

Selected Shorts: Terumah and Shabbat Zachor
Rabbi Eliot Malomet Feburary 20, 2021 8 Adar 5781

שמות כ"ה:ב'

(ב) ... וְיִקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה ...

Exodus 25:2

(2) *let them take for Me a raised-contribution.* Considering that the supplies for the Sanctuary could have been requisitioned by force, the request for voluntary gifts dignified the donors, maximized the number of givers, and democratized the process. Unlike public institutions that have only one wealthy donor, the Sanctuary would have a broad base of symbolic ownership.

שמות כ"ה:ח'

(ח) וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנֹתַי בְּתוֹכָם:

Exodus 25:8

(8) *And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.* We note that the sanctuary enables God to dwell among the people. It consists of two square zones that form a long rectangle. At the center of one of the zones we have the Holy of Holies and at the center of the other zone, we have the altar. The sanctuary is the tangible representation of the God-Israel relationship: Israel connects to God at the altar and God connects to Israel at the Holy of Holies.

שמות כ"ה:ט'

(ט) כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מֵרְאֶה אוֹתְךָ אֶת מִבְּנֵי־הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֶת מִבְּנֵי־הַקֹּדֶשׁ כְּלִי־בָנָיו וְכֵן תַּעֲשׂוּ: (ס)

Exodus 25:9

(9) *Exactly as I show you, the pattern of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, so shall you make it.* This is an idea that is repeated several times in the course of these instructions: God shows Moses a model, and Moses and the people assemble it. Creating habitable structures is a universal human activity, but we underestimate the degree of technical skill and knowledge that is necessary. The sanctuary is a complex structure comprised of several important pieces (the ark, table, menorah, altar etc.) beams, coverings and fasteners, which was to be repeatedly assembled and disassembled in a meticulous fashion. Considering that up until now, the people's greatest technical achievement was brick making, putting this structure together without some kind of direction would have been an impossible task. Like the novice assembling furniture, they required visual model or diagram. The Torah only gives us the textual description.

שמות כ"ה:ט"ז

(טז) וְנָתַתָּ אֶל־הָאָרוֹן אֶת הַעֲדוֹת אֲשֶׁר אָתָּן אֵלָיךְ:

Exodus 25:16

(16) *And deposit in the Ark [the tablets of] the Pact which I will give you.* The holiest element of the tabernacle was the Ark of the Covenant which functioned as the repository of the tablets. The Ark and its contents was a tangible reminder of the foundational moment at Sinai. The sanctuary becomes the "portable" Sinai and a representation not of God, but of the covenantal relationship.

שמות כ"ה:כ"ב

(כב) וְנוֹעַדְתִּי לָךְ שֵׁם וְדִבַּרְתִּי אִתְּךָ מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים אֲשֶׁר עַל־אָרְוֹן הַעֲדוֹת אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה אוֹתְךָ אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל: (פ)

Exodus 25:22

(22) *There I will meet with you, and I will impart to you—from above the cover, from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the Pact—all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people.* God doesn't reside there, but "meets" the people there. The infinitesimal space above the cover, between the cherubim is the Point Zero of the God-Israel relationship. What is it? How big is it? Is it describable? Does it compare it anything? Are there metaphors to help us understand this? Perhaps. Consider cosmology. Just as an indescribable "singularity" – a hot "dense seed" no bigger than a proton, an "unknowable void" – preceded the Big Bang, and from it the entire universe emerged, God's Infinite Voice emerges from the infinitesimal indescribable "singularity" above the Ark and fills the universe. Psalm 150 reflects this understanding: הַלְלוּ־אֵל בְּקִדְשׁוֹ – *Praise God in the infinitesimal-space-that-is-located-above-the-cherubim-located-in-the-Holy-of-Holies;* הַלְלוּ־הוֹי בְּרָקִיעַ עֲזוֹ: – *Praise Him in the infinite-expanse-of-His-heavenly-stronghold.* The religious imagination is transfixed by the mystery of the Divine. God "speaks" from an infinitesimal-unknowable-invisible-H-of-H space and is heard throughout the universe. The sanctuary is an attempt to locate us in the drama of that mystery.

PARASHAT ZAKHOR - Deuteronomy 25:17

(יז) זְכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדַרְדֵּךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם: *Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt—* We are referring

here to the heinous attack that took place immediately following the Exodus. Sensing the vulnerability of the Israelites, and for no apparent reason, the Amalekites commit a series of atrocities against the Israelites, attacking the women, children and elderly. Israel wages a battle and they are repulsed. The Bible shapes this traumatic episode into a formative moment that requires vigilant memory. Amalek becomes the symbol of “radical evil” with which compromise, negotiation, and coexistence is not possible. It’s ultimate aim is the complete annihilation of Jews.

דברים כ"ה:י"ט

(יט) וְהָיָה בְּהֵגִיחַ ה' אֶלְקֵינוּ אִלְנֵי מַסְבֵּיב בְּאַרְצוֹ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה־אֱלֹהֵינוּ נָתַן לָנוּ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת־זִכְרָה עֲמַלְק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח: (פ)

Deuteronomy 25:19

(19) *Therefore, when the LORD your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!* The commandment is tangled up in paradox: remember what they did; blot out every mention of their existence; but don’t forget. Underpinning this commandment is a sober understanding of Jewish existence: as a vessel of God’s name, there will always be those who want to annihilate us. Jewish history is replete with catastrophic examples; they continue even to this day. Memory requires vigilance; Zionism added sovereignty and the means of self-defense.

HAFTARAH – 1 SAMUEL 15:2-34

King Saul is instructed to destroy Amalek completely, and not take any spoils. Saul stops short: (ט) וַיַּחַמֵּל שְׂאוּל וְהָעָם עַל־אַגָּג וְעַל־מִיטֵב הַצֹּאן וְהַבָּקָר וְהַמִּשְׁגָּיִם וְעַל־הַפָּרִים וְעַל־כָּל־הַטּוֹב וְלֹא אָבּוּ הַחֲרִימָם וְכָל־הַמְּלָאכָה נִמְבָּגָה וַנִּמַּס אֶתֶּה הַחֲרִימוּ: (פ)

I Samuel 15:9

(9) *but Saul and the troops spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the second-born, the lambs, and all else that was of value. They would not proscribe them; they proscribed only what was cheap and worthless.* Why does Saul spare Agag? Does he see in Agag a mirror of himself? Does he allow the fellowship of monarchy to subordinate the divine command to eradicate him? Is Agag in this moment, the “noble foe,” a Sadat sitting across the table from a Begin, with whom he is about to make peace? Is he a General Lee surrendering to a General Grant with whom

he has to symbolize a return to union and nationhood? Agag is the embodiment of Amalekite evil with which co-existence is not possible. The tradition renders harsh judgement for Saul for delivering compassion, rather than justice to the cruel. Where the cruel receive compassion, the innocent inevitably become victims.

שמואל א ט"ו:י"ד

(י"ד) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל וַיְמַה קוֹל־הַצֹּאן הַזֶּה בְּאָזְנֵי וְקוֹל הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי שֹׁמֵעַ:

I Samuel 15:14

(14) *“Then what,” demanded Samuel, “is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of oxen that I hear?”* We cannot expect the translation to pick up the nuances of the Hebrew here. The *onomatopoeia* of קוֹל־הַצֹּאן uMEH kol hatzon – mocks Saul’s self-righteousness. *You were told to destroy everything, and now you are going to offer sacrifices to God with these stolen animals? Do you think God wants this?*

שמואל א ט"ו:כ"ז-כ"ח

(כז) וַיִּפֹּב שְׂמוּאֵל לְלֶכֶת וַיַּחַזֵּק בְּכַנְף־מְעִילוֹ וַיִּקְרַע: (כח) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו שְׂמוּאֵל קְרַע ה' אֶת־מַמְלַכּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַלְיָד הַיּוֹם וַיִּנְתְּנָה לְרַעַף הַטּוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ:

I Samuel 15:27-28

(27) *As Samuel turned to leave, Saul seized the corner of his robe, and it tore.* (28) *And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you.* In the Bible, the tearing of garments is deeply laden with pathos. But note that it is the corner of the garment that is torn. As we know from the commandment to wear *tzitzit*, the corner is the most important part of the garment; it is the identifier. Saul’s tearing of the corner of Samuel’s garment, is more than just a mishap; it is an assault on Samuel’s prophetic identity. Samuel has plenty of reason to react to Saul harshly, but at this moment it just got personal.

שמואל א ט"ו:ל"ד

(לד) וַיִּלְךָ שְׂמוּאֵל הַרְמַתָּה וְשְׂאוּל עָלָה אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ גִּבְעַת שְׂאוּל:

I Samuel 15:34

(34) *Samuel then departed for Ramah, and Saul went up to his home at Gibeah of Saul.* See 15:33 for the rather gruesome end that befalls Agag. Irreparable and permanent, the violent dispatching of Agag mirrors Samuel’s anguished severance from Saul. For Samuel and Saul, it’s over. Samuel pivots to the future and a young, formidable new king: David. Shabbat Shalom!