



Parshat Teruma
Temple and Tabernacle
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Introduction

Parshat Teruma introduces us to the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, which God commands the Israelites to construct in the wilderness of Sinai. The parasha begins with the instruction to collect materials for this purpose, and God then explicitly formulates His command: "They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell in their midst" (25:8). Maimonides attributed to this verse practical significance far exceeding its immediate context – the construction of a Mishkan. In his view, this verse establishes the eternal obligation to build a Temple:

"The twentieth commandment is that He commanded us to build a Chosen House for worship, where sacrificing and the burning of the eternal flame will occur, and to where the festival pilgrimage and assembly will take place each year. And this what is meant when He, may He be exalted, said, 'They shall make for Me a Sanctuary.'" (Sefer Ha-mitzvot, positive commandment 20)

"There is a positive commandment to make a building for God designated for the offering of sacrifices, and where we celebrate three times a year, as it says, 'They shall make for Me a Sanctuary.' The Tabernacle that our teacher Moshe built is already explained in the Torah, and it was only temporary... " (Code, Hilkhoh Beit Ha-bechira 1:1)

Maimonides cites this verse as the basis for an eternal command in two other contexts, as well. In his introduction to Sefer Ha-mitzvot, Maimonides delineates the fourteen principles by which he determined which laws earn inclusion within the list of 613 commandments. His twelfth principle establishes that when a given command entails numerous different tasks, it nevertheless constitutes a single commandment, and we should not ascribe independent mitzva-status to each individual task required. Maimonides' first example of such a mitzva is the command to construct a Temple:

"For example, 'They shall make for Me a Sanctuary,' which is a single positive command among all the commandments, namely, that we should have a building designated for approaching Him and petitioning Him, where sacrificing should occur and where the assembly takes place on the festivals. And then it [the Torah] proceeds to describe its components and how it should be fashioned. It is not appropriate to count as an independent commandment every [component of the Tabernacle] regarding which it says, 'You shall make'."

Once again, Maimonides clearly interprets God's instruction to build a temporary Tabernacle as a much broader imperative, which includes the eventual construction of a permanent Temple.

Finally, in his *Guide to the Perplexed* (3:32), Maimonides famously posits his controversial theory regarding the underlying motive behind the entire institution of the



Temple and sacrificial worship. He contends that God instituted this mode of worship not because of its intrinsic value, but because it had become so widespread among the pagan religions that He could not have expected the Israelites to suddenly adopt a religious system without sacrificial rituals. Amidst this discussion, Maimonides writes:

"For this reason, God allowed these kinds of service to continue; He transferred to His service that which had formerly served as a worship of created beings, and of things imaginary and unreal, and commanded us to serve Him in the same manner; viz., to build unto Him a Temple; comp. 'And they shall make unto Me a Sanctuary'."

As noted by Rabbi Yosef Karo, in his commentary, "Kessef Mishneh," Maimonides' position in this regard is not universally accepted. The Tosafist work, "Sefer Mitzvot Gadol" (known by its title's acrostic, "Semag"), cites a different verse as the basis for the eternal commandment to erect a Temple. Rather than citing the verse from Parashat Teruma, which seemingly refers only to the temporary Mishkan that served the Israelites until the permanent Temple's construction in King Shlomo's time, the Semag invokes a different verse, from the Book of Devarim (12:11). To appreciate the significance of this verse, we must read it in context; we will therefore cite it together with the preceding three verses:

"You shall not act at all as we now act here [in the wilderness], every man as he pleases, because you have not yet come to the allotted haven that the Lord your God is giving you. When you cross the Jordan and settle in the land that the Lord your God is allotting to you, and He grants you safety from all your enemies...there shall be the site that the Lord your God shall choose to establish His Name – there you shall bring all that I am commanding you... "

Moshe here tells the Israelites that once they enter the Land and achieve peace and security, they must establish one specific location for sacrificial worship. Unlike during their travels in the wilderness, where an individual could offer sacrifices "as he pleases," the nation must erect one "building" at "the site that the Lord...shall choose to establish His Name." This site will then become the exclusive location for sacrificial offerings.

The advantage of the Semag's position over that of Maimonides is clear. In the verse here in Shemot, God commands the Israelites to construct a temporary Tabernacle, rather than a permanent Temple. It appears far more reasonable, then, to point to the verse in Devarim, which explicitly orders the establishment of a permanent site for worship, as the basis for the command to build a Temple. Why, then, did Maimonides choose specifically a verse dealing with the temporary Mishkan as the source for the command to construct a permanent Temple?

We will attempt to explain Maimonides' position on three levels: 1) by drawing evidence from earlier sources; 2) by examining the relationship between the Tabernacle and the Temple; 3) by assessing the central function and nature of the Temple in Maimonides' thought.

Evidence From Earlier Sources

At least two early rabbinic sources indicate that the instructions concerning the Mishkan apply, at least to some extent, to the permanent Temple. The Talmud (Shavuot 15a) infers this notion from the verse that immediately follows the command to "make Me a



Sanctuary": "Exactly as I show you – the pattern of the Mishkan and the pattern of all its furnishings – so shall you make it" (25:9). According to the Talmud, the otherwise superfluous, concluding clause, "so shall so you make it" should be interpreted as extending the laws of the Mishkan to future generations. On this basis, the Rabbis concluded that the Jewish people can expand the physical boundaries of the Temple's courtyard and the city of Jerusalem, and confer upon the newly included territory the Temple's or city's status of sanctity, only under conditions resembling those of the Israelites in the wilderness. Namely, just as the Mishkan was constructed and infused with holiness under the auspices of a king and prophet (Moshe), so must these conditions be present for the conferral of sacred status upon new territory. Thus, the Rabbis viewed the construction of the Mishkan as establishing a precedent for the future construction of the permanent Temple. This would perhaps lend support to Maimonides' position, that the command to build a Mishkan includes the command to erect a permanent Temple at some point in the future.

We should note that the exact parameters of this provision are subject to debate. Rashi, in his commentary to this verse, cites the Talmud's comment and claims that the Temple's furnishings must resemble those of the Mishkan. As Nachmanides notes, however, the copper altar build by King Shlomo for the First Temple was considerably larger than the copper altar in the Mishkan. (Several different approaches have been taken to resolve this difficulty against Rashi's view; see the commentary of Rabbi Eiyahu Mizrachi, Maharal's "Gur Aryeh," and Rabbi Chayim Ben Atar's "Or Ha-chayim.") In any event, Rashi's contention underscores the point that the Temple is seen as the continuation of the Mishkan; the instructions concerning the latter thus naturally apply to the former, as well.

More compelling evidence to Maimonides' view appears in the Sifrei (a mainly halakhic work on the Books of Bamidbar and Devarim, from the Mishnaic period). The context of the Sifrei's discussion is God's instruction to Moshe to appoint seventy men to serve under him as national leaders: "Gather for Me seventy of Israel's elders... they shall share the burden of the people with you" (Bamidbar 11:16-17). The Sifrei comments that whenever God inserts the otherwise unnecessary phrase, "for Me" in formulating a command, such as in this context of the appointment of seventy elders, it alludes to the given ordinance's eternal application. Maimonides (Sefer Ha-mitzvot, positive commandment 176) indeed cites this principle established by the Sifrei, and on this basis codifies the obligation to appoint a Sanhedrin (the supreme body of halakhic authority). The Sifrei proceeds to cite several other instances where this rule applies, including the command to construct a Mishkan: "They shall make FOR ME a Sanctuary." Quite possibly, Maimonides concluded on the basis of this passage in the Sifrei that the command to construct a Mishkan somehow applies for all time. Accordingly, he determined that this imperative refers not only to the temporary Tabernacle, but to the permanent Temple, as well. (This proof for Maimonides' position appears in the work "Kin'at Softim" – a defense of Maimonides' Sefer Ha-mitzvot, which appears in the standard editions of that work.)

The Relationship Between the Temple and Tabernacle

Conceptually, the debate between Maimonides and the Semag perhaps touches upon the more fundamental issue regarding the nature of the relationship between the Tabernacle erected in the wilderness and the permanent Temple. If, as Maimonides claimed, the divine imperative to construct a Tabernacle established as well the eternally binding obligation to build a Temple, then we must view the Tabernacle as nothing less than a portable Temple.



Despite being a tent, rather than a building, the Mishkan's stature equaled that of the Temple. After all, for Maimonides, the Mishkan was the initial means of fulfilling the divine command to construct a Temple.

The Semag, by contrast, might have perceived the nature of the Tabernacle differently. Having never been intended as the Israelites' permanent condition, the Mishkan, in the Semag's view, cannot possibly be equated with the permanent Temple. Rather, it provided the nation with a temporary means of serving God until they reached their ideal condition during Shlomo's time, when the Temple was erected.

If, indeed, this conceptual issue underlies the debate between Maimonides and the Semag, one might suggest associating this dispute with a more famous, exegetical controversy concerning the commandment to construct the Mishkan. Rashi (to Shemot 31:18), based on the Midrash (Tanchuma, Teruma 8), asserts that God ordered the construction of the Tabernacle only after the tragic incident of the golden calf. Although the Torah records the sin of the calf only after the instructions concerning the Mishkan, it in fact preceded them. The aforementioned passage in the Midrash explains that the Tabernacle served as a means of atonement for, and rectification of, the incident of the calf. It is commonly explained that the sin of the calf revealed the Israelites' inability to continue worshipping an invisible, abstract deity without some physical representation. To prevent this instinctive need from developing into idolatrous worship, God ordered the construction of a Mishkan, which would, on the one hand, provide a physical representation of His "presence," while at the same time emphasizing His incorporeal essence.

Now undoubtedly, Rashi did not mean that the idea of a designated location for the worship of God originated only after and in response to the sin of the calf. After all, we find in the Torah a number of explicit references to a Temple even before this unfortunate incident. For example, the Israelites prophetically speak of the Temple's construction as part of their song of praise after emerging safely from the Sea of Reeds: "You will bring them and plant them in Your own mountain, the place You made to dwell in, O Lord, the Sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands established" (15:17). Moreover, already in Parashat Mishpatim, God conveys the mitzva of bikkurim – bringing one's first fruits to the Temple: "The first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God" (23:19). This "house" clearly refers to a Temple. And, two verses earlier, we are introduced to the obligation of "aliya le-regel" – to appear before God on the three pilgrimage festivals: "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Sovereign, the Lord." Where else would one "appear before the Sovereign," if not in a Temple representing His presence?

Clearly, then, even Rashi acknowledges the need for a Temple even before the sin of the golden calf. As Rabbi Menachem Leibtag explained (see <http://tanach.org/shmot/truma/trumas1.htm>), Rashi maintained that had it not been for the golden calf, a temporary Tabernacle would not have been needed to serve as a Sanctuary until the construction of the permanent Temple. The Israelites were to have entered and successfully conquered the Land within a matter of just several weeks. (Their stay in the wilderness was prolonged due only to the sin of the scouts – Bamidbar, chapters 13-14.) There would have been no reason, then, to construct a temporary Tabernacle to accompany them for such a brief period of time. It was only the sin of the calf which necessitated their atonement for this grievous sin, which they achieved through the construction of a Mishkan.

Nachmanides, both in his introduction to the Book of Shemot and in his opening comments to Parashat Teruma, disagreed, arguing that the Torah's presentation in fact follows chronological sequence, such that God ordered the Mishkan's construction even before the sin



of the calf. Nachmanides viewed the building of the Mishkan as the ideal culmination of the redemption process, which began with the Exodus, continued with the Revelation at Sinai, and climaxed with the descent of God's representative presence in the Tabernacle (as recorded in the final verses of the Book of Shemot). The Mishkan's construction came not in response to unfortunate circumstances, but rather as the execution of the divinely planned process of redemption.

Conceivably, the debate between Maimonides and the Semag, concerning the Biblical source for the obligation to construct a Temple, hinges on this dispute between Rashi and Nachmanides. Maimonides, who considered the divine imperative to build a Tabernacle the source for the obligation to construct a permanent Temple, viewed the Mishkan as equivalent in stature to the Temple. It is likely, then, that he would embrace Nachmanides' position, that the Mishkan did not merely serve to rectify the unfortunate circumstances that arose due to the incident of the calf, but was rather ordained from the outset. Indeed, nowhere in his writings (to the knowledge of this author) does Maimonides point to the golden calf as the factor necessitating the construction of the Tabernacle. As mentioned, he speaks of the construction of a Sanctuary as a necessary concession to the prevalent mode of ancient pagan worship, but does not make specific mention of the golden calf in this regard. (As we will see in the next section, the positions of Maimonides and Nachmanides concerning the nature and function of the Temple differ significantly from one another. The association drawn here relates specifically to the issue of whether the Mishkan had been initially planned as a precursor to the permanent Temple, or if it was merely necessitated due to the unique circumstances that arose.)

The Semag, by contrast, perhaps followed Rashi's position, that the Tabernacle served a secondary function, and did not represent the ideal situation God had envisioned, so-to-speak, when He released the Hebrew slaves from Egypt. It thus does not share the same status as the permanent Temple, and therefore God's command to construct a Mishkan must be viewed as specific to the particular context in which it was issued, rather than an eternal obligation, as Maimonides claimed.

The Essential Definition of the Mitzva

This debate between Maimonides and the Semag likely touches upon a different issue, as well. In the context cited by the Semag as the source for the obligation to build a Temple, the Torah repeatedly refers to the Temple as, "the site that the Lord your God shall choose to establish His Name." Rabbi Sa'adya Gaon interprets "to establish His Name" to mean, "to bestow His majesty." In other words, the Torah here refers to the Temple's function as God's place of residence, as it were, the site He selected to represent His presence among the Nation of Israel. Elsewhere, however, we find reference to a different function served by the Temple. After the consecration of the First Temple, God appears to King Shlomo in a dream and informs him, "I have chosen this site as My House of sacrifice" (Divrei Hayamim II 7:12). The Temple is not merely the site of God's representative presence; it also the "House of sacrifice," the exclusive location for sacrificial worship of the Almighty.

While the Temple undoubtedly serves both these functions, the question arises as to which of these roles forms the basis of the obligation to construct a Temple. Earlier, we cited four passages from Maimonides' writings where he describes this mitzva. In the first three contexts, he specifies the primary objective of the Temple's construction, claiming that this edifice is "designated for the offering of sacrifices, and where we celebrate three times a



year." According to Maimonides, then, the obligation to build a Temple constitutes an obligation to build a "House of sacrifice," a place designated for sacrificial worship.

This approach to the mitzva expresses itself as well in Maimonides' classification of the obligation to build the Temple's furnishings (the altars, the menorah, and so on). As we saw earlier, Maimonides points to the obligation to build a Temple as a classic example of a mitzva requiring many different practical measures; it demands the construction of the building itself, as well as of the various furnishings. Nachmanides (in his critique of *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, positive commandment 33), objects to this classification. In his view, we should instead include the building of these furnishings under the obligation to perform the given rituals involving each. For example, the obligation to construct a menorah should be subsumed under the obligation to light candles in the Temple – a command that necessarily entails the construction of a proper candelabra. Likewise, the requirement to offer daily sacrifices on the copper altar naturally includes the obligation to construct such an altar. It turns out, then, that for Maimonides, the obligation to build a Temple includes the obligation to provide it with the necessary furnishings, whereas Nachmanides maintains that this mitzva is fulfilled even without the furnishings. The furnishings are necessary not for the fulfillment of this obligation, but rather to facilitate the various Temple rituals.

In explaining this debate between Maimonides and Nachmanides, Rabbi Mordechai Breuer, a contemporary writer (*Pirkei Mo'adot*, vol. 2, chapter 21), draws an analogy to the distinction between the construction of a house, and that of a factory or laboratory. A contractor commissioned to build a residential home has completed his task the moment the structure stands, even before it has been furnished. By contrast, a person summoned to construct a factory cannot be said to have completed his work before he has provided the equipment and machinery necessary for the factory's operation. The debate between Maimonides and Nachmanides reduces to the question of whether we compare the Temple to a residential home, or a factory. According to Nachmanides, the mitzva to build a Temple requires building a "residence," as it were, for the Almighty, a place where He may "establish His Name." Therefore, the Nation of Israel fulfills its obligation in this regard even before they have "furnished" the building. Maimonides, however, as we have seen, understands the obligation as requiring the nation to build a "House of sacrifice," a place to worship and serve the Almighty. Naturally, then, this mitzva has not been fulfilled until the building is equipped with the appurtenances necessary for its functioning.

This issue, too, likely relates to the question as to the Biblical source of this obligation. It would appear that the Semag did not subscribe to Maimonides' definition of this mitzva, as intended to provide a location for sacrificial worship. If this were the obligation's primary objective, there would be no reason to distinguish – as the Semag implicitly does – between the temporary Mishkan and permanent Temple. Such a distinction seems reasonable only if we focus not on the functional purpose of the Sanctuary, but rather on the element of "hashra'at ha-Shekhina" – God's "residence" in the given edifice. For while the Temple and Tabernacle were identical with respect to their facilitating of sacrificial worship, they differed considerably in terms of the nature of God's presence within them. Although God did, indeed, "reside" in the Mishkan, He did so only so long as it contained the ark, which symbolized His throne. During the period of the prophet Shemuel, when the ark was not situated in the Mishkan, Benei Yisrael were permitted to offer sacrifices anywhere they wished; they were not required to bring their sacrifices to the Mishkan. The reason, as Rabbi Breuer (*ibid.*) explains, is clear: the Torah forbids bringing sacrifices outside the Tabernacle only when God "resides" within it; under such circumstances, He demands that His subjects frequent His



"abode" to offer tribute. When, however, He does not reside in the Mishkan, as symbolized by the ark's absence, they may offer sacrifices in any location.

With the Temple's construction, however, the situation changed. As Maimonides codifies (Hilkhot Beit Ha-bechira, 1:3), the construction of the Temple rendered it forbidden to ever again offer a sacrifice to God anywhere outside the Temple. Even after the Temple's destruction, God's presence remains on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and thus sacrificial worship is forbidden anywhere else. And according to Maimonides (Hilkhot Beit Ha-bechira 6:14-16), the site of the Temple retains its full status of halakhic sanctity even after its destruction, such that one may, strictly speaking, offer sacrifices even today on that site. (Most authorities nevertheless forbid doing due to technical considerations, such as the uncertainty regarding the precise location of the altar and the lineage of contemporary kohanim.) Once God chose "to establish His Name" at this site, it becomes the permanent, everlasting location of the divine presence.

Accordingly, the Semag could not interpret God's command to build a Mishkan as including as well the obligation to construct a Temple. For he defines the obligation to construct a Temple not in the functional sense, as Maimonides does, but rather as requiring the establishment of God's permanent home, as it were. Once God chooses a place for His eternal "residence," His nation bears the obligation to build Him a home at that site. Clearly, then, the obligation to build a Mishkan cannot refer as well to this, eternal mitzva, which involves the establishment of a permanent "residence" for the Almighty.

For Maimonides, of course, this distinction – though undoubtedly correct – is entirely irrelevant as far as this mitzva is concerned. This commandment requires building a "House of sacrifice," a role served by the Mishkan to the same extent as the permanent Temple in Jerusalem. Accordingly, the divine imperative to construct a temporary "tent of sacrifice" indeed refers as well to the future "House of sacrifice."

Summary

This essay analyzed the fundamental debate between Maimonides and the Sefer Mitzvot Gadol concerning the Biblical source for the Torah obligation to construct a Temple. Maimonides extracted this obligation from God's command to the Israelites to build a temporary Sanctuary, a Mishkan, in the wilderness. The Semag, by contrast, unwilling to transform the imperative regarding a temporary structure into an eternal obligation, cites a different verse, requiring the construction of a permanent Temple at the site chosen by God as His place of residence. After bringing possible evidence for Maimonides' position from earlier sources, we proceeded to assess the conceptual underpinnings of this debate. First, we suggested that these views might result from different perspectives on the nature of the temporary Tabernacle, the question of whether it represented the ideal condition initially envisioned by the Almighty, or a necessary measure necessitated by the sin of the calf. Maimonides likely adopted the former viewpoint, and thus accorded the Mishkan a status similar to the Temple, whereas the Semag perhaps viewed the Mishkan as serving a secondary function, rather than as a precursor to the permanent Temple. Finally, we suggested that this debate perhaps hinges on a different issue, whether the obligation to build a Temple focuses mainly on providing a place of residence, so-to-speak, for God, or on the need for a "House of sacrifice." The Semag most likely viewed the obligation as geared to the construction of a house for God's "residence," and for this reason distinguished between the temporary Mishkan, and the Temple, which marked the permanent establishment of God's presence in



Jerusalem. Maimonides, who viewed the obligation to build a Temple as serving primarily to provide a place for sacrificial worship, naturally equated the Mishkan and Temple, as both adequately provided the means for worshipping the Almighty through sacrifices.