

The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Pekudei

How Does Moshe's Blessing Bring About the Rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash?

Why Would Our Four-Year-Old Granddaughter Want to Visit the Kotel?

Last week, we took our four-year-old granddaughter, Agam, to the Kotel. Her father – our son – could hardly believe she actually wanted to go there. What could possibly draw a young child to an ancient stone wall filled with people praying and swaying, rather than to an amusement park, the zoo, or go-karts? Yet, after her first visit with us, she asked to return. Yes, she did complain that I – her grandmother – prayed too long, but still, she wanted to go back. As we descended the many steps leading to the holiest place in the world, the excitement in the air seemed to build with each step. It was dusk, and the illuminated Western Wall radiated a quiet energy that drew us in. People from all walks of life milled about the plaza. A man wrapped in a flowing tallit blew the shofar loud and strong – its sound echoing through the stones and heart of heaven. I had given Agam a crocheted pouch filled with coins for tzedakah, and she eagerly looked around for beggars. Near the women's section, an elderly woman reached out her hand, and Agam happily reached into her pouch and dropped a coin into the woman's metal box with a loud "cling" that delighted her. We separated from my husband, and Agam chose a small siddur from among the many spread out on a large table. I had hoped we would pray together – she knows *Tehillim* 121 by heart, but it didn't quite work out. Instead, we looked at the doves together, especially one beautiful white dove nestled between the stones of the Kotel, partly hidden by the greenery growing from the cracks. We approached the wall itself, towering above us, touched its soft, timeworn ridges, and marveled at all the tiny rolled-up notes tucked into its crevices. Agam followed me as I closed my eyes and kissed the cool stone. I was reminded of the poignant words from the song *HaKotel* by Yossi Gamzu, made famous by Naomi Shemer: **יש אנשים עם לב** **יש אבנים עם לב** **יש אנשים עם לב** **יש אבנים עם לב**, *Yesh anashim im lev shel even, yesh avanim im lev adam...* "There are people with a heart of stone, and there are stones with a human heart..." Agam and I were both touched. I encouraged her to say a little prayer for a family member, and she whispered a name. As we left, Agam delighted in walking backward – as I explained is the custom – to avoid turning our back on the Shechinah (Divine Presence) that rests at the Kotel. I was happy she agreed to respect the custom passed down for generations, honoring the holiness she somehow sensed even at her tender age. And that, perhaps, is the answer to why a four-year-old would choose to visit the Kotel: because even a child can feel the heart within the stones.

Why is the Kotel the Holiest Place in the World?

The destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. left the Western Wall standing. For centuries, Jews have come to this remnant – once known as the 'Wailing Wall' – to mourn the Temple's loss and to pray, just as we still do today. It is no coincidence that it was at this very Wall that I found my way home to the Torah world in 1980. Even then – with barely any knowledge of Judaism and unaware of the structure of formal prayer – my heart was opened to the holiness that permeated the place. In my own way, I prayed to Hashem. He answered that prayer in a remarkable way by sending Chava, who invited me to the women's yeshiva where I kept my first Shabbat. The rest, as they say, is history. The sanctity of the Temple and Jerusalem stems from the presence of the Shechinah that permeated the Temple Mount when King Solomon first built the Beit Hamikdash. That holiness, once established, can never be nullified. The holiest place in the world is the site of the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount itself. Yet, despite the Temple's destruction, the Western Wall remains sacred due to its proximity to the Holy of Holies and its enduring connection to the Divine Presence. As Rabbi Acha teaches: The Divine Presence never leaves the

Western Wall, as it is written: "Behold, He is standing behind our wall" (*Song of Songs* 2:9); (*Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 2:2). During the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, Vespasian divided the city among his four generals to be demolished. The general assigned to destroy the western section left it intact. When Vespasian asked why, the general replied that he wanted to leave it standing as a testimony to the greatness of the city he had conquered. But beyond military strategy, the Midrash teaches that it had been decreed in Heaven that the Western Wall never be destroyed – because the Shechinah rests on the western side of the Temple, where the Holy of Holies once stood (*Midrash Eichah Rabbah* 1:31). This concept has halachic implications as well. Many agricultural mitzvot of the Land of Israel – such as those concerning Shemittah and tithes – are currently observed at a Rabbinic level. In contrast, these laws retain a higher level of sanctity in Jerusalem. As the Rambam writes: "The original sanctification sanctified the Temple and Jerusalem for eternity" (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Beit HaBechira* 6:16). The Kotel remains not merely a historical remnant, but a living testimony to Hashem's eternal covenant with His people – a place where hearts awaken and prayers rise, and even the youngest of souls can sense the holiness of the Shechinah that still rests between its stones.

What was Moshe's Blessing of Israel Upon the Completion of the Sanctuary?

The sanctity radiating from the Temple Mount and the Kotel originates in the very first Mishkan (Sanctuary) that the Israelites built in the desert on their journey to the Land of Israel. *Parashat Pekudei* concludes the construction of the Mishkan, offering a detailed accounting of the materials used and describing the final assembly of the sacred structure. The themes of this parasha resonate deeply with the Mishkan's ultimate purpose – serving as a forerunner to the Beit Hamikdash in Jerusalem, the eternal dwelling place of the Shechinah in Eretz Yisrael.

ספר שמות פרק לט פסוק מג

וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל הַמְּלָאכָה וְהִנֵּה עָשׂוּ אֶתֶּה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'שָׁם כִּן עָשׂוּ וַיְבָרַךְ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה:

"Moshe saw all the work, and behold, they had done it as Hashem had commanded, so they had done it; and Moshe blessed them" (*Shemot* 39:43).

This moment of completion parallels the dedication of the Beit Hamikdash, where King Shlomo blessed the nation after the construction of the Temple: "Then the king turned his face about and blessed all the congregation of Israel, and all the congregation of Israel stood" (*I Melachim* 8:14). The Midrash depicts a direct link from the Mishkan to the Beit Hamikdash, teaching that the sanctity first introduced through the portable sanctuary found its ultimate expression in the permanent Temple in Jerusalem (*Midrash Tanchuma, Pekudei* 11). The Mishkan was not meant to remain a temporary sanctuary in the desert – it was to pave the way for a legacy that would culminate in a permanent home for the Divine Presence in the Holy Land. Blessings are most potent when uttered in the presence of the Shechinah – the Source of all blessings. Many commentators sought to clarify the meaning of Moshe's words of blessing uttered at this opportune moment. According to Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg, Moshe's blessing was: "May Hashem, the G-d of your forefathers, bless you..." Just as you dedicated yourselves to the building of the Mishkan and the Shechinah rested upon the work of your hands, so may you merit to build before Him the Beit HaBechirah – the Temple – and may the Shechinah again rest upon the work of your hands. Building upon this, Ha'amek Davar explains that because the Mishkan was completed with evident Divine assistance and extraordinary success, Moshe blessed them that the same would be true of the Beit Hamikdash (Ha'amek Davar, *Shemot* 39:43). The blessing Moshe gave upon the completion of the Mishkan was therefore not only a moment of gratitude – it was a prophetic hope for the future. A hope that the holiness established in the wilderness would one day find its eternal home in the heart of Jerusalem, in the Land where the Shechinah would dwell forever.

What is the Ultimate Connection between the Mishkan, Kotel, and Beit Hamikdash?

A striking Midrash reveals a profound parallel between the Mishkan and the human body. Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman, in the name of Rabbi Natan, teaches that there are eighteen commands related to the Mishkan – corresponding to the eighteen vertebrae in the human spine. These also parallel the eighteen blessings of the daily *Amidah*, the eighteen times G-d's name appears in the *Shema*, and the eighteen mentions of G-d's name in *Tehillim 29* (*Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 1:8*). Just as the spine connects the upper and lower parts of the body and allows us to stand upright, the Mishkan served as the spiritual backbone of Israel – joining heaven and earth, body and soul. When the Beit Hamikdash was built, it was as though the full body of Divine service was completed, with the Mishkan as its core. Its structural and spiritual continuity bound the holiness of the desert sanctuary to the eternal holiness of Jerusalem. Another Midrash offers an even deeper insight into this enduring connection: “Then Moshe blessed them.” – He said to them: “May it be Hashem’s will that the Shechinah dwell in the work of your hands.” Alternatively – He said to them: “May it be Hashem’s will that no enemy gain control over the work of your hands, for the Mishkan was hidden away in the underground chambers of the Temple” (*Pesikta Zutarta, Shemot 39:43*). This remarkable teaching implies that the Mishkan was not merely a spiritual forerunner of the Beit Hamikdash – it actually became part of it. The original sanctuary, built with devotion and infused with Moshe’s blessing, was hidden deep within the Temple structure itself, continuing to infuse it with holiness even during times of destruction. Perhaps it was precisely Moshe’s blessing that ensured the enemies could never fully destroy the work of Israel’s hands. Thus, the Western Wall of the Temple would remain, preserving the presence of the Shechinah at the Kotel. His blessing continues to pulse through that last remaining wall. The Kotel may be seen not just as a relic of the past, but as the living spine of the Jewish people – still standing, still supporting, and still drawing the Shechinah into our world. Perhaps the continued existence of the Kotel – the last vestige of the Beit Hamikdash – will become the catalyst for the rebuilding of the Temple. The Kotel may be compared to the seed from which the ultimate tree of the entire Beit Hamikdash will spring forth. May we soon witness the fulfillment of that very blessing – when the Mishkan, the Kotel, and the Beit Hamikdash will be united in the rebuilt Temple, radiating holiness to all creation.