

## Parshas Pekudei

# Transforming the Darkest of Places

נדפס לעילוי נשמת האברך האהוב, ר' נדיב דובער בן יבלחט"א עוזי קהתי. המקום ינחם משפחתו בתוך שער אבלי ציון וירושלים.

*This week's Torah portion concludes with the final descent of G-d's glory upon the Mishkan, after its erection. However, amidst this record of events, we find a seemingly disconnected interlude of the Jewish people's travel routine. This Sicha explores the depth behind this narrative, and reveals the procedure of bringing about G-d's dwelling in this world.*

At the conclusion of *Parshas Pekudei*, after enumerating the details of the *Mishkan's* (Tabernacle) erection and the climactic moment of G-d's *Shechina* (Divine Presence) finally dwelling within its physical structure—a revelation so great, that even Moshe was unable to enter the *Mishkan* due to the intensity of G-d's glory that was present—it then relates the manner in which the Jewish people traveled.

The Torah narrates the above events as follows:

### Text 1

And the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the *Mishkan*. Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud rested upon it and the glory of the Lord filled the *Mishkan*. When the cloud rose up from over the *Mishkan*, the children of Israel set out in all their journeys. But if the cloud did not rise up, they did not set out until the day that it rose. For the cloud of the Lord was upon the *Mishkan* by day, and there was fire within it at night, before the eyes of the entire house of Israel in all their journeys.

*Shemos 40:36-38*

The Torah relates how the Jewish people knew the times of travel to their next destination,

based on when the cloud of Glory rose from the *Mishkan*.

However, the Torah's account of this phenomenon requires further understanding. Why is the description of this occurrence situated in *Parshas Pekudei*?

Seemingly, the two verses describing the circumstance in which the Jewish people were able to travel, and the dependency on the cloud of G-d's glory indicating the instruction to do so, do not seem to fit into the context of the *parsha* (Torah portion).

These verses should have been situated further on in the Torah, in the section that discusses the details of the Jewish people's travels in the desert. Indeed, there—in *Parshas Beha-aloscha*—these journeys are described at great length and this process of travel is repeated there as well.

It would seem appropriate therefore, to speak of the manner in which each travel was instigated—i.e. through the indication of the cloud of G-d's glory—*only* in that section, where the Torah's objective is to record the travels of the Israelites in the desert. In our *parsha*, this seems to be out of place.

All that is in the Torah is exact and intentional. Although this passage deals with the intensity of the revelation of G-dliness in the *Mishkan*, it must somehow be pertinent to the mention of the Israelites' travels as well.

It must therefore be understood: what is the connection between the travels of the Jewish people and the occurrence of the cloud rising, with the content of *Parshas Pekudei*, which speaks of the *Shechina* residing in the *Mishkan*?

### **An Explanation**

There are commentators<sup>1</sup> who explain the connection of the travels to *Parshas Pekudei* as follows:

The fact that the Jewish people were unable to travel until the *Shechina* was lifted from upon the *Mishkan*, demonstrates the degree that the *Shechina* dwelt upon the *Mishkan*.

The narrative relating that the *Shechina* never left the *Mishkan* unless the Israelites needed to travel was *not* repeated for the purpose of explaining the travels of the Jewish people. It was explained in order to *emphasize* that not only did the *Shechina* reside upon the *Mishkan* with great intensity, but it was there in a *constant* manner as well.

G-d's abiding was so permanent in the Tabernacle to the point that it was always there, *unless* the Jewish people needed to travel.

### **An account of the travels**

However, this explanation does not satisfy our questions:

From the syntax of the verse, it does not seem that the intent of the section is to illustrate this idea—that of the *Shechina* constantly resting amongst the Jewish people. Rather, the purpose of the verse is simply to relate the process by which the Israelites traveled in the desert.

This is in fact clearly expressed in the *Medrash*:

### **Text 2**

When the cloud rose up: this is the account of the travels. Upon the word of G-d they camped and upon the word of G-d they traveled.

*Medrash Lekach Tov, Shemos 40:36*

Contrary to the suggested explanation, that the purpose of these verses is to point out the manner in which the *Shechina* resided in the *Mishkan*, it is explained in the *Medrash* that the intent of these verses was indeed to explain the routine by which the Israelites traveled.

This question is amplified when considering the following:

*Parshas Pekudei* is followed by *Parshas Vayikra*, which begins with the Almighty summoning Moshe to the Tent of Meeting:

### **Text 3**

And He called to Moshe, and the Lord spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying:

*Vayikra 1:1*

The Sages explain that this verse is a continuation of the previous *parsha*. Since the previous Torah portion concludes with mentioning that “Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud rested upon it and the glory of the Lord filled the *Mishkan*,” the Torah therefore recounts that when G-d wished to speak to Moshe, He would specifically call him and thus enable him to enter.

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<sup>1</sup> Shemos 40:37.

#### Text 4

...And he (Moshe) was standing from the outside, for he was afraid to come to the Tent of Meeting, as it says, “Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting.” The Holy One, Blessed be He said, “It is not fair that Moshe, who made the *Mishkan*, should stand from the outside and I from the inside; rather, I will call him that he should enter. Therefore, it is written, “And He called to Moshe.”

*Medrash Tanchuma, Vayikra 1*

Accordingly, these two verses that speak of the travels of the Jewish people seem to be an *interruption* to the main ideas at the end of the *parsha*, which are a direct segue into the following Torah portion.

Seemingly, these verses do not belong in this portion of the Torah. What is the reason that they are indeed placed there?

#### An exact purpose

Everything in the Torah is extremely precise. Because the *Medrash* says that *Parshas Vayikra* is a continuation to our *parsha's* statement of Moshe being unable to enter the *Mishkan*, it is understood that there must be a connection between the general *content* of *Parshas Pekudei* and *Vayikra*—which also includes the verses regarding the travels.

*Parshas Vayikra* does not only follow *Parshas Pekudei* chronologically, but the last idea that is mentioned in *Parshas Pekudei* is directly linked to *Parshas Vayikra*.

This concept indicates that *Parshas Vayikra*, which deals with the instruction for the *korbonos* (animal sacrifices), comes not only as a continuation to the *building* of the *Mishkan* (the *place* where the *korbonos* were brought), but also as a continuation to the concept of the

*Shechina* residing in the Tabernacle, which is the concluding idea in the *parsha*, immediately preceding *Parshas Vayikra*.

The same can be said regarding the fact that *Parshas Vayikra* immediately follows the seemingly interruptive narration of the Jewish people's traveling routine.

This is so because the concept of the sacrifices—although connected to the general residing of the *Shechina* in the *Mishkan*—is even *more* connected with the fact that in order for the Jewish people to travel, it required the *departure* of the *Shechina* from the Tabernacle.

It is because of this connection that the Torah first recounts the travel of the Jewish people and only afterwards does the Torah explain the various sacrifices.

#### Counting

In order to understand the above connection, it is imperative to first explain the correlation between the beginning of the book of Shemos (*Parshas Shemos*) and its end (*Parshas Pekudei*).

For, as per the Kabbalistic axiom, an entity's beginning and end are directly related.

#### Text 5

The end is wedged in the beginning and the beginning in the end.

*Sefer Yetzira 1:7*

This connection is expressed through the names of both *parshiyos*, which are both indicative of the concept of counting.

The beginning of *Parshas Shemos* begins with the tallying of the members of Yaakov's family

who entered the land of Egypt. The first verse of Shemos states the following:

### Text 6

And these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt; with Yaakov, each man and his household came:

*Shemos 1:1*

Rashi comments on the above verse:

### Text 7

Although [G-d] counted them in their lifetime by their names (Bereishis 46:8-27), He counted them again after their death, to let us know how precious they are [to Him], because they were likened to the stars, which He takes out [from beyond the horizon] and brings in by number and by name, as it is said<sup>2</sup>: “who takes out their host by number; all of them He calls by name.”

*Rashi, ibid*

Pekudei as well discusses counting, as is indicated in the opening Rashi of the portion:

### Text 8

In this *parsha*, all the weights of the donations for the *Mishkan* were counted - [that] of silver, of gold, and of copper. And all its implements for all its work were [also] counted.

*Rashi, Shemos 38:21*

The beginning of the book of Shemos begins with counting, and its concluding *parsha* ends with counting.

### The redemption of the Israelites

Being that counting is what connects the beginning of the book of Shemos and its end, it is understood that there is a correlation between counting and the general subject matter of the book of Shemos.

The theme of the book of Shemos on a general scale is the redemption of the Israelites from Egypt. Accordingly, it is understood that the idea of counting—the connecting link between the beginning and end of the book—must be related to redemption as well.

This is perplexing though: the ideas of “counting” and “redemption” are seemingly two completely opposite themes. When something is *counted*, it demonstrates that the entity is limited (by the total amount of the count). However, true redemption is the idea of *breaking out* of all limitations!

### Parshas Shemos

This contradictory theme presented in the book of Shemos is also expressed immediately, at the commencement of the volume.

The title of the first *parsha* itself (which, being the first, expresses the theme of the entire portion) is “Shemos,” meaning “names”—a term that expresses the specific (limited) number of names that came to Egypt. Yet, immediately afterwards, the portion goes on to express the tremendous, miraculous growth that the Jewish people had, which *transcended* all limitation.

The Torah relates,

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<sup>2</sup> Yishaya 40:26.

## Text 9

The children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and increased and became very, very strong, and the land became filled with them.

*Shemos 1:7*

The Torah expresses the manner in which the family grew into a great multitude.

Being that this boundless growth is included in *Parshas Shemos*, it conveys the idea that this limitlessness *too* is part and parcel with the concept of counting.

### **Parshas Pekudei**

This idea can be similarly observed in *Parshas Pekudei*. Numbering the specific objects in the *Mishkan* is expressive of the finiteness of the *Mishkan*.

However, conversely, the *Shechina* that rested in the *Mishkan* resided there in a manner that *transcended all limitation*.

The infinite manner in which it permeated the Tabernacle, was to such an extent that Moshe was unable to enter its domain, due to the intensity of the G-dly revelation present there.

How can the themes of counting and of transcending all limitation be expressed in the same breath?

### **The fusion of both**

The general explanation of how to reconcile this seeming paradox is as follows:

Although the ultimate goal is to come to a state of being which is *beyond* limitation, i.e. the era of redemption, the intent of redemption, however, is not to do away with all limitations, but that the infinite should *permeate* the finite, and that there should be a fusion of the two.

It is specifically within the limited that there can be revealed the essence of G-dliness. When the infinite is revealed in the finite, it demonstrates that just as G-d is not limited by the finite, he is not limited to only being revealed in the infinite as well.

This objective was also the essential purpose of the *Mishkan's* function. The *Mishkan*, while being a place of unlimited G-dly revelation, was a structure composed of vessels built with exact requirement and measure. In the finite was expressed the infinite.

The reason why the *Mishkan* was a place that had expressed the infinite in the finite was because this was in line with G-d's wish of having "a dwelling place in this mundane world."

The Almighty wished for the merging of the unlimited expression of G-dliness with the confines of the physical world, since this is His supernal intent for the creation of the universe—that this mundane world become a dwelling place to host His infinite Presence.

## Text 10

The purpose of the creation of this world is that the Holy One, Blessed be He, desired to have an abode in the lower worlds.

*Tanya, Chapter 36*

In creating a dwelling place for G-d, there are two points:

- A) The dwelling place is for G-d—in His infinite, transcendent existence
- B) This abode must be in the physical world.

## Jewish Souls

These two above ideas—that there be a dwelling place for the Almighty and that it exist in this physical world—are expressed as well in the difference between the souls of the Jewish people and the physicality of the world.

Ultimately, G-d's desire for a physical abode on the elemental level is His wish to dwell within the souls of the Jewish people.

### Text 11

To reside and dwell within the souls of Israel...that the congregation of Israel be a dwelling place for His resting.

*Hemshech 5666, Pg. 468*

While G-d desired that the world be a dwelling place for His Presence, His ultimate wish is to reside within the souls of the Jewish people.

The reason for this is as follows: the Jewish people are, in their essential identity, one with the Almighty, and they are therefore the ideal abode in which He can dwell completely.

They are, so-to-speak, one with the Essence of the Almighty<sup>3</sup> and therefore the true place that can serve as an abode for the essence of G-dliness.

The dwelling place, however, must be created specifically through work in *this* lower world, through causing the physical to become a vessel for serving G-d. For it is particularly through the efforts with the *mundane* that demonstrate the reality of the Jewish soul being ultimately one with G-d.

In other words: The unity between the Jewish people and the Almighty is most pronounced in working to transform the physical.

For, this truly brings out that there is *nothing* that can separate the Jew from their connection to the Almighty.

Not only does the mundane not serve as a *deterrent* for them in their service of G-d, but on the contrary, the physicality *itself* is able to be transformed into a G-dly dwelling *through* a Jewish person's efforts.

Instead of being brought down by the physicality around them—they, instead, *transform* the physical into holiness.

### The beginning and the end

At this point we can also appreciate the correlation between the beginning of the book of Shemos and its end, and the reason that the first *parsha* begins with the counting of the Jewish people, while the concluding *parsha* discusses the counting of the donations for the *Mishkan*.

To make a comparison: the book of Bereishis discusses the creation of the world in the way that it existed *before* the true intent of the universe was revealed.

This is expressed in the first Rashi on the Torah:

### Text 12

(Heb. בְּרָאשִׁית בְּרָא.) This verse calls for a medrashic interpretation [because according to its simple interpretation, the vowelization of the word בְּרָא, should be different, as Rashi explains further]. It teaches us that the sequence of the Creation as written is impossible, as is written immediately below] as our Rabbis stated<sup>4</sup>): [God created the world] for the sake of the Torah,

<sup>3</sup> Zohar 3, 73a.

<sup>4</sup> Osiyos D'R. Akiva, "Beis."

which is called (Prov. 8:22): “the beginning of His way,” and for the sake of Israel, who are called (Jer. 2:3) “the first of His grain.”

*Rashi, Bereishis 1:1*

Before the Jewish people were created and were given the Torah, the purpose of the world was not yet revealed.

The book of Shemos however, is centered upon the Jewish people (as they were born into a nation) and the Torah—both of which affect the ultimate intent of creation.

Within this achievement, there is a “beginning” and an “end,” which are expressed in the beginning and end of the volume, respectively.

The “beginning,” and innermost aspect of G-d’s intent is that the Jewish people are one with G-d. This is the reason that the Jewish people were the ones counted in the beginning of Shemos, expressing the first and foremost endearment that G-d has for the Jewish people.

The “end,” i.e., the intent as it comes into *actuality*, is the creation of a tangible dwelling place in this world, built from physical objects. This is therefore the meaning of *Parshas Pekudei*, which includes the tallying up of the objects in the *Mishkan*.

### **In this world**

As explained above, the root of the Jewish soul is expressed specifically in their work in this *lower* world, in a place where G-dliness is concealed.

It is therefore understood that the more G-dliness is concealed, the more that the Jewish people are able to reveal the ultimate root of their souls, which is not deterred from any concealment of G-dliness whatsoever.

It is thus clear that this is accomplished on an even greater level during the time of exile, when G-dliness is concealed in the greatest manner.

This is the explanation as to why the story of the Jewish people’s traveling is related specifically in this section, which deals with expressing G-dliness. Since, it is through the *concealment* of G-dliness, and the departure of the *Shechina* from the *Mishkan* during their travels, that brings about the *greatest* expression of G-dliness.

The purpose of the *Mishkan*, to create an abode for the Shechina in this world, is most strongly expressed during the time of their travels throughout the desert.

### **Text 13**

I also lifted My hand to them in the desert to scatter them among the nations and disperse them in the lands.

*Yechezkel 20:35*

The desert that the Jewish people traveled in hints to the subsequent exiles of the Jewish people<sup>5</sup>.

It is specifically in exile that the Jewish people demonstrate, that no matter the darkness of the world, they are able to transform it into an abode for G-d.

The *Shechina*’s departure from the *Mishkan* is actually expressive of the greatest revelation of G-dliness that there could be!

### **The Sacrifices**

This most fundamental goal is also found within the *Mishkan* itself. Among the various aspects of

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<sup>5</sup> Likutei Torah, Mas’ei.

the Tabernacle, this idea was expressed most strongly through the *korbonos*.

The difference between the *Mishkan* itself, versus the specific service of the animal sacrifices, is the following:

Concerning the building of the *Mishkan*, the intent was not as much to elevate the physicality, and make it holy, but to provide a place for the Supernal to *descend*, and reside. The primary goal was thus not to have the physical objects transform into holiness (as seen, that the revelation of the *Shechina* in the *Mishkan* was infinitely higher than the physical materials it was built from).

However, the idea of the sacrifices expressed the objective of refining the *animal* and transforming it into a *korbon* for G-d.

Therefore, even though the sacrifices served as a prelude for the *Shechina* that resided there, still it was specifically in sacrifices that we reach the greatest intent of the *Mishkan*—to transform the physical so that it should be a receptacle for G-dliness.

Now we can understand why *Parshas Vayikra* is, in truth, a continuation also to the story of the cloud leaving the *Mishkan* at the time of their travels.

For, in both of these ideas, the same point is expressed—that of the essential purpose of the *Mishkan* being primarily expressed at the time when the *Shechina* is not tangibly present.

The more mundane the service, the greater revelation that the Jewish people can bring about.

### The root

During the Jewish people's travels, the *revelation* of the *Shechina* was lacking. Being as there was no *Mishkan* for the *Shechina* to reside in, it was specifically then that the root of the Jewish

people was revealed in the way that they are one with the Almighty Himself (as explained above), above limitation.

This is thus the deeper explanation of “when the cloud *rose* up from over the *Mishkan*, the children of Israel set out in all their journeys.”

Externally, it seems that there was a departure of the *Shechina*. In a deeper sense though, it is specifically through this that they reached an even *higher* level, which they would then reveal during their next encampment.

### The lesson

This is the lesson to each and every one of us:

Although the exile is tremendously dark, and each individual is keenly aware of their personal exile, he needs to know that there is a specific intent of his service in these concealed times.

Just as the *Shechina* departing from the *Mishkan* was for the purpose of revealing a greater level of G-dliness, so too our personal exiles are to reveal greater levels of G-dliness.

One needs to feel that his “travels” as well, are connected to the G-dly cloud, and specifically, when G-d's glory “departs” and is hidden, he has the ability to accomplish the greatest goal. As the Torah teaches, all of man's steps are orchestrated by G-d Himself:

### Text 14

From the Lord a mighty man's steps are established, for He delights in his way.

*Tehillim 37:23*

Everywhere that he goes, in all situations, he has a mission from the Almighty to create a dwelling place for G-d.



It is then that he reaches a point *higher* than the cloud that rested on the *Mishkan*, and reveals G-d Himself. This, in turn, is revealed in the next stop of the Jewish people!

*(Based on Likutei Sichos 16, Pekudei 3, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel.*

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