



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 16 | Pekudei | Sichah 3

Counting the Infinite

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1.

NON SEQUITUR

The Torah describes in detail how the *Mishkan*¹ was built and then how the *Shechinah*² came to rest in the *Mishkan*:³ “The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Hashem filled the *Mishkan*.”⁴ The indwelling of the *Shechinah* was so intense that “Moshe was not able to come to the Tent of Meeting, for the cloud rested upon it, and Hashem’s glory filled the *Mishkan*.”⁵ Next, the Torah relates that “when the cloud rose from above the *Mishkan*, the Children of Israel would travel on all of their journeys. If the cloud did not rise, they would not travel until the day it rose.”⁶

We need to clarify: At first blush, these final two verses belong thematically to the Torah section in *parshas Behaaloscha* describing the Jews’ journeys in the desert. In fact, the gist of these verses is actually repeated there⁷ (at **great length**). But what relevance do the steps of their travels (“when the cloud rose... the Children of Israel would travel... if the cloud did not rise, they would not travel”) have with the balance of the subject matter of this *parshah*, which is focused exclusively on the *Shechinah* coming to rest in the *Mishkan*?

*Seforno*⁸ explains that the passage, “when the cloud rose from above the *Mishkan*, the Children of Israel would travel...,” illustrates and informs us of the constancy of the *Shechinah*’s presence in the *Mishkan*, to the extent that “the *Shechinah* would never leave the Tent of Meeting until they had to travel.”

However, *Seforno*’s explanation is not smooth. From its diction, it is clear that this passage is simply relating the travel routine of the Jewish nation. As the *Midrash* puts it:⁹ “This is the account of their travels.” What is the connection

¹ {The portable temple constructed in the desert.}

² {The Divine Presence.}

³ *Shemos* 40:17 ff.

⁴ *Shemos* 40:34.

⁵ *Shemos* 40:35.

⁶ *Shemos* 40:36-37.

⁷ *Bamidbar* 9:15 ff.

⁸ *Seforno* on *Shemos* 40:36.

⁹ *Midrash Lekach Tov*, loc cit.

between “the account of their travels” — which belongs ({and is detailed} at length) in *parshas Behaaloscha* — and the account of the building of the *Mishkan* and the *Shechinah* coming to rest in it?

The question is even stronger according to the exposition of our Sages¹⁰ that that beginning of *sefer*¹¹ *Vayikra*, “Hashem called to Moshe,”¹² is a continuation of the earlier passage (which precedes the verse, “when the cloud rose...”): “Moshe was not able to come to the Tent of Meeting.” {According to this exposition, by juxtaposing these passages, the Torah teaches that} Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting until “Hashem called” to him — Hashem’s calling allowed Moshe to enter the Tent of Meeting.

It turns out that the Torah **interrupts** the **sequence** of passages: “Moshe was not able...” and “Hashem called to Moshe,” with an unrelated topic — a brief of the travels — which seems to be unrelated to the subject of the *Mishkan*.

2.

THE CONNECTION

Everything in Torah is precise. Since the *Midrash* says that “Hashem called to Moshe” (the beginning of *sefer Vayikra*) continues the topic of (the end of our *parshah* {and *sefer Shemos*}), “Moshe was not able to come...,” clearly there must be a correlation between the **content** of the two *parshiyos* (of which these verses are a component).

In other words, *sefer Vayikra* — whose theme is sacrifices¹³ — continues not just the account of the construction and assembly of the *Mishkan* (where the sacrifices were brought), but also continues the detailed description of **how** the *Shechinah* came to dwell in the *Mishkan*, as is recounted in our *parshah*, particularly since this {detailed description} comes at the end of our *parshah*.

¹⁰ *Midrash Tanchuma* on *Vayikra*, ch. 1, 8.

¹¹ {the Book of}

¹² *Vayikra* 1:1.

¹³ See *Ramban* in his introduction to *Sefer Vayikra*.

This is also the reason that following the verse, “Moshe was not able to come...,” the Torah interrupts, giving an account of the journeys of the Jews. Their journeys are correlated to “when the cloud **rose** from above the *Mishkan*” — the *Shechinah* **departing** from the *Mishkan* — because the matter of the sacrifices is linked (not so much with the *Shechinah* coming to rest in the *Mishkan* but) specifically with the fact that as a result of a Jew’s journeys (as it says, “on all of their journeys”), there had to be a **departure** of the *Shechinah* (as will be elaborated in Section 8).

3.

BEGINNING AND END

We can understand this better by prefacing with an explanation of the connection between the end of *Shemos* and its beginning (in accordance to the principle:¹⁴ the end is wedged in the beginning, and the beginning in the end). This connection is also expressed by the names of the first and last *parshiyos* {of *sefer Shemos*}, which pertain to the topic of counting:

“*Shemos*” {the name of the first *parshah*, lit., “names”} — as Rashi explains:¹⁵

Although the Torah counted them {the children of Yaakov, when they descended to Egypt}... the Torah counted them again... to make known how precious they are {to Hashem} — that they are compared to the stars....

“*Pekudei*” {the name of the last *parshah*, lit., “accountings”} refers to the accounting of:¹⁶

The weights of contributions to the *Mishkan*... all its utensils for all of its work.

The theme of *sefer Shemos* is the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt.¹⁷ In light of this, “redemption” must be a correlated to “counting” (which

¹⁴ *Sefer Yetzirah*, ch. 1, *mishnah* 7.

¹⁵ *Rashi* on *Shemos* 1:1.

¹⁶ *Rashi* on *Shemos* 38:21.

¹⁷ As *Ramban* says (on *Shemos* 40:34): “The book of the redemption” {referring to *sefer Shemos*}; *Bereishis Rabbah* (ch. 3, sec. 5): “{The book} in which Israel went out from darkness to light”.

connects the beginning¹⁸ of the book to its end¹⁹). This is puzzling: Aren't "counting" and "redemption" complete opposites? Counting something proves that what was counted is limited (in quantity), which the count **underscores**. In contrast, (genuine) redemption entails moving **beyond** constriction, exile, and limitation.²⁰

This paradox can also be found at the beginning of the *sefer* itself: The name of the {first} *parshah* (which alludes to the content of the **entire** *parshah*) is "*Shemos*," which alludes to the restricted count of "the Children of Israel who came to Egypt."²¹ This is followed immediately by the verse,²² "the Children of Israel were fruitful, teemed, increased and became strong — **very, very much...**" which indicates an increase that was completely beyond the norm. Since **this** {verse} is also in *parshas Shemos*, we must conclude that "fruitful, teemed... very, very much" is also included in "counting."

At the end of the *sefer* of *Shemos*, we find a similar paradox: "The **accountings** (of the *Mishkan*)"²³ exemplify, as explained, counting and constraint (of the *Mishkan*'s utensils, etc., which were counted and limited). However, the end of *parshas Pekudei* says that "Moshe was not able {to enter the Tent of Meeting}, for the cloud rested upon it..." — when the *Shechinah* rested in the *Mishkan*, the indwelling was unrestricted. ("Moshe was not able to come to the Tent of Meeting..." — the indwelling of the *Shechinah* in the *Mishkan* was so sublime that even Moshe, "the paragon of humanity,"²⁴ was unable to enter.)

¹⁸ For the beginning or the "head" of anything includes the entire thing.

¹⁹ For everything is in accordance with the conclusion (*Berachos* 12a).

²⁰ Note *Torah Or* (71c ff.) which says that the exodus from Egypt connotes leaving the constriction and limitation of the **entire** *sefer hishtalshelus* {the entire continuum of existence}.

²¹ {*Shemos* 1:1., no more than 70 souls as stated in v. 5.}

²² *Shemos* 1:7.

²³ {*Shemos* 38:21.}

²⁴ Rambam's *Commentary on Mishnah*, "*Sanhedrin*," ch. "*Chelek*," Principle Seven.

4.

LIMITED ABODE FOR THE UNLIMITED

To clarify this in general terms: The ultimate goal is indeed to reach {the level} “beyond limits — redemption — which is beyond worldly dimensions and constraints. However, the intent is not to thereby **abrogate** limitations. Rather, the goal is that the unlimited and the limited should be fused.²⁵

[We find a similar idea regarding the population of Jewish people. As the verse says:²⁶ “The **number** of the Children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which shall be **neither** measured **nor** counted.” Meaning, the number itself will be “neither measured nor counted.”

And similarly regarding the *Mishkan*: The resting {of the *Shechinah*}, which transcended fixed dimensions and limits, happened within {the confines of} (the furnishings of) the *Mishkan*, which was counted and measured, as discussed.]

Since the supernal intent {of Creation} was that “Hashem desired to have an abode in the lower realms,”²⁷ these two goals have to be accomplished: (a) There has to be an **abode for Him** — for Hashem’s Essence²⁸ (which is completely beyond the world); and (b) the “abode” must be “in the lower realms” — “in this physical world... {a level so low that} there is none lower than it”²⁹ (specifically, {a world} with fixed dimensions and limits).

²⁵ For it is specifically through this fusion that the power of Hashem’s **Essence** is revealed. He is truly Omnipotent, and can fuse contrary trends — the infinite and the finite. (See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 3, p. 904 ff.)

²⁶ *Hoshea* 2:1.

²⁷ *Tanya*, beg. of ch. 36; based on *Tanchuma, Naso*, 16; et al.

²⁸ *Or Hatorah*, “*Balak*,” p. 997; *Hemshech* 5666, p. 3; and in several places.

²⁹ *Tanya*, beg. of ch. 36.

5.

REVEALING THE UNITY

These two above mentioned goals — (a) an “abode” for Hashem’s **Essence**, and (b) that this abode be “in the lower realms” — are expressed **broadly** through the difference between Jewish souls and the “world”:

The (deeper) meaning of “an abode for Hashem” is {for Hashem’s Essence} to “specifically reside in the **Jewish souls...**, for the Jewish collective³⁰ to serve as an abode for Him...”³¹ Since “The Jewish people and Hashem are all one,”³² **Jews** are therefore the ultimate “abode” for Hashem’s Essence — as they are one entity with the Essence.³³

[In contrast, Hashem’s “abode in the lower realms,” as it applies to the world, is (only) {realized by} the world’s recognition that its entire existence is only a result of Hashem’s Essence, and that “without Him {actively willing it to be} nothing exists whatsoever.”³⁴]

But still, this “abode” must take place specifically in “the lower realms” — as a result of a Jew’s divine service in this **lowly** physical world, transforming physical things into vessels for G-dliness. Only by accomplishing this does the source of the Jewish people’s souls (which are united with Hashem’s Essence) become revealed.

Put differently: When does it become apparent that the Jews are an abode for Hashem — that they are absolutely unified with Essence without any limitations or impediments? Only when the limitations and fixed dimensions of the “lower realms” do not constitute an obstacle, but rather, the lower realms themselves become — by the {divine service of the} Jews — a befitting place for His abode.

³⁰ {In the original Hebrew, “*knesses Yisroel*”; referring to the abstract, spiritual body of all Jewish souls.}

³¹ *Hemshech* 5666, p. 468.

³² See *Zohar*, vol. 3, 73a, 93b.

³³ {Hashem’s Essence.} See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, p. 246, at length.

³⁴ *Maamar U'lakachtem* 5661.

6.

CONNECTING THE BEGINNING AND THE END

In this context, we can clarify why the “beginning” of *sefer Shemos* discusses the counting of the Jewish people, and the “end,” the furnishings of the *Mishkan*:

Sefer Bereishis is about Creation itself,³⁵ before the purpose of creation — “For Torah and for Israel”³⁶ was **revealed**.

Sefer Shemos, however, focuses on the Jewish people (the “birth”³⁷ of the Jewish nation)³⁸ and on the Torah, the medium through which the plan for Creation materializes. In this respect (i.e., the Jews fulfilling the purpose of Creation), there is a “beginning” and an “end”:

The “beginning” ({i.e.} the primary and **inner**) purpose is manifest in the Jews’ unity with Hashem’s Essence. This is depicted by the enumeration of the Jewish people in *parshas Shemos*: “To make known how **precious they are...**” (thus, Hashem Himself performed **this** counting— in the **Torah**, Hashem counts them).

“The end” is how this purpose is achieved in actuality — by constructing a *Mishkan* out of physical materials for Hashem.³⁹

³⁵ As the *Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 3:5)* says regarding *sefer Bereshis*: “{In this book,} Hashem occupied himself and created his world.”

³⁶ *Osiyos D’Rabbi Akiva*, ch. 2; Rashi on beg. of *parshas Bereishis*.

³⁷ See *Yechezkel*, ch. 16 and the commentaries there.

³⁸ {I.e., the exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai.}

³⁹ In different words: A dwelling place in the lower realms has two dimensions: the “inwardness” of the abode — which is realized specifically in the souls of the Jewish people, since their very beings are, as it were, {manifestations of} Essence; the “externality” of the abode — the world, in that the world becomes a befitting place for the revelation of Essence. [Nevertheless, this does not imply **grafting**, G-d forbid, of two entities.]

TRANSFORMING THE DESERT

True, the source of the Jewish souls (that they are one with Essence) becomes apparent specifically through *avodah* in “the lower realms” — a place of concealment. Hence, this is primarily achieved [more than through the *avodah* of building the *Mishkan* — where G-dliness was **revealed**] through the *avodah* with a “lower” entity, which on its own would not be a vessel for G-dliness. In more general terms, this refers to the *avodah* in the period of exile, a time when G-dliness is not clearly apparent in the world.

This clarifies why at the conclusion of the description of the *Mishkan*’s construction and the *Shechinah* resting in the *Mishkan*, the Torah records “the account of the journeys,” which was connected to “when the cloud rose...”:

The purpose of the *Mishkan* (to transform the lower realms into a home for Hashem) is achieved mainly through (the *Mishkan* empowering this) “on all of their journeys.”

– As the Alter Rebbe explains,⁴⁰ the journeys in the desert allude (also) to the sublimation of the “wilderness of the nations”⁴¹ during exile. –

During these journeys, the “*Shechinah* is exiled,”⁴² and **not revealed** [for “the cloud rose” — the *Shechinah* **departed**]. It is then that the Jews purify and transform the concealment of the world, allowing G-dliness to also shine there {i.e., in exile}.

⁴⁰ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Eileh Massei*.”

⁴¹ *Yechezkel* 20:35. {This refers to the unsettled regions through which the Jews traveled after the Exodus, and by extension, to the “journeys” of the Jewish people throughout *galus*.}

⁴² {In the original Aramaic, “*Shechinta ba’galusa*.” See *Zohar* vol. 1, 27b; et al.}

8.

CONTRACTION INDUCES GROWTH

The above concept (that the purpose of the *Mishkan* is achieved primarily by *avodah* outside of the *Mishkan*) is expressed in the *Mishkan* itself by the fact that its principal *avodah* consisted of sacrifices:⁴³

The difference between the *Mishkan* itself and the *avodah* of the sacrifices: The purpose of building {the structure of} the *Mishkan* was [not so much to **elevate** the physical materials with which the *Mishkan* was constructed, but primarily] to create a space for the *Shechinah* {to descend} **from Above** {and} to rest below. (This indwelling {of the *Shechinah*} is infinitely loftier than the {capacity of} physical objects {to contain or elicit}.)

In contrast, the function of the sacrifices is to elevate the physical animal, etc., transforming it into an offering for Hashem — into holiness.

True, the *avodah* of the sacrifices (the holiness drawn down through it) is a preparation to achieve something loftier — the indwelling of the *Shechinah* in the *Mishkan* (in the ark, etc.).

[This is why the letter *alef* of the word, *vayikra* is written with a smaller letter,⁴⁴ וַיִּקְרָא, alluding to *tzimtzum*.⁴⁵ This is because in the *avodah* of (sacrifices, since the theme of *sefer Vayikra* is) sacrifices, the Divine light elicited (“*vayikra*,” a term denoting “calling” and “drawing down”⁴⁶) is minor compared with the illumination generated by the *Shechinah*’s indwelling in the *Mishkan*.]

⁴³ See Rambam, “*Hilchos Beis Habechirah*,” ch. 1, par. 1: “{It is a positive commandment to construct} a House for G-d, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within...”.

⁴⁴ {The letter *alef* in the word “*Vayikra*” in *Vayikra* 1:1 in a Torah scroll is written smaller than the other letters. In printed *Chumashim*, a smaller font size is often used.}

⁴⁵ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Vayikra*,” 1b. {Lit., “contraction”; the process of Divine self-contraction and self-limitation which makes possible the concept of a limited, worldly existence.}

⁴⁶ *Likkutei Torah*, *ibid*.

Nevertheless, only through the *avodah* of the sacrifices do we satisfy an even higher {Divine} intention behind the *Mishkan* — turning physical objects themselves into vessels for G-dliness.

With this explanation, we can also clarify how “Hashem called to Moshe”⁴⁷ (and the *sefer* {of} Sacrifices,⁴⁸ as a whole) is (also) a thematic continuation of the passage, “when the cloud rose...”⁴⁹ (as discussed in Section 2). Both highlight the same point — that the purpose of the *Mishkan* had also been realized — and in fact, even more so, through the *avodah* performed in places where the *Shechinah* did not rest in the *Mishkan*.

9.

REACH FOR THE CLOUDS, AND BEYOND

Although the *avodah* during the course of their **journeys** lacked the *Shechinah*’s **revelation**, it still had an advantage in that it revealed the source of the souls of the Jewish people — how they are one with Hashem’s Essence, as elucidated above.

This is the deeper meaning of the verse, “when the cloud rose from above the *Mishkan*, the Children of Israel would travel on all of their journeys”: Outwardly, it may indeed have seemed that the *Shechinah* had departed. Inwardly, however, **this** *avodah*, in particular, enabled the attainment of something **loftier** than the *Mishkan*’s cloud. This {level} was diffused into the *Mishkan* at the **next** encampment — “their journeys,” implying their encampments.⁵⁰

This is the lesson for every person in their *avodah*: Despite the darkness of exile — especially since every person knows himself and is aware of his spiritual standing and the personal exile in which he finds himself — a Jew must focus on

⁴⁷ {The beginning of *sefer Vayikra*.}

⁴⁸ {Another name for *sefer Vayikra*.}

⁴⁹ {The end of *sefer Shemos*.}

⁵⁰ Rashi on *Shemos* 40:38.

fulfilling Hashem's mission "on **all** of their journeys," whatever type of journey {i.e. encampment} it may be.

As long as a Jew's "journey" is connected with the Divine cloud (meaning, a Jew remembers that only "when the cloud rose...the Children of Israel would travel..." but "if the cloud did not rise, they would not..."), he knows that "the man's footsteps are directed by Hashem"⁵¹ — wherever he goes and in whatever situation he finds himself, he is connected with the Divine mission to transform the lower realms into an abode for Him. Consequently, his journey in exile will conform with Hashem's will.

Then a person can experience {the idea expressed by the passage} "when the cloud rose..." in a positive sense — his stretch reaches **beyond** the cloud (even though this revelation of the cloud exceeds even the ability of the aspect of Moshe within his soul,⁵² as discussed). Then, this can be drawn into the next encampment — {and this pattern repeats} until {a person reveals how} "the Jewish people and Hashem are all one."

– Based on talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Pekudei*, 5724 (1964) and 5727 (1967)

⁵¹ *Tehillim* 37:23.

⁵² See *Tanya*, "*Likkutei Amarim*," beg. of ch. 42.