

A Thought on Parashas Pekudei 'A Mishkan in my Heart'

By Jeremy Richards

In Memory of my Dear Parents, a"h

L'ilui Nishmos Yitzchok Ben Nachman Halevi a"h and Yenta Bas Yisroel a"h

לעלוי נשמת יצחק בן נחמן הלוי ע"ה ולעלוי נשמת יענטע בת ישראל ע"ה



In as much as Parashas Pekudei completes the sidros dealing with the Mishkan, concludes Sefer Shemos and lies at the threshold of Vayikra, now is an important moment for pausing and reflecting on the significance of the Mishkan and its relevance in our lives.

The beautiful words of the stirring song בְּלִבִּי מִשְׁכַּן אֶבְנֶה, "In my heart, I'll build a sanctuary..." are a profound and powerful commentary on the posuk, "ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם," which we read in Parashas Terumah (Shemos 25:8). Holy Luminaries such as the **Sheloh HaKadosh**, the **Alshich HaKadosh** and **Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin** in his Nefesh HaChaim interpreted that posuk to mean that ה' will dwell within the very hearts of B'nei Yisroel.

Similarly, **Rav Asher Weiss**, one of our contemporary Gedolim, explains that although the Beis HaMikdash has been destroyed, and the Shechinah no longer dwells in Shilo or Yerushalayim as it once did, it still dwells among us in our homes, shuls, and yeshivos, **and in the heart of every Jew** who dedicates himself to Hashem's service, by supporting the pillars of Torah, Tefillah and Chessed. (Rav Asher Weiss on the Parashah, Bereishis and Shemos, Artscroll / Mesorah: p.263)

But we can not assume there is a simple cause and effect relationship between living a life of Torah and mitzvos and meriting a connection with the Divine.

And when **Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner ztz"l** wrote the words of בְּלִבִּי מִשְׁכַּן אֶבְנֶה, "In my heart, I'll build a sanctuary," based on a piyyut in Rabbi Elazar Azikri's 16th Century **Sefer Chareidim**, he was giving expression to the need to actively prepare a place in our hearts for ה' Presence.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, the Kedushas Levi teaches that it will not be a life of merely habitual practice of the mitzvos that will cause Hashem's Presence to dwell among us; rather, it's only sincere, dedicated Torah observance and devoted service to Hashem which will bring a person close to Him, indeed bring about a bond between the two, and also bring pleasure and joy to the Almighty. He writes:

האדם צריך לעשות המצות בכדי שעל ידי זה יהיה לו התחברות אל השכינה, ... שעל ידי זה יהיה תענוג להשכינה ממצות ישראל...

A person needs to perform the mitzvos in order that through these actions he will join together with the Shechinoh, ... that through this there will be delight for the Shechinoh from the mitzvos performed by Israel. (Sefer Kedushas Levi, Parashas Pekudei, p.238)

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik contrasts **effort** against **brilliance**, **sincerity** against **intellect**; Rav Soloveitchik teaches that it's not by the quality and outcome of practical performance that man's encounter with Hashem is evaluated, but rather according to **the sincerity** in his effort and dedication, and the extent of **his passion** to forge that attachment. He puts it like this:

"The worth of the meeting between man and Shekhinah is determined by the **sincerity** of the commitment, by the **intensity** of the dedication, by the **warmth** of the encounter, by the **love** and **passion** of the G-d-questing individual, and not by the brilliance of the performance."

(Family Redeemed ~ Essays on Family Relationships, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik: MeOtzar HoRav, p.178)

In addition to sincerity and dedication, we find that it's necessary to nurture the right kinds of middos, upon which the Shechinoh will be happy to rest. Citing the Mechilta on Parashas Yisro, the sefer **Be'er Moshe** notes that the trait of **humility** is a prerequisite for meriting to receive the Divine Presence:

כל מי שהוא עניו סופו להשרות שכינה עם האדם בארץ... שבכחו של אדם להקים את המשכן בגופו ובאבריו באמצעות הכנעת הלב וטהרתו, שיהיה קדש קדשים לה', שבו תוכל לשרות השכינה גם בארץ. (באר משה, תרומה, עמ' תשצ)

Anyone who is humble will ultimately cause the Shechinoh to dwell with man on earth...for it is in the power of man to set up the Mishkan in his body and in his limbs through the humility of the heart and its purity, such that it will be a holy of holies to Hashem, within which the Shechinoh will be able to dwell also on earth. (Be'er Moshe, Parashas Terumah, p.790)

The **Sefas Emes** explains the relationship between **משכן** and **מקדש**, and through his ideas we can perhaps determine a pathway to the level of "התחברות אל השכינה" – "*joining together with the Shechinoh*," which we saw in the Kedushas Levi is the level at which a person should be serving his Creator.

The Sefas Emes speaks of a **personal spiritual journey** that *begins* at the *lower* level of Emunoh, where one needs Faith because at that point there is **הסתר** – *Concealment* of the Divine, and that journey *ends* at the higher level of **אמת**, *Truth*.

The former is the level of "ועשו לי מקדש" and implies **פרישה והבדלה**, *Holiness, which is separation and division*; here, at "ועשו לי מקדש," explains the Sefas Emes, our Faith remains somewhat limited, and the Divine Presence remains, to a degree, concealed. However, as we achieve **greater clarity in our Emunoh**, the concealment fades away and our senses can

perceive the Shechinoh as revealed and distinct, and this is the level of **“ושכנתי בתוכם”**, the level of **אמת**. (טללי אורות, יששכר דוב רובין, שמות ב: קלא)

The Sefer HaChinuch describes two levels in ***purity of objective*** that motivate Torah practice, and which, in turn, lead to different intensities in our connection with Hashem: those operating at the lower of these are focused merely on the **reward** to be gained from performing the mitzvos, while those with the more elevated intention are driven by **an aspiration to move ever closer to the Almighty**. (ספר החינוך, פרשת תרומה, מצוה צ"ה)

Rabbi Soloveitchik *also* observes that there is a lower level in our relationship with Hashem, where we relate to Him as our **“Father”**; this is the level of **faith** - comparable to the lower level described by the Sefas Emes - and **obedience**. At the higher level, we relate to Hashem’s **Shechinoh** as our **“Loving Mother”**; here, there is **reciprocity** and **closeness**, and our recognising the Shechinoh’s presence makes Her happy. And in describing the ideal notion of the Shechinoh holding us **“in Her embrace”**, Rav Soloveitchik is perhaps in accord with the Kedushas Levi, who taught, *“A person needs to perform the mitzvos in order that through these actions he will join together with (or, embrace) the Shechinoh.”*

Says Rabbi Soloveitchik:

As a father, ה' demands **reverence** and **obedience**. As a mother, the Shekhinah wants only **recognition**, that the child **be aware of the presence of the mother**. Faith and belief satisfy the father, but they do not make mother happy. She wants that her child be **near**, and that the child welcome her presence. The eye of the father is focused upon the objective expression of **faith**, the eye of the mother upon **affection and love**.

(Family Redeemed ~ Essays on Family Relationships, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik: MeOtzar HoRav, p.179-180)

So while we hope and expect that our dedication to Torah and mitzvos should lead to ה' dwelling within a Mikdash in our hearts, that won't happen unless we embark on a journey of sincere and passionate devotion to ה' Himself and of a yearning for closeness to Him. As we sing:

וּלְקָרְבֵן אֶקְרִיב לּוֹ אֶת נַפְשִׁי הַיְחִידָה.

...and the sacrifice offering I shall make to Him is my one and only soul.

May we indeed achieve such closeness to ה', and with that, also clarity, Shalom and the ultimate **גאולה**.



Wishing everyone a Good Shabbos,

Jeremy