

The Creator left His mark on all He created. Those "marks" are His logical designs and laws seen in all things physical and ideational... including religion.

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Weekly Parsha

Tetzaveh

RABBI BERNIE FOX

"And you should make sacred garments for Ahron and your brother for honor and glory." (Shemot 28:2)

Our parasha discusses the
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Reality

1 Designer... 1 Design

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Weekly Parsha

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garments of the Kohen Gadol. In the above passage, Moshe is command to instruct Bnai Yisrael in the creation of these garments. The pasuk says that these garments are designed for honor and glory. However, the pasuk is vague. The garments glorify whom or what?

The commentaries offer a number of responses to this question. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra suggests that these beautiful and impressive garments glorify Ahron or the Kohen Gadol who wears them.[1] Nachmanides acknowledges this possible interpretation of the pasuk. He also suggests an alternative explanation. He proposes that the garments honor and glorify Hashem.[2] Apparently, Nachmanides reasons that the Kohen Gadol serves Hashem. Performing his duties in these wondrous vestments glorifies the service and the Almighty.

Sforno suggests that the garments serve both purposes. They honor Hashem and glorify the Kohen Gadol.[3]

There is another dispute among the Sages regarding the requirement that Kohanim wear special vestments. Maimonides, in his Sefer HaMitzvot, writes that our passage communicates a positive command. The Kohen and the Kohen Gadol must wear their assigned vestments when serving in the sanctuary.[4] Halachot Gedolot disagrees with Maimonides. He does not derive a commandment from our passage. He maintains that there is no separate command that directs the Kohen Gadol or the other Kohanim to wear these garments.

Of course, this creates a problem. The Kohen Gadol and the Kohanim are not permitted to perform service in the Temple without these garments. How can Halachot Gedolot contend that there is no specific command directing the Priests to wear these garments, and also acknowledge that the Kohanim are not permitted to serve without their vestments?

Nachmanides responds to this question. He explains that the Halachot Gedolot certainly acknowledges that a Kohen cannot serve without the proper vestments. However, according to Halachot Gedolot, the vestments are a requirement for the proper performance of the service.

They are a prerequisite for the performance of the mitzvah of service in the Temple. As a prerequisite for another command – the performance of the service, the requirement to wear the vestments does not merit to be classified as an independent commandment.[5] Let us consider another example from halacha that illustrates Nachmanides' argument. All males are required to wear Tefillin. Wearing Tefillin is a mitzvah. Now, in order to wear Tefillin one first must acquire the Tefillin. Yet, clearly the procurement of Tefillin is not a separate mitzvah. It is merely a prerequisite for the fulfillment of the commandment of wearing Tefillin. Nachmanides argues that similarly the garments worn by the Kohen are a prerequisite for the proper performance of the Temple service. As a prerequisite, the wearing of these garments does not qualify as a separate mitzvah.



How would Maimonides respond to Nachmanides' position? Nachmanides is seemingly offering a compelling argument for not counting the wearing of the vestments as a separate mitzvah. Maimonides agrees that the procurement of Tefillin is not a separate mitzvah. Why does he consider the requirement for the Kohen to wear his special attire a separate mitzvah?

In order to answer this question, we must consider the order in which Maimonides places the various commandments concerning the Kohanim. Maimonides states that the requirement of the Kohanim to wear their garments is the thirty-third positive command. According to Maimonides' enumeration of the commandments, the thirty-second positive commandment is to honor the Kohanim – the descendants of Ahron. It seems from the close association of these two commandments that they are related. What is this relationship?

Apparently, Maimonides maintains that the garments are designed to honor and glorify the Kohanim. These vestments distinguish the Kohanim and defer special status upon them. It is true that a Kohen cannot serve in the Temple without his vestments. But according to Maimonides, this is not because the vestments are a prerequisite for the service. The garments complete the status of the Kohen. The vestments qualify him for service. In other words, without

(continued on next page)

the garments, the Kohen is not the person permitted to perform the service.

Let us now focus on identifying the pivotal issue of contention between Maimonides and Nachmanides. According to Nachmanides, the garments are designed to glorify the service in the Temple. They are a prerequisite for service. Therefore, wearing this special attire is not a separate mitzvah. In contrast, Maimonides maintains that the garments glorify and honor the Kohanim. They confer full status on the Kohen. As a result, the wearing of the garments is a separate mitzvah within Taryag --- the 613 commandments.

“And it shall be upon Ahron when he serves. And its sound will be heard when he comes to the sanctuary before Hashem and when he goes out he shall not die.” (Shemot 28:35)

Our pasuk discusses the jacket that is worn by the Kohen Gadol. This jacket is of unusual design. A series of gold bells hang from the jacket. What was the purpose of these bells?

Most of the commentaries agree that our pasuk is addressing this question. However, they differ on the answer the passage is providing. Nachmanides comments that the bells announce the Kohen Gadol's entry and exit from the sanctuary. Why is this notice required? Nachmanides explains that it is inappropriate to enter the presence of the King without announcing oneself. It is also disrespectful to leave the King's presence without first providing notice. The bells provide the necessary announcement.[6]

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra takes a very different approach to explaining our pasuk. He suggests that the proper translation of the pasuk is that “his – the Kohen Gadol's -- voice will be heard when he comes to the sanctuary before Hashem.” According to Ibn Ezra, the bells, as well as the other garments, are designed to distinguish the Kohen Gadol from the other Kohanim. Through wearing his special vestments, the Kohen Gadol distinguishes himself as the leader of the Kohanim and the people. The passage assures that the sincere prayers of this leader will be heard.[7]

Gershonides offers a unique approach to explaining the bells of the jacket and the meaning of our passage. He explains that the Kohen Gadol's garments are not merely designed for visual beauty. These vestments also communi-

cate important ideas. For example, the Choshen – the breastplate – worn by the Kohen Gadol includes a series of stones. Engraved on these stones are the names of the Shevatim – the Tribes. The Choshen conveys to the Kohen Gadol that he represents the entire nation. These various messages motivate the Kohen Gadol to concentrate exclusively on the spiritual. However, these various messages can only be communicated to the Kohen Gadol when he is aware of the special vestment. The bells draw the Kohen Gadol's attention to his garments. This, in turn, allows the vestments to convey their messages to him. Based on this interpretation of the bells, Gershonides explains our passage. The Kohen Gadol hears the ringing of his own vestments. This encourages him to notice his garments and their special messages. His focus on these messages raises him to an elevated spiritual plane. As a result of his spiritual focus, the Almighty hears his voice and prayers.[8]

It is noteworthy that Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the bells is consistent with his overall perspective on the vestments of the Kohen Gadol. Ibn Ezra maintains that the garments of the Kohanim are designed to bestow honor and glory upon them. He interprets the bells as one of the elements of the vestments that distinguish the Kohen Gadol.

Nachmanides contends that the vestments are designed to glorify Hashem. His understanding of the bells is consistent with this perspective. He explains that the bells are required in order to show proper reverence when entering before Hashem and leaving His presence.

Gershonides' understanding of the bells is somewhat unique. He contends that the vestments are designed to communicate to the Kohen Gadol. The bells facilitate this communication. They focus the Kohen Gadol's attention of the garments. The bells are not a fundamental element of the vestments. They do not communicate any idea. However, they enhance the performance of the other vestments.

“And they shall be on Ahron and his sons when they enter the Ohel Moed or when they approach the altar to serve in sanctity. And they shall not be guilty of sin and die. It is an eternal law for him and his descendants after him”. (Shemot 28:43)

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik Ztl explained that there is a crucial difference between the

utensils of the Mishcan and the garments of the Kohen Gadol. The design of the garments was strictly governed by the law. If any garment was lost or damaged, it was replaced by an exact duplicate. The description of the garments was binding for all generations.

In contrast, the design of the utensils was not permanently binding in all of its details. The design described in the Chumash was intended for the Mishcan. These utensils were also essential components of the Bait HaMikdash. However, the utensils in the Holy Temple were not required to meet the description of the Chumash in every detail. Deviation was permitted.

Why is the law of the garments different from the law of the utensils? The Mizbeyach Menorah, Shulchan and other utensils were part of the Mishcan. They were as essential as the tent itself. The Mishcan was only one model of the institution of sanctuary. These utensils were designed for this model. Other models could have utensils designed in a different manner. However, the garments were not a part of this institution of sanctuary. They were an expression of the sanctity of the Kohen Gadol. This sanctity did not change with the various forms of sanctuary. Therefore, the garments were not altered. The Kohen Gadol of the Mishcan had the same sanctify as the individual serving in Shlomo's Temple. The garments of both High Priests were therefore identical. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 28:2.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 28:2.

[3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot 28:2.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 33.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Critique on Maimonides' Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 33.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 28:35.

[7] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Abbreviated Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 28:35.

[8] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 382.

1 Designer... 1 Design

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

After a recent discussion, I realized the need to address one of the most dominant human dichotomies: religion vs. all other areas. Many people are under the belief that religion is not to be subject to the same critical thinking applied to all other matters. For example, a person will fully agree that surgery should not be performed on his or her body, unless by a well trained surgeon. The rationale expressed is that since the body has intricate and precise laws, only comprehended after years of training; an ordinary person who performs surgery is ignorant of said laws, and will most definitely kill the patient. This same thinking is applied by all people, everywhere, whether we discuss medicine, science, math, or any other matter.

The reason for this view, is based on the observed truth that the universe functions in line with laws and principles. For example, NASA will not send a manned spaceship to the sun, assuming it will not be hot by the time it arrives: the sun's laws are not assumed to cease. Farmers too will not come out with a statement that "apples are poisonous on Wednesdays", since this too denies known facts, that laws governing plant life are constant.

But when we come to religion, or spirituality, many people accept and opine ideas that have no reasoning behind them. Why does this contradiction exist? Why do people demand rigorous credentials and proof for doctors, lawyers and accountants, for their children's teachers and their stockbrokers...but such meticulous concern is absent when it comes to the area of religion? Is this because there are no laws governing religion? Some people view religion as the area of life where "we can believe what we want". They also suggest, "there is no right and wrong in religion". Let's first define "religion".

Religion refers to "a set of laws and beliefs regarding God's will for man". The first problem with those who feel "there's no right and wrong in religion", is that they contradict the very definition of "religion". Feeling there is no right or wrong, they admit their belief could not be God-given. They mean to say this, "Even if my beliefs are

NOT God-given, there is no wrong in this belief". This opinion admits that what they believe is not necessarily God's word. Therefore, they are not following God. This must be clear to you: if you have no proof that what you follow is God-given, then you may be actually violating God's desire for you. All this points us towards the need to include reasoning in our religious choices as well. For without reasoning, we do not know if we follow or abandon God's true will for mankind. (And on that note, since there exists only one mankind, there must exist only one religion.)

Furthermore, people would not say "any operation anyone wants to perform on me is OK". This is obviously unacceptable due to the reality of the deadly results that come from careless mutilation. (There's a key word: "results") But they do say "people should believe what they want".

So why do people use reasoning when it comes to schooling, finances and health, but in connection with religion, reason is tossed out the window? Here are some of my thoughts for this dichotomy:

Why reason is abandoned in religious choices:

1. People don't desire confining and restricting laws.
2. People dislike a Master, a Being that makes rules.
3. People do not see the drastic results of living with foolish religious beliefs.
4. People do not want to learn they are wrong, or that movements are wrong, especially if they cherish the movement, and its adherents and leaders.

If reason would be applied to religious choices, a person would have to face all the above. So they abandon reason, for a "higher" good: their egos. However, there is in fact much good in following restricting laws if they improve us. If we follow our Master, does He not know better? And although we see no direct "results" on Earth from religious choices, does this mean there are no repercussions? And cannot movements – regardless of size or popularity – have it all wrong?

Ego is the driving force for the dichotomy we mentioned. This teaches us that people are not truly rational, but they are so, only when it serves their egotistical goals. The ego again is why people follow reason in matters of health and wealth...it's not necessarily rationality. The underlying motivational force in man appears to be his or her ego. It is then so vital that we realize this, so our future decisions are not motivated to defend our egos or our accepted beliefs. But if we want to know what is true and false, what is really good or bad for us, then we must not seek anything but truth itself. And we are going to be wrong...many times! But that's great...for when we are wrong,

here too we learn something new!

Now, returning to math, science and other laws...didn't we omit one? I refer to psychology. Any rational person admits that there is not only a design in the universe, its creations and laws, but also in man, and his inner workings...i.e., our emotions and our intellects.

We clearly see happy and unhappy people, and with 100% consistency, certain phenomena gladden our hearts, while others depress us and make us miserable, and cry. We see certain people so immersed and elated in their intellectual studies that they forget to eat...while others are millionaires, never cease working, and never enjoy life. Bottom line is, man too has a design. And if we use reason, we will determine what will make us happy. It appears we have debunked the credo of "people should believe whatever they want".

Just as in all other areas there exists a design, religion too is based on a design...human design, and also demands reasonable arguments that uncover what is truly God's word, and what is not. And if we study His one religion, we will arrive at new insights that make sense to our minds, just like the insights we find in science and math, that are so logical and pleasing to how we think. We will be as firm in our Judaism as in proven natural laws, and we will finally find that sensibility we've yearned for, that resonates in our souls. We will then be able to cast off that insecure, baseless belief or blind faith lifestyle that always left us empty inside. We will be fully content in what we finally see is 100% provable, and enlightening. Yesterday, a friend Jordan and I discussed a few areas in philosophy. He commented, "Once you see the reasoning behind Judaism, it's hard to go back to the blind faith and emotional trend others follow in religion."

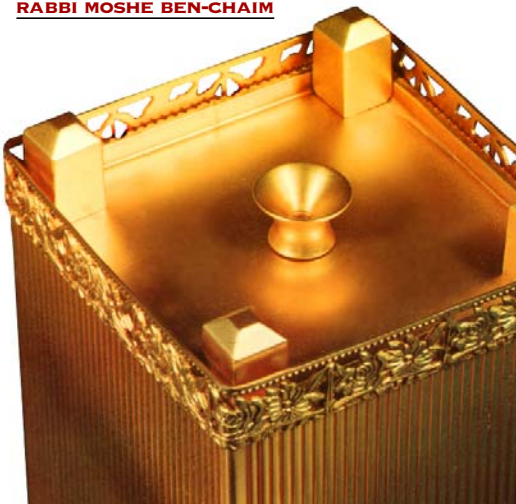
There is one Designer of all that exists, from science, math and astronomy...to planets, plants, animals and man. That design, that blueprint...is a system of "reason". All that exists, follows laws. And in all areas, man enjoys his life when he complies with the universe's laws. It is therefore wise that we study human design, and human history, so as to determine how we work, what will make us most happy, and which religion God truly gave.

The wisest men taught that this Designer designed our beautiful eternity if we follow Him, and "following Him" means following reality, that which our minds tell us is truth...not the baseless beliefs we manufacture in our hearts or hear from others. If however we ignore these proven truths and "believe whatever we want", these men also taught of the tremendous loss we will suffer.

This is worth looking into...rationally. ■

The Incense Altar

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



My friend Jessie was reviewing the Incense Altar in Parshas Tetzaveh. She wondered why it was omitted from inclusion in last week's Parsha Terumah, where the other vessels were discussed. The incense altar is one of four vessels located in the Temple. The other three are the Ark, the Showbread Table and the Menorah. Why was the Incense Altar not included in the discussion of the other three vessels?

I started to look over this section and noticed that the command to burn incense is connected to both; the cleaning and lighting of the Menorah, each morning and evening respectively:

“And on it Aaron shall fumigate a spice incense every morning, when he cleans the lights, he shall incense it. And when Aaron lights the lights in the evening, he shall incense it, a regular incense before God for your generations.” (Exod. 30:7,8)

What is the connection between the Incense Altar and the Menorah? Is the burning of incense only accidentally tied to these two parts of the day, or does something in the incense require this timing? The Talmud teaches that the incense is to

be burned quite literally “during” the cleaning of the Menorah: the priests would clean the wicks and ashes from 5 of the 7 bowls of the Menorah; interrupt their cleaning with the lighting of the incense, and return to clean the remaining two bowls. What is the reason for this interruption? Which demands which: does Menorah demand incense, or does incense demand Menorah? Perhaps, they require each other. Reading the actual verses below, it appears to me that the Incense Altar follows the ‘lead’ of the Menorah: it is fumed, only when work is done with the Menorah. So we conclude that the time of burning incense is subordinated to the Menorah. What is this relationship? What purposes do these two vessels serve? God's laws must be reasonable.

Another interesting point is the Torah's law regarding the Incense Altar's position. It is actually described first:

“And you shall place it before the Parochess, which is over the Ark of Testimony; before the Kaporess which is on the Testimony, by which I meet you there.” (Exod. 30:1)

Of course we wonder why two relationships are stated. The Incense Altar is to be placed, 1) before the Parochess (separating curtain) and, 2) before the Kaporess (the Ark's cover with the golden Cherub figurines). So which one is this Incense Altar to be placed in front of: the Parochess or the Kaporess? And why is its position considered “before” the Parochess? It is in fact not directly in front of it: this Incense Altar is further away from this Parochess curtain, than are the Menorah and the Showbread Table. Rashi answers: it is equidistant from the left and right walls as one enters the Temple. In contrast, the Table was at the north side at the right, and the Menorah on the south side at the left, not centered, as was the Altar. Rashi states that “before the Parochess” teaches that one must align the Incense Altar to be directly in line with the Ark's position. This means that there is a relationship between the Altar and the Ark. What is it?

An interesting chapter in Maimonides work, the “Guide” is apropos at this point.

Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed – Book III, CHAPTER IX

“THE corporeal element in man is a large screen and partition that prevents him from perfectly perceiving abstract ideals: this would be the case even if the corporeal element were as pure and superior as the substance of the spheres; how much more must this be the case with our

dark and opaque body. However great the exertion of our mind may be to comprehend the Divine Being or any of the ideals, we find a screen and partition between Him and ourselves. Thus the prophets frequently hint at the existence of a partition between God and us. They say He is concealed from us in vapours, in darkness, in mist, or in a thick cloud: or use similar figures to express that on account of our bodies we are unable to comprehend His essence. This is the meaning of the words, “Clouds and darkness are round about Him” (Ps. xcvi. 2). The prophets tell us that the difficulty consists in the grossness of our substance: they do not imply, as might be gathered from the literal meaning of their words, that God is corporeal, and is invisible because He is surrounded by thick clouds, vapours, darkness, or mist. This figure is also expressed in the passage, “He made darkness His secret place” (Ps. xviii. 12). The object of God revealing Himself (on Sinai) in thick clouds, darkness, vapours, and mist was to teach this lesson; for every prophetic vision contains some lesson by means of allegory; that mighty vision, therefore, though the greatest of all visions, and above all comparison, viz., His revelation in a thick cloud, did not take place without any purpose, it was intended to indicate that we cannot comprehend Him on account of the dark body that surrounds us. It does not surround God, because He is incorporeal. A tradition is current among our people that the day of the revelation on Mount Sinai was misty, cloudy, and a little rainy. Comp.” Lord, when thou wentest forth from Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped water” (judges v. 4). The same idea is expressed by the words “darkness, clouds, and thick darkness” (Deut. iv. 11). The phrase does not denote that darkness surrounds God, for with Him there is no darkness, but the great, strong, and permanent light, which, emanating from Him, illuminates all darkness, as is expressed by the prophetic simile, “And the earth shined with His glory”. (Ezek. xliii. 2).”

Maimonides makes it quite clear that God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai with clouds. This was done precisely to teach our ignorance of what God is. One might think – especially at Sinai – that he has received some positive knowledge of God. Therefore, God cloaked that event amidst darkness, cloud and rain. He desired no one to walk away, assuming they acquired any positive knowledge about Him. Moses too reminds the people: “you saw no form” when referring to that awesome event. So disastrous is the fallacy that we might know anything about God, that God

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(Tetzaveh continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

killed 57,000 people when they looked into the Ark upon its return from the Philistines. Once someone feels there can be something “seen” in relation to God, he has forfeited his life, as he errs in the most primary of all areas: what God is and what He is not. He is worthy of death.

Clouds

God manifests His providence over Israel via cloud - both in the Temple, and during the Exodus. God uses cloud to embody the idea that He cannot be understood: His true nature is “clouded” by our very physical natures, as Maimonides stated. On Yom Kippur the High Priest smokes the entire Holy of Holies, lest he too fall prey to a notion that something may be seen in connection to God, in that exalted room housing the stunning Cherubs and the miraculous Ten Commandments.

**Ramban's Equation**

The first Ramban on Parshas Terumah states that of one were to study the account of Revelation at Sinai, he would understand the Temple and Tabernacle. I did uncover that, to which Ramban alludes. His equation is strictly limited to a parallel between the Temple and Sinai, and nothing else. However, I did notice some eye-opening parallels:

- 1) The Jews left Egypt behind them – where, via the first Passover sacrifice, they denounced animal worship.
- 2) Upon their exit from Egypt, the Jews were led by God's cloud by day, and His pillar of fire at night.
- 3) They were sustained with Manna, God's miraculous bread.
- 4) All of this took place en route to Sinai where the Torah was given.
- 5) Sinai took place amidst a flaming mountain.
- 6) God's words emanated from the darkness.

Now compare those to these:

- 1) The priest leaves the altar behind him outside the Temple – where animals are killed.
- 2) Upon entrance in the Temple, he first encounters the Gold Altar of incense, which makes clouds only by day, while he lights the Menorah only at night.
- 3) In the Temple is the Table housing the show-bread, twelve loaves correspond to the Twelve Tribes.
- 4) All of this is en route to the Holy of Holies, where God's Torah is housed.
- 5) The Ark is a golden structure that mimics the flames.
- 6) God's words emanate from the concealed Holy of Holies.

History Reiterated – Temple Embodies God's Providence

I am not offering a conclusive explanation here. I merely wish to suggest my observations. But I do find them intriguing. Why do we reiterate the cloud, the pillar of fire, Manna, and Sinai in the Temple's vessels and design? These events imparted to us levels of knowledge of God's providence – this is how God works. Such knowledge is our objective: to arrive at an ever growing knowledge of God's ways, His justice, kindness, mercy, and all other methods. These historical events become eternally solidified in the Temple's vessels. Each one alludes to some aspect of how God relates to man, teaching us more truth about the Creator. Although we never experienced it first hand, all future generations

benefit from what God imparted to those Jews who left Egypt, by studying or experiencing the Temple. The Divine providence they experienced, teaching them new truths about God, is also available to us through studying the Torah's record of those events, and through Temple.

Subordinate to the Menorah

I again suggest inconclusively. Besides recalling the pillar of fire, perhaps the Menorah's light also alludes to “knowledge of God”. Its seven branches certainly remind one of Creation's seven days...an allusion to God's wisdom. Light too in Torah is equated to Torah knowledge, “For a flame is a mitzvah, and Torah is light”. (Proverbs, 6:22) Perhaps then, our limited knowledge of God must be tempered by the Incense Altar's cloud. As Maimonides taught, cloud always encompasses God. Similarly, cloud must encompass light. The Altar must always provide cloudy fumes when actively working with the Menorah. That which embodies the knowledge of God – the Menorah's light – must be accompanied by the realization that we never achieve positive knowledge of God: He is cloaked, and thus, the incense must cast a veil with its billows.

For this reason, the Altar is to follow the Menorah's lead: when one works with the Menorah, only then does the Altar enter the picture. The Altar “negates” something, and does not exist of its own. It is therefore not recorded together with those other three vessels that impart positive concepts. The Incense Altar reminds man that he cannot possess any positive knowledge about God.

Not only is it true that we have no positive knowledge of God, but if we were to assume this, we would then follow with an additional error: we would ‘project’ onto God. It is man's nature that when he is familiar with something, that he assumes more than what reality dictates. You might meet someone new who is similar to an old friend, and then you might assume other similarities to exist, although you never witnessed such similarities. The same is the case in connection to God. If one were to make one false assumption, he would make others. Perhaps this is an additional reason why we are so careful not to make any assumptions about God. The very existence of this Incense Altar addresses the need to constantly reiterate never to cross that line.

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Position

This approach would also answer the positioning of the Incense Altar. It was aligned with the Parochess, as this very "curtain" carried the same function as the Incense Altar: they both serve to "cover" something. I found the verse describing the positioning of the Incense Altar quite interesting. I will note it again: "And you shall place it before the Parochess, which is over the Ark of Testimony; before the Kaporets which is on the Testimony, by which I meet you there." (Exod. 30:1) The verse keeps shifting what it is exactly that we place the Altar before: is it the Parochess, the Kaporets, the place where God speaks to us?

Perhaps the very structure of this verse alludes to the elusive nature of knowledge of God. We are not told to place the Altar before one, single object, but many references are given, as if to say, even in Temple, there is no such idea of "before God". He is not physical. He takes up no space. He is not "in" the Temple.

On this point, my friend Shaye suggested this verse conveys "degrees of separation" between God and us. And this is conveyed only in the Temple. For it is only when a 'relationship' exists – in Temple – that degrees of separation may apply.

However, the Parochess is mentioned first in our verse because of its similar function to the Altar. However, ultimately, we are to arrive at the purpose of the Temple: greater knowledge of God. Thus, the end of the verse refers to the place where God speaks from, from where knowledge emanates. This is the objective of Temple.

Addendum

On a micro level, Menorah and the Incense Altar create light and darkness respectively. Through them we are mindful of what we can and cannot know. On a macro level, again we see this parallel: God's first creations included light and darkness. As if these two entities precede all others in importance, and rightfully so: knowledge is the purpose in God's creation of a universe...for mankind to study His wisdom. The parallel continues even into man's very workings: man's conscious and unconscious minds deal with what is known, and what is hidden.

In Genesis, God created lights from the darkness. Of all his physical creations, most stupendous are His heavenly luminaries. Conversely, man moves in the opposite direction: declaring his ignorance of He who is all knowing. God created the great lights, while man strives to escape his "night".

Perhaps we have shed some light on the fact that we are in the dark. ■

Part II

We just observed a very interesting parallel between the Jews' history, and the Temple's structure. We noted that the Jews left animal worship behind them upon their Egyptian exodus. God led them through a desert by way of pillars of smoke and fire, while sustaining them miraculously with the Manna. They arrived at Sinai obtaining God's Torah. These events are directly paralleled by the Temple's design: the priests enter the Temple with the animal sacrifice behind them. Inside, they encounter smoke from the Incense Altar, fire from the Menorah, and bread set on the Showbread Table. These are all in service of the primary vessel, the Ark that houses God's Torah. It too is cloaked by a Parochess curtain, as was Sinai cloaked in darkness, rain and cloud.

These phenomena of pillars of smoke, fire, and the Manna, were not simply conveniences, but precisely planned by God. Each served a lesson, not just for the Jews who left Egypt, but also for all future generations. So important are their lessons, they form the design of the Temple: God desired that the Egyptian, terrestrial journey mirror every man and woman's internal journey. We all must leave our own "Egypt". Life is a struggle to abandon our infantile and primitive natures, our own Egypt, and adhere to the truth, embodied by the Menorah's light. And as we said, we temper our knowledge with our admission of our ignorance, conveyed by the Incense Altar's cloud. And if we truly devote ourselves to this mission for which we were created, God's Manna - His providence for our physical needs - will be readily found, just as it was prepared for the Jews. And just as the Manna was miraculous, we too will not understand how God provide as we engage more hours in Torah study than in work, but He does. God wishes that man devote himself more to study, than to accumulation of wealth. The Manna was actually commanded to be on display in the Temple as a proof of God's ability to sustain us. Again we learn: the lessons of the desert are to be permanent lessons. Maimonides also teaches that for one who abandons the life of monetary concerns, devoting himself to study God's Torah, God will provide his needs. (Mishneh Torah: Laws of Shmita and Yovale, 13:13)

As the Jews eventuated at Sinai to obtain the Torah, so too, the Temple's focus is the Ark which houses the Torah. We are reminded daily of our true purpose: to arrive at an ever-increasing love of God. This may only be accomplished by studying His creation and His Torah. We therefore learn how essential it is that we are aware of our inner natures - our primitive and instinctual tendencies. We all possess them. These emotions and drives work on us each day. We must evaluate which urges rule us, understand their destructive natures, and abandon

them, or satisfy them properly. But our minds are to rule our emotions, not the reverse. This too was exemplified by the Jews' Passover sacrifice. Before being redeemed, they had to display their disbelief in the Egyptian animal god. For many, it was too strong a desire, and they perished with the Egyptians in Egypt. One cannot simultaneously adhere to God and an animal deity.

It ends up that all those ancient events are not quite so ancient. It would appear that God desired those events to embody mankind's mission...in each generation. It follows that God commanded our recurring Jewish Holidays to set on permanent display these educational episodes. This journey applies to us all, and Temple is the permanent reminder. There are other similar laws. The new moon for example is said to wax and wane, teaching man that he too may decrease by sin, but like the moon, he may again wax to glow in his perfection. The Rabbis indicate that this is an actual purpose in the design of the moon's orbital phases.

Our internal world is quite hidden, and rarely studied. Temple teaches that matters should be just the opposite: we must examine our natures, admitting our poor character traits, and work on improving them as outlined in the Torah. This is where the Keruvim come in.

The Keruvim, or cherubs, were the childlike, gold figurines, which form the Ark's cover. Why were such images attached to the most prized of all Temple vessels housing God's Torah? What do they have to do with the Torah? The Rabbis teach they were similar in design to an infant.

What is an infant? How is it distinguished? I believe cherubs are to embody man who is not yet distorted; he does not yet follow the instinctual, primitive and idolatrous emotions. He is innocent. Keruvim portray man in his yet, uncorrupted state: a child. This is what the knowledge of Torah (housed under the Keruvim) target. Man should return to that state where his emotions have no affect on him. Keruvim are the focus of the Temple, as man's focus is to return to a state where he is similar to a child in this respect.

The zenith of man's existence is when he is untainted with sin, as a child. But this is joined to his other spiritual element: his soul. Man has two missions, to free himself from his instinctual, and cleave to the intellectual, the world of wisdom. But they work hand in hand: man's attachment to the world of wisdom, (the Tablets inside the Ark), is proportionate to how far he removes himself from the grips of his emotion, the Keruvim. The Ark's dual nature of Tablets and Keruvim above, embody man's dual nature of an intellectual and emotional being. Although the ancient Jews made but one journey from Egypt to Sinai on the ground, all Jews must journey from "Egypt to Sinai" each and every day. ■

“I’m More Spiritual than Religious” II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Some are of the opinion that astrology provides true information. Others feel psychic ability is real. The question to ask such individuals is this: if a trained doctor said you needed a certain surgery to live, and an astrologer or psychic said not to have the surgery...who would you follow?

I feel such questions truly show the individual that in matters that concern them most, they truly are convinced of natural law, over baseless, supernatural claims. They would follow doctors.

As psychics never win lotteries, and astrologers never predict with any accuracy, and only come close a small percentage of the time...we explain the former as liars, and the latter as mere guesswork. An ignorant person can make guesses and will be right as often as astrologers.

