



Likkutei Sichos

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Sacred Ground

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1.

MISHKAN SHILOH – HOUSE OR TENT?

Our *parshah* discusses the mitzvah to bring and offer sacrifices exclusively in the Temple and the prohibition of offering sacrifices outside the Temple.¹ The Mishnah² (and similarly, *Sifri*)³ articulate the steps {of how bringing sacrifices on private altars became prohibited}:

From the time that the Mishkan⁴ was erected, private altars were prohibited... when they {the Jewish people} came to Gilgal, private altars were permitted... when they came to Shiloh, private altars were forbidden, and there was no roof there; instead, it was only a house of stone. And this {period when the Mishkan would be situated in Shiloh} is {described in the Torah as} “rest.” When they came to Nov and {later} to Givon, private altars were permitted.... Private altars were prohibited when they came to Yerushalayim, and there was no [subsequent] period when they were allowed. And it {the Temple in Yerushalayim} is {described in the Torah as} “inheritance.”

From the Mishnah’s wording, it seems that this law — “when they came to Shiloh, private altars were prohibited” — is tied to the fact that Shiloh featured a “**house** of stone... and it is {described in the Torah as} ‘rest’” (in contrast with the preceding location at Gilgal, where the Jewish people erected the Tent of Meeting),⁵ and, as Rambam writes,⁶ “Shiloh is called a *house*.”

We need to clarify: The verse states explicitly,⁷ “For I have not dwelt in a house from the day that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, to this day, but have walked in a tent and a Mishkan.” In other words, even the Mishkan in Shiloh was not considered a *house* but a **tent** (or Mishkan)!

¹ *Devarim* 12:4 ff.

² *Zevachim* 112b.

³ *Sifri* on *Devarim* 12:8.

⁴ {The portable temple, first erected in the desert.}

⁵ *Zevachim* 118b; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,” ch. 1, par. 2.

⁶ “*Commentary on Mishnah*,” on *Zevachim* 14:6; see Rambam’s wording in *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*, *ibid*.

⁷ II *Shmuel* 7:6. {Hashem said this to the prophet Nassan to relay to David in the context of his wish to build the Temple.}

Simply speaking, we could explain that it depends on the context: Relative to the Tent of Meeting — the Mishkan — Shiloh is considered a **house**. However, it is merely a tent relative to the Temple in Yerushalayim.

However, the fact that this {distinction} is tied to a particular **law** — the prohibition against private altars — implies that even the Mishkan in Shiloh was **defined** as a **house**, which is why it “is {described in the Torah as} ‘rest.’”

2.

PERMANENCE

The explanation of the matter:

The Torah applies the same expression to Shiloh and to the Temple in Yerushalayim. It says in *Sifri*:⁸ “*The place that Hashem will choose*”⁹ — this refers to Shiloh and the Eternal House {the Temple}.” This expression is not used regarding the Mishkan that preceded it (nor regarding the “Temples”¹⁰ in Nov and Givon).

The difference between these {groupings} is clear: Although “private altars were prohibited” when the Mishkan was in the desert as well, and sacrifices could only be offered within the Mishkan, it was still not the “**place which Hashem will choose**” for it was not fixed in one place, but it was transported from one encampment to another. Clearly, we can also not apply this {definition of “the place that Hashem will choose”} to the fourteen years of conquest and division of the land (when the Mishkan was in Gilgal and there were no longer any encampments).¹¹

On the other hand, Shiloh was designated as “**the place** that Hashem will choose”; it was a permanent place for 369 years.¹² This is why it was prohibited

⁸ *Sifri* on *Devarim* 14:25; 26:2.

⁹ {*Devarim* 12:5 et passim.}

¹⁰ Wording of Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,” ch. 1, par. 2: “And they built a Temple there” {referring to Nov and Givon}.

¹¹ See Rambam’s “*Commentary on Mishnah*,” on *Zevachim* 14:5.

¹² *Zevachim* 118b; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,” ch. 1, par. 2.

to offer sacrifices in other places (outside the Mishkan in Shiloh) during the Shiloh period.

Therefore, a stone house was erected there¹³ (and it is called a “house” {as opposed to a tent}), as this expresses the permanence of the place.¹⁴

3.

PRIVATE ALTARS

On this basis, we can explain the distinction between the rationale for permitting the use of private altars “when they entered the land” and “came to Gilgal,” as opposed to allowing the use of private altars after {the Mishkan at} Shilo was destroyed and “they came to Nov and Givon”:

Rambam writes:¹⁵

From when the {period of} encampments ended, and they entered the land... which is when they came to Gilgal, this prohibition was **lifted**, and it **remained permissible** for anyone who wished to offer a sacrifice on a private altar, **as was the case before the {construction of the} Mishkan.**

Since the {period of} encampments ended, and matters reverted to their prior state before the construction of the Mishkan, the use of private altars automatically became re-admissible.

Conversely, permitting sacrifices on private altars after the Mishkan in Shiloh ceased to function required a particular interpretation derived from the verse,¹⁶ “For you have not yet come to the resting place or the inheritance”: “*To the resting place* — this refers to Shiloh; *to the inheritance* — this refers to Yerushalayim. Why did the verse separate them? **To grant permission** {to

¹³ However, Rambam contends that even in Nov and Givon, a **mikdash** was built, which implies a stone building; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 16, p. 304, fn. 47, and the **sources cited there.**

¹⁴ See *Maharsha on Tosafos*, “*Shevuos 15a*,” s.v. “*Ein HaAzarah.*”

¹⁵ “*Commentary on Mishnah*,” on *Zevachim 14:5.*

¹⁶ *Devarim 12:9.*

sacrifice on private altars during the period} between this one {Shiloh} and that one {Yerushalayim}.”¹⁷ A special dispensation was needed for this.

This is also implied by the expression, “To grant permission between this one and that one.” The assumption (which this interpretation is rejecting) that private altars would be prohibited is [not because the Mishkan was in Nov and Givon and there were still encampments, but instead, it is] based on the understanding that after “they came to Shiloh,” the **overall** concept of private altars lapsed (to which the verse introduces the idea of “permission between this one and that one”). This is also the implication of Rashi’s remark in his commentary in the Gemara:¹⁸ “How do we know that once Shiloh was sanctified, private altars were permitted {again} after Shiloh’s destruction ?”

But why presume that “when they came to Shiloh,” private altars were disallowed entirely?

However, this {presumption} proves that Shiloh introduced the idea of **permanence** (which did not exist previously) — “The place that Hashem will choose” — which terminated the era of private altars, except that a special exposition was then introduced “to grant **permission** {for using private altars} between this and that.”

4.

COMPARING VERSES

But now, another question arises: Since the expression, “**The place** that Hashem will **choose**” also refers to Shiloh, why was the Temple in Yerushalayim — but not the Mishkan in Shiloh — called “the Chosen House”¹⁹?

¹⁷ *Zevachim* 119a.

¹⁸ *Zevachim*, *ibid.*

¹⁹ {In the original Hebrew, “*Beis HaBechirah*.”}

We must say that although Shiloh was also called the “place which Hashem will choose,” a distinction remains between the **choice** of Shiloh and the choice of Yerushalayim.

This matter will be clarified by prefacing with a discussion of the varied expressions in our *parshah* regarding the obligation to offer sacrifices in the Temple.

First, Scripture says,²⁰ “You shall not do so to Hashem, your L-rd” (which means — as Rashi explains: “To offer {sacrifices} to Heaven in any place”), “but only to the place that Hashem your L-rd will choose... you shall inquire after His dwelling and come there. You shall bring there your *olah*²¹ sacrifices....” Further, it says,²² “You shall cross the Jordan... and He will give you rest {from all your enemies}... It shall be that the place that Hashem, your L-rd, will choose it, to cause His Name to dwell there — there you shall bring everything that I command you.” *Sifri* explains — and Rashi also cites this explanation in his Torah commentary²³ — that the first verse “refers to Shiloh,” and the second, “to Yerushalayim.”

There is another difference between the verses: In the first verse, the focus (at the beginning) is on the person — “**you shall bring** there your *olah* sacrifices,” whereas, in the second verse, the focus (at the beginning) is on the place — “**there** you shall bring everything that I command you.”

This difference corresponds to a broader difference between the verses:

In the first verses, the Torah begins with the prohibition, “*You shall not do so to Hashem, your L-rd* — to offer {sacrifices} to Heaven at any place.” Then, as a follow-up (and consequence) of the prohibition, the Torah obligates us: “...but only to the place.”²⁴ In other words, the choice of this special place underscores

²⁰ *Devarim* 12:4-6.

²¹ {Commonly translated as “an ascent-offering,” it was consumed completely on the altar.}

²² *Devarim* 12:10-11.

²³ On *Devarim* 12:11.

²⁴ See *Gur Aryeh* on Rashi, *Devarim* 12:5, where he writes that the entire verse, “But only to the place that Hashem your L-rd will choose...” refers to Shiloh. In his commentary on *Devarim* 12:14, he writes in a similar fashion. However, see *Re'em* and *Sifsei chachamim* on those verses.

the prohibition of offering sacrifices elsewhere; sacrifices may only be offered in the **one** place designated by Hashem's choice.

In contrast, the second verse begins with the obligation — “It shall be that the place that Hashem, your L-rd, will choose it, to cause His Name to dwell there — there you shall bring...” Meaning, the reverse is true. The Torah's directive, “there you shall bring,” is a consequence of the fact that this is “the place that Hashem, your L-rd, will choose it.”

5.

WHY WERE THEY CHOSEN?

It is now clear that although Shiloh was chosen {as the site of a Mishkan}, the type of choice by which Shiloh and Yerushalayim were chosen differs fundamentally:

Shiloh was chosen as a place {for sacrifices} only as a result of the prohibition on “offering {sacrifices} to Heaven at any place,” which necessitated a designated place for offering — this place was chosen based on an {extrinsic} cause and reason.

Conversely, Yerushalayim was the place that Hashem chose (not due to an {extrinsic} reason, but) as the place for His *Shechinah*²⁵ to reside — and **consequently**, it became the place where sacrifices were to be offered (“there you shall bring”).

In other words, Hashem chose Shiloh for considerations related to the Jewish people so that they would have a designated place to offer sacrifices (as opposed to {offering them} anywhere, as had been permitted earlier when private altars were allowed). Conversely, Hashem chose Yerushalayim for

²⁵ {The Divine Presence.}

considerations pertaining to Himself, as it were; the place that Hashem chose, as it were, for His *Shechinah* — “This is My resting place forever.”²⁶

6.

WHAT WAS CHOSEN?

The difference between Shiloh and Yerushalayim in how they were chosen {as sacred places} leads to a difference concerning what was **chosen**:

Since Shiloh was selected for the sake of having a dedicated site for sacrifices, choosing the **place** (where the Mishkan was, but not choosing the {structure of the} Mishkan that was built there) was sufficient, and this satisfied this need.

Conversely, Yerushalayim was chosen (without a restrictive reason) on its merit, including the place of (the Temple and) the Temple itself. Since this is the place that Hashem had chosen as His resting place “forever,” it follows that the Temple itself enabled the actual resting. That is, the Temple itself was a “Chosen **House**.”

We also see this point emphasized in the varied wording of the verses mentioned above:

When it comes to Shiloh, the verse says, “The place that Hashem, your L-rd {will choose it} **to set** His Name **there**,” whereas the verse regarding Yerushalayim says, “that Hashem, your L-rd, will choose **it**, to cause His Name to dwell there”: In Shiloh, the object of Hashem’s choice was not **in** the place,²⁷ but rather “**to set** His Name,” whereas in Yerushalayim, the object of Hashem’s choice was **in** the site itself.

²⁶ *Tehillim* 132:14.

²⁷ For a location to be chosen in the complete sense, the sanctuary (which is in that place) must (also) be chosen. Since the Mishkan in Shiloh was not chosen, it is understood the location itself was not chosen in the complete sense.

7.

THE CHOSEN HOUSE

It is now clear why Rambam named this section of laws “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* — *Laws of the Chosen House*”:

[Although at the beginning of “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,” in the heading of this section, where all the mitzvos included in these laws are listed,²⁸ Rambam says that the first mitzvah is “to build the *Beis HaMikdash*” (and not the *Beis HaBechirah*). Similarly, in the laws themselves, Rambam cites the verse,²⁹ “They shall make for Me a *Mikdash*” right in the first paragraph (as opposed to the verse that uses the term “*Bechirah*”).³⁰ Moreover, Rambam names the following sections of laws relating to the *Beis Hamikdash* with the appellation of “*Mikdash*” — “*Klei HaMikdash*,” “*Bias Mikdash*.”]³¹

This name, *Mikdash*, emphasizes the essential uniqueness of the *Beis Hamikdash* in Yerushalayim as “the everlasting Temple” because it is a result of Hashem’s **choice**.

And this, in turn, is expressed in the fact that (also) the Temple is a “***Beis HaBechirah***.”

8.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE TEMPLE

Based on everything discussed above, we can also explain Rambam’s expression:³² “Once the Temple **was built** in Yerushalayim, it became forbidden to build a sanctuary for Hashem in any other place.”

²⁸ Which was written by Rambam — see his Preface to *Mishneh Torah*.

²⁹ *Shemos* 25:8.

³⁰ {*Devarim* 12:11} Which is cited in *Sanhedrin* 20b and *Sifri* on *Devarim* ibid.

³¹ {“Utensils of the *Mikdash*; entering the *Mikdash*.”}

³² *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,” ch. 1, par. 3.

Seemingly, if what made the Temple unique {as compared with the previous iterations} was the element of Hashem's choice, Rambam ought to have said, "Once the Temple **was chosen**"! Additionally, *Mechilta*³³ uses the expression, "Until Yerushalayim was chosen... until the Temple was chosen." Rambam **deviates** from the expression in *Mechilta* and says, "Once the Temple **was built**"!

With the previous explanations in mind, we can suggest that there are two aspects to the choice of the Temple in Yerushalayim, each at its proper time:

- a) Choosing **the place** of the Temple on Mount Moriah, which occurred during the time of our Patriarchs.

[This is why this is "the place where Avraham built the altar on which he bound Yitzchak for sacrifice, and it was the place where Noach built {an altar}...", as Rambam explains in chapter 2.]³⁴

- b) Choosing the Temple itself, which took place when "the Temple was **built** in Yerushalayim" (and the **complete** meaning of choosing the place was also realized then), and therefore, "it became forbidden to build a sanctuary for Hashem in any other place" only at that time.

Now we can also understand why Rambam cites these verses as proof: "And David said, **This** is the **House** of Hashem, the L-rd, and this is the altar for the *olah* sacrifices for Israel"³⁵ — a verse which expresses how this choice applied (not only to the place of the Temple but also) to the Temple itself — "And it says, **This** is my resting place forever." The second verse articulates why the choice applies to the Temple (as well): Hashem chose this place (not for a specific reason or function of offering sacrifices there, but) as "**My resting place** forever"; it follows that this choice applies to the Temple itself.

³³ *Mechilta*, beg. of "Bo."

³⁴ *Mishneh Torah*, "Hilchos Beis HaBechirah," ch. 2, pars. 1, 2; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 19, p. 143 ff.

³⁵ *Divrei HaYamim I* 22:1.

9.

WHAT'S THE FOCUS?

On this basis, we can also understand the distinction mentioned above (discussed in Section 4) as to why Scripture says about Shiloh, “**You shall bring** (there).” Namely, the Torah starts with the individual’s duty to bring sacrifices (which leads to there being a place — “there”). In contrast, the verse regarding Yerushalayim begins, “**There** (you shall bring)” (and consequently, the sacrifices must be brought there):

The requirement to offer sacrifices exclusively in Shiloh (for as long as the Mishkan stood there) was incumbent upon the individual:³⁶ The Jewish people were commanded to offer sacrifices. Later, this obligation was amended and limited to a special place — so Hashem chose (the Mishkan in) Shiloh as the place for offering sacrifices. (Sacrifices could only be offered there — a prohibition forbade **them** to offer sacrifices outside Shiloh.)

Concerning Yerushalayim, however, since it was chosen on its merit and as an “object”³⁷ of the **Temple** — “*Beis HaBechirah*, the Chosen House” — we can posit that the mitzvah to offer sacrifices there — “to offer all sacrifices in the *Beis Habechirah*”³⁸ — is also an imperative stemming from {the intrinsic nature of} the “object”-sacrifice {and is not only the obligation of the individual}.

On this basis, we can appreciate Rambam’s wording in *Mishneh Torah*³⁹ when describing the mitzvah to offer sacrifices in the Temple. He does not start with the individual’s obligation, saying, “It is a positive commandment to offer all sacrifices in the Temple.” Instead, he speaks about the sacrifices: “{For} all sacrifices... it is a positive commandment to offer them within the Temple.” This wording implies that the imperative to offer sacrifices only in the Temple is (not only a condition placed upon the person offering the sacrifices but) also a requirement (necessitated by the intrinsic nature) of the “object”-sacrifice.

³⁶ {In the original, “*chiyuv gavra.*”}

³⁷ {In the original, “*cheftza.*”}

³⁸ Rambam’s expression in the listing of mitzvos at the beginning of *Mishneh Torah*, positive mitzvah 84.

³⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Maaseh HaKorbanos*,” beg. of ch. 18.

This {additional imperative imposed by the “object”-sacrifice} is purportedly on account of the same rationale as explained above. Once there is a **Beis HaBechirah**, a place for the *Shechinah*, it imposes the imperative on the “object”-sacrifices — they must be offered in the Temple.

— From talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Matos-Masei* and Shabbos *parshas Re'eh*, 5740 (1980); and Shabbos *parshas Devarim*, 5742 (1982)