliefs, to create a feeling of awe before G-d, and to instill a firm belief in the possibility of prophecy. The real place where spiritual perfection is found is not in a structure of wood and cloth, but in the hearts, souls, and minds of human beings. If the *mishkan* serves to improve the souls of the Jewish people through the lessons it offers, it will have contributed to presence of the *shekhina* in the most important way.

The author of sefer Ha-Hinuch expressed this idea as follows: "Through the *hechsher* of the acts and the purity of the thoughts that we have there (in the Temple), our intellect will achieve *deveikut* with the supernal intellect. In this manner we can explain the dwelling of the *shekhina* in that place literally." (Mitsvah 95, parshat Terumah)

In both accounts, the *mishkan* serves to bring spiritual enlightenment to the Jewish people, but it does so in different ways. For Hallevi it works by its mere presence; for Rambam it works through the lessons it teaches. Lessons have one important advantage: they can be taught by many different means and applied in many different ways. Even without the *mishkan*, the lessons of the *mishkan* can be learned by means of study and applied to different situations. We will take a closer look at them in the following weeks.