

Likkutei Sichos - Terumah

Why Confine G-d to a Single Place?

Parshas Terumah relates G-d's command to take gold and silver and other articles (13 different substances according to some commentaries, or 15 according to others) and construct a sanctuary for G-d. Together with the command: "And they shall make Me a Sanctuary," G-d promises: "I will dwell within."

G-d cannot be limited by physical location. Nevertheless, He promises to reside within a Sanctuary to be built within this material world, a building with a specific size and location. This applies not only to the Beis HaMikdash in Jerusalem, which remained in the same place from the time of its construction, but also to the Sanctuary which traveled with the Jews in their journeys through the desert. Although the Sanctuary was moved from place to place, wherever it was erected, there the Divine Presence rested.

This seems difficult to understand. G-d is not bound by the limitations of space, and exists everywhere, as it is written: "I fill the heavens and the earth." Why then did He command that a specific place be established for His Presence to dwell?

While it is true that G-d is everywhere, it is possible that His existence will not be felt within the world. For G-dliness can be felt only through Divine service. This service need not be confined to a specific locale; wherever a Jew serves G-d, he draws down His influence. Seemingly, the Divine service performed in the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash could be performed in other places, drawing down G-d's Presence everywhere. Why was it necessary that this service be performed only in the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash?

Two Dimensions to the Sacrificial Offerings

One of the services, indeed, one of the fundamental services, performed in the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash was sacrificial worship. Even in the Beis HaMikdash, there were two dimensions to such worship: a) the physical activities involved in offering an animal on the altar; and b) the spiritual counterpart of these activities, which today is accomplished through prayer, as our Sages commented: "The prayers were instituted in place of the daily offerings."

Both of these dimensions are connected with the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash. Sacrifices could be offered only in these places, as the Mishnah states: "At the time the Sanctuary was erected, [the offering of sacrifices] at private altars became forbidden." And similarly, after the construction of the Beis HaMikdash in Jerusalem, it became forbidden to offer sacrifices in any other spot.

Similar concepts apply to prayer, the spiritual counterpart of the sacrifices. We may pray in any place, with the exception of an open valley, for it is hard to concentrate in such open spaces. Nevertheless, wherever we pray, we must always face the Beis HaMikdash, “the gate of heaven.” For it is through the Beis HaMikdash that our prayers ascend, as it is written: “They shall pray to You towards their land.” In the Diaspora, we should face Eretz Yisrael. In Eretz Yisrael, we should face Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem, we should face the Beis HaMikdash.

This raises a question: Prayer is described as “service within the heart,” a spiritual activity. Why should it be associated with a specific place?

It can be explained that the actual offering of the sacrifices had to be associated with a specific place, for this involved placing an animal on the altar, and there were several conditions for this service. Moreover, even the spiritual influence drawn down through the sacrificial offerings was associated with the material realm, as reflected in the verse: “And fire emerged from before G-d, and consumed the burnt offering.” Since even the spiritual influence aroused by the sacrifices was associated with this material realm, it is easier to accept the premise that the sacrificial offerings must be limited to one place.

(Even so, an explanation is still required, for the spiritual influence aroused by the sacrifices could seemingly also have been expressed in another place. Thus in the eras when it was not forbidden to offer sacrifices on private altars, it was possible to offer them in different places at the same time.)

With regard to prayer the spiritual dimension of the sacrifices the limitation to a specific place is more difficult to understand. Prayer is an entirely spiritual service. Aside from his own person, the individual praying is not involved with any material entity at all. His objective is to bring himself close to G-d, and to draw his powers and senses closer to G-d by devoting himself to Him in prayer and supplication.

Moreover, the fundamental element of prayer is the intent within the heart, a person’s spiritual efforts. It is true that one must also verbalize the words, but this is also associated with the heart’s intent, for “saying [words of prayer] aloud arouses one’s intent.”

Prayer also has an effect within the material world. For through our prayers, we arouse G-d’s influence and motivate Him to answer our supplications: healing the sick, granting prosperity, and the like. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the spiritual dimension of prayer, because with our physical eyes we cannot see the result of our prayers. With regard to the sacrifices, however, it was possible to actually see the heavenly fire on the altar.

Accordingly, the question remains: Since prayer is entirely a spiritual matter, why must it be associated with one specific place?

A Level Above the Infinite

The resolution of the above questions depends on a well-known spiritual principle: “The attributes which are highest in potential descend to the lowest levels.” The very fact that G-d’s indwelling is associated with a specific material place the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash indicates that its source is a level so lofty that it is revealed on a very low rung.

To explain: G-d is infinite. He is not bound by either the limits of finite space or the limits of transcendence. Just as it is improper to say that G-d can be confined in a specific location, so too it is improper to say that He transcends space. For transcendence is also a definition that implies a limit; it is above space, and not within space. G-d, by contrast, is above all definitions and limits, and manifests Himself in all mediums. And when space and transcendence, finiteness and infinity combine, when we see the merging of opposites, the power of G-d’s essence is revealed. For He is truly omnipotent, and can fuse contrary trends. This fusion creates a setting in which the Divine Presence rests.

This is the new development that occurred within the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash. On one hand, the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash were limited by the confines of our material world. The curtains, the boards, the sockets, and the other elements of the Sanctuary all had specific measurements. Similarly, a precise width and length was specified for the Beis HaMikdash , and for the utensils used in both structures. Moreover, these measurements had to be adhered to exactly. As with the other laws of the Torah, even a slight deviation would disqualify them.

Nevertheless, together with this emphasis on precise measurements, an element of G-dliness which transcended limitation was overtly revealed in the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash , demonstrating a fusion of limitation and transcendence. As the Mishnah relates, there were ten ongoing miracles in the Beis HaMikdash. And in the Holy of Holies (the essential element of the Beis HaMikdash), there was an open miracle. “The space of the ark itself was not included in the measurement [of the chamber’s length].” The ark was two and one half cubits long. There were ten cubits from the western wall to the ark of the Holy of Holies, and ten cubits from the ark to the eastern wall of the Holy of Holies, and yet the length of the entire chamber was 20 cubits. This revealed the power of G-d’s essence, which is able to fuse space and transcendence.

For this reason, both the sacrificial offerings and our prayers are connected with the Beis HaMikdash. For the purpose of these spiritual endeavors is to establish a connection with the level of G-dliness that is above all forms of description. It cannot even be described by the term “unlimited.”

To relate to this level of G-dliness, it is necessary for the Divine service which establishes the connection to be associated with a limited material place. Were our prayers and the sacrifices not confined to a specific place, they would relate only to that dimension of

G-dliness which transcends limitation, but not to G-d's essence. How is G-d's essence expressed? In the fusion of limitation and transcendence.

(For this reason, even during those periods of time when it was permitted to offer sacrifices on private altars, those sacrifices did not possess the advantage of sacrifices offered in the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash. This is reflected by the fact that the sacrifices offered in the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash were governed by many more laws and limitations. Moreover, there were certain sacrifices offered in the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash which could never be offered on private altars.)

The Contrast Between the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash

On this basis, we can also understand why the Beis HaMikdash was on a higher level than the Sanctuary. The Sanctuary was not located in one specific place, but traveled with the Jewish people through the desert, as it is written: "And I [the Divine Presence] journeyed in a tent." Moreover, the primary component of the Sanctuary was wood, from the plant kingdom (the sockets were made of metal, but they merely served as a foundation). The structure thus did not incorporate the lowest levels, inanimate matter, and therefore cannot be said to have drawn down the highest levels of light, compared to the Beis HaMikdash.

In contrast, the Beis HaMikdash was restricted to a specific place, and was constructed primarily of stone, inanimate matter, i.e., it extended to the lowest levels. Within these limitations was manifest the truly unlimited power of G-d's essence, a power which cannot be confined by any limitations, to the extent that it can be connected with a clearly defined, specific place within our material world.³⁵ In this limited world, and particularly within its lowest levels, inanimate matter, a dwelling can be established for G-d's essence.

For these reasons, the Sanctuary served as a temporary dwelling for G-d, while the Beis HaMikdash became His permanent home.

Each Person a Sanctuary

On this basis, we can understand our Sages' interpretation of the verse: "And they shall make Me a Sanctuary, and I will dwell within." The verse does not use the singular form of the word "within," which would imply that the indwelling is within the structure of the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash, but rather the plural form, indicating that G-d dwells within each and every Jew. When a Jew makes his physical environment a Sanctuary for G-d by studying the Torah, performing mitzvos, and infusing holiness into the mundane entities with which he comes in contact, he makes himself a resting place for G-d's Presence.

And indeed, in a certain way, the indwelling of G-d's Presence within each Jew surpasses the indwelling of His Presence in the Sanctuary and the Beis HaMikdash. For although

the Beis HaMikdash was built in a physical place, and with inanimate objects, it can hardly be considered as “lowly” when compared to the world at large. When a Jew brings holiness into inanimate objects in the world at large, he fulfills the ultimate intent for the creation of the world that G-d should have a dwelling in this material plane, “below which there is no lower level.” There he fashions a resting place for G-d’s essence.

Therefore it is this type of Divine service which will lead to the building of the Third Beis HaMikdash , where G-d’s true infinity will be manifest to an even greater degree than in the First and Second Batei Mikdash.

Holiness in Everything We Do

Our present endeavor to “make a Sanctuary for Me,” i.e., every Jew’s efforts to infuse holiness into his environment, must follow the same pattern as the construction of the sanctuary. It must encompass one’s gold and silver and all the 13 (or 15) different substances from which the Sanctuary was constructed. In the Sanctuary, these materials became holy. It is the same with regard to the Sanctuary a Jew makes from his worldly possessions: they also must become holy.

It is not sufficient for a Jew to conduct himself in a manner which differs from that of a non-Jew with regard to restrictions, such as observing the prohibitions against deception or infringement of a colleague’s rights. The ultimate purpose of his work is to make a positive contribution, so that even within his commercial activity, he sees and hears G-dliness. Not only will his efforts be conducted “for the sake of heaven,” using material entities for a spiritual purpose, but the materials themselves will become holy. This happened in the Sanctuary, where the substances used to build it themselves became part of G-d’s resting place.

This reflects the approach of “Know G-d in all your ways.” Not only should one’s conduct be directed toward bringing about the knowledge of G-d; in everything one does, one should know G-d. To cite a parallel: eating on Shabbos is a mitzvah.

This concept should be extended with regard to eating during the week, and to all the other physical activities one performs; not only should they be performed “for the sake of heaven,” they themselves should be expressions of the knowledge of G-d. The table at which a person eats should be “the table which is before G-d”; it should be holy like the altar was holy. Similar concepts apply with regard to all material activities.

The Order of the Book of Shmos

On this basis, we can also appreciate the connection between Parshas Terumah and the parshiyos Yisro and Mishpatim which precede it. For these parshiyos develop a common theme. Parshas Yisro speaks about the giving of the Torah, which established a connection between the spiritual and the material. Parshas Mishpatim expands this concept, as reflected in our Sages’ interpretation of the verse: “And these are the

judgments,” “These complement those which came before (the Ten Commandments),” for mishpatim communicate a G-dly code of law that is to be applied in our everyday life.

But there is still a limitation. The mishpatim reflect how spirituality can be connected with material existence at the time of the fulfillment of a mitzvah. Parshas Terumah reflects how material existence can become suffused with holiness for all time. When material substances are used in the construction of a Sanctuary, they themselves become holy, as reflected in the path of service indicated by the verse “Know Him in all your ways.” Moreover, this connection continues forever, as implied by our Sages’ statement: “Whenever the word li (‘Me’) is mentioned, an ongoing bond is implied.”

Extending this concept, we can see the sequence of all the parshiyos in the Book of Shmos , and the pattern of ascent which they follow. The first parshiyos speak about the Egyptian exile and the exodus; these served as a preparation for the giving of the Torah. Afterwards, parshiyos Yisro and Mishpatim tell about the giving of the Torah and its laws, which make possible a connection between the spiritual and the physical. The parshiyos from Terumah onward⁵⁰ show how G-dliness can permeate every aspect of material existence, as expressed in our endeavors to “Know Him in all your ways.”

(Adapted from Sichos Shabbos Parshas Shemini, 5722)

Why Intent is Necessary

On the verse: “And they shall take an offering for Me,” Rashi comments that “for Me,” means “for My sake.” A donation to the Sanctuary had to be given for G-d’s sake, and not for any personal reason.

The question arises: Why is this requirement mentioned in connection with this mitzvah, and not in connection with others? All the mitzvos should be carried out for G-d’s sake.

Indeed, in this context, the opposite would appear to be the case. As the Baal Shem Tov explains, there are certain mitzvos regarding which a person’s intent is not so important. For example, a person who immerses in a mikveh with no intention of purifying himself nevertheless becomes pure. Indeed, he is granted that status even if he had no intention of immersing at all, and a wave of water passes over him.

A second example is the mitzvah of tzedakah. The reason for which a person gives tzedakah is not that important. Indeed, even if he has no intention of giving tzedakah , but rather loses money that is found by a poor person, the person who lost it is considered to have fulfilled the mitzvah of tzedakah , since the finder uses the money for the sake of his livelihood. Another example is the mitzvah of shichechah, sheaves forgotten in the harvest. Seemingly, giving to the Sanctuary could be likened to these mitzvos.

This reinforces the question: With regard to other mitzvos, where the intent of the person performing them is not as important, the Torah does not feel it necessary to remind us that the mitzvah must be performed for G-d's sake. Nevertheless, with regard to donations for the Sanctuary, which seemingly parallels the mitzvah of tzedakah, the Torah emphasizes that the mitzvah must be performed for G-d's sake.

This difficulty can be resolved based on the concept explained previously: that the intent of the Sanctuary was to enable a Jew to connect all his concerns with G-d, following the dictum: "Know Him in all your ways." Since the intent of the construction of the Sanctuary is the establishment of all-encompassing unity with G-d, a person must make his gifts to the Sanctuary "for G-d's sake."

Give and Take

The above concept can be further clarified by a careful analysis of the wording of the above-mentioned verse. The verse reads: "And they shall take an offering for Me." Why doesn't it say: "And you shall give an offering for Me"? Since the emphasis is on the donor's intent, his giving should be focused upon more clearly.

The verse is alluding to the fact that the recipient of tzedakah should also act for G-d's sake. G-d has structured creation so that there should be givers and recipients, rich and poor. For G-d desired that the world be structured in a way that involves both giving and receiving; this is the pattern of tzedakah.

In truth, it is G-d who "in His goodness, sustains the entire world with grace, with kindness, and with mercy." Both the rich and the poor derive their sustenance from Him. The way in which He sustains the poor, however, is indirect. He gives their sustenance to the rich, who are obligated to give the appropriate portion to the poor. And so, when a rich man gives tzedakah to a poor person, he is not giving away something which is truly his. It is merely the poor man's portion, and was given to the rich man only for safekeeping.

G-d could have granted the poor their sustenance directly. Why did He arrange things so that they had to receive it as tzedakah from the rich? Because G-d wanted kindness and charity to be an integral part of the world. If every person derived sustenance without an intermediary, kindness and charity would not exist.

This should be the poor man's intent when receiving tzedakah. He accepts tzedakah with the intent of carrying out G-d's intention that the world be characterized by kindness and charity. This is intimated by the phrase: "And they shall take an offering for Me" even taking tzedakah should be for G-d's sake.

A Greater Challenge

The Torah's commandments and directives empower a person to fulfill them. Indeed, a special strength and power is necessary to enable a poor man to receive charity for G-d's sake. When it comes to giving tzedakah, that same degree of empowerment is not necessary. For although the intent in giving tzedakah is not as significant, we may assume that it was given for G-d's sake. There are two explanations for this:

a) Money is a medium with which a person can purchase the necessities of life, and earning it sometimes requires him to work with all his strength. If he bends his nature and gives this money to tzedakah, we can assume that he does so for G-d's sake.

b) In general, mitzvos, including the mitzvah of tzedakah, are performed for G-d's sake.

This positive intent is enhanced when tzedakah is given without public notice. In this manner, it is easier to focus one's intent correctly. These factors do not apply with regard to receiving tzedakah, for:

a) The poor man did not have to work hard to receive the tzedakah. He receives it in order to provide himself and his family with the necessities of life. This is so important to him that despite the difficulty involved, he humbles himself to receive the tzedakah.

b) He is not necessarily thinking about the mitzvah involved; he is seeking to sustain his family. Therefore the Torah gives him an explicit directive teaching that receiving tzedakah must also be for G-d's sake.

Jews are commanded to "know Him in all your ways," bringing holiness into all our affairs. Regardless of what he does, whether it is something which he compels himself to do, something that is necessary for him to do, or something in which he takes pleasure, everything a Jew does should be suffused with the awareness of G-d.

For this reason, the Torah communicates the importance of taking tzedakah with the proper intent in connection with the construction of the Sanctuary, for the Sanctuary demonstrates that every element of our experience can become a dwelling for G-d.