

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Naso 5786

D. Mordechai Schlachter

Central to the Mishkan are the laws of tumeh and tahara.

צו את בני ישראל וישלחו מן-המחנה כל-צרוע וכל-זב וכל טמא לנפש:

“Command all of Bnei Yisroel, and they shall send out from the camp every metzora and every zav and all those afflicted with tumeh to their souls.” (Bamidbar 5:2).

Why does the Torah use the strong “command” here? What connection does this have to the segment of the responsibilities the Leviim had to the Mishkan?

There are only eight commands that are called “command.” While the Geonim and early Rishonim took to calling all of the rules (mishpatim), ordinances (chukim), and laws (Toras) as “mitzvos,” it is actually the least frequent type of statute in the Torah. Tzav – command is limited to the strictest and most spiritual of the commands. It is stated regarding the Oleh – a fully burnt offering. (Vayikra 6:2). It is also stated in regards to the pure oil to light the Menorah. (Ibid 24:2). It is in the introduction to the korbanos offered throughout the year. (Bamidbar 28:2). It is also used to adjure confidence and bravery: the borders that Bnei Yisroel must conquer in Eretz Yisroel (Bamidbar 34:2), beware not to antagonize Edom (Devarim 2:4), and for Yehoshua to be strong and take over leadership (ibid 3:28). It is also used here. What is so special about sending out the tameh?

The section of sending out the tameh is sandwiched in between the counting of the Leviim and the gifts of the Nesiim. The counting of the Leviim also outlined the various duties to the Mishkan that each of the three Levi families – Merari, Kehas, and Gershom – had. In that description it states that all vessels were to be carried covered. Either in covered wagons, and the smaller vessels (like the Menorah, Aron, Table) covered in cloths and tachash skins. (Bamidbar 4:10). Besides protection from the elements, the skins were to protect the vessels from incidental touching. They were so holy that incidental touching, even from pure Leviim, was discouraged. What is tachash skin?

Tachash was an animal. It may have been a large bird (or dinosaur) or it could even have been some large mammal. While it is unidentified, the Gemara says two things about its species. (Shabbos 28b). First, it is now extinct. Second, it was a kosher animal. One opinion in that Gemara says it had beautiful colorful skin; this could have led to its extinction – being hunted for its hide. The Gemara specifically stated that it was a kosher animal. The implication is, all items used for the Mishkan had to be from tahor sources.

One can argue and state that something like techeiles dye – the blue dye used to color the strings of tzitzis – could have come from a tameh animal. The mitzvah aseh of having techeiles overrides the lo saseh of not to touch or becoming tameh through abominable animals. This makes sense by tzitzis where we already learned that it can be made from shaatnez. (Yavamos 4a). However, that is a special dispensation because of

the juxtaposition of the pesukim in the Torah, and shaatnez is not inherently bad or tameh.

The rules of the Mishkan are different. We learn them out from the juxtaposition from the rules to carry the items of the Mishkan and the inauguration of the Mishkan sandwiching this *tzav* – command to send out all the tameh from the camp. The Mishkan cannot be inaugurated and cannot function with tumeh in its midst. On Yom Kippur the Kohen Gadol has to affect atonement for any possible tumeh of the Mikdash. (Vayikra 16:16). Hashem is inside the camp of Yisroel, there shall not be anything unseemly there. (Devarim 23:15). Even bringing a foreign fire—one that was not commanded by Hashem—caused Hashem to have to be sanctified. (Vayikra 10:3). Moshe immediately had the sons of Aharon carried out of the Mishkan so as not to have a tameh corpse linger there. (Ibid 10:4).

The command to send out the tameh from the camp is next to the laws of the Nazir. He brings two birds. (Bamidbar 6:10). This is akin to the birds brought by the woman after childbirth (Vayikra 12:8), and the metzora (ibid 14:22) when they become purified. It is also next to the laws of the wayward woman. The Torah says, that she makes herself tameh. (Bamidbar 5:29). She did not merely make herself sin. She put herself in a situation of impurity. The Torah is being clear; there shall be no tumeh when it comes to the Mishkan. Even if a lo saseh can be overridden by an aseh, this is not the time to start bending rules and using abominable object when constructing the Mishkan. That is how the Gemara learns that the tachash was a kosher animal.

The instruction to build the Mishkan itself, indeed even its name, hints at this rule as well. “You shall make for me a sanctuary, and I shall dwell among them.” (Shmos 25:8). The point of all the foregoing materials listed is to make a sanctuary, a Mikdash, something holy and something fit for Hashem to dwell in. The Torah went so far as to make sure the kohanim wore pants under their tunics, for extra modesty as they were entering a Kodesh—a holies. (Ibid 28:43). “And I will sanctify the Ohel Moed and the mizbeach...and I shall dwell amongst [within] Bnei Yisroel.” (Ibid 29:44,45). Besides the instructions for the Mishkan, the only other instruction given to Moshe on his first visit to Har Sinai is recorded as, “And further, you shall keep my Shabbos...I make you holy.” (Ibid 31:13). Holiness is paramount, there is no room for abomination or tumeh.

Shlomo HaMelech did design part of the Beis HaMikdash with the images of lions. (Melachim I 7:29). Lions are tameh animals – not kosher. However, the lion depicted was not just any non-kosher animal. It was specific. Along with lions, oxen were also depicted. (Ibid). This is because oxen, lions, and also eagles were already featured in the Mishkan – on top of the Aron. The Aron held two cherubim. Cherubim had four faces: man, lion, ox, and eagle. (Yechezkel 1:10). Therefore, the depiction of the lion was not just a random tameh animal, but it referenced the holy cherubim.

This is why the command to send out the temah before the inauguration of the Mishkan is so important. The Mishkan had to be dedicated with pure holiness. It was fit for Hashem to dwell there and to sanctify the entire nation of Yisroel. It was the heart of the nation and its health depended on it being pure. It was the purity that every Yisroel strove for and basked in.