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on their marriage.

In the Shadow of God: The *Mishkan*'s "Constructive" Theology

Ranana Dine

In *Parashat Ki Tissa* God tells Moses that Betzalel has been explicitly called by name for the sacred task of designing what will be God's home among the Israelites, and this divinely chosen architect is described as a highly skilled craftsman, an artist, able to design works in all sorts of materials. What I find most curious and inspiring about Betzalel is his description as being "endowed" with "divine spirit," gifted with *ruah Elokim* (Exodus 31:1-5).

Something about Betzalel's work is godly, it requires more than talent or ingenuity or creativity—a spark of the divine is necessary. As an artist, I enjoy thinking of Betzalel working away, using his divinely tinted paintbrush, loom, hammer, and chisel to build God's dwelling place. It is the invocation of divinity, however, that also inspires my questions. As a student of Christian and Jewish theology, the mention of "divine spirit" in the description of Betzalel, and in the work of constructing the *Mishkan* more broadly, opens up a space for questions about the connections between God and godliness, artistic creation, and the *Mishkan* (and later *Beit ha-Mikdash*). What can the building of the *Mishkan*, and the calling of Betzalel teach us about being godly, being filled with *ruah Elokim?*

It is possible to try to answer these questions by turning to traditional Jewish sources. But before doing that I want to show how Christians, and particularly English Christians living during the tumultuous Protestant Reformation, understood these passages and the purpose of the beauty of the *Mishkan* and *Beit ha-Mikdash.* It is my contention that the theological import and message of the Jewish texts becomes clearer and more salient when presented next to Christian understandings. And the Christian tradition, particularly during the Reformation, and particularly in England, has a long history of struggling with the role of beauty, craftsmanship, and decoration within theological discourse.[1]

For English theologians in this period the *Mishkan* and *Beit ha-Mikdash* were central to debates about the role of physical beauty in the church—should a church be beautiful? Should it include visual art? Jewish sources are less explicit about these kinds of physical concerns, and focus more on the meaning behind the divine nature of the *Mishkan's* construction, a fact that becomes clearer and more insightful when shown against the light thrown by the church's theological works.

[1] For theological discussion of art in Reformation England, see Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts: Laws against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). For work on the Reformation more broadly see William Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Sergiusz Michalski, *Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993).

In the sixteenth century, England underwent a number of religious upheavals, moving under Henry the VIII from being a Catholic country to a Protestant, and then swinging back and forth between variations of Protestant and Catholic worship and belief for the next century. One major debate in all of these religious reformations was the role of elaborate ritualistic worship in the church—the use of rich vestments and altars, the legality of images and music. The *Mishkan* and the *Beit ha-Mikdash* were seen as biblical precedent for highly ritualistic, and aesthetically beautiful, worship, but depending on the scholar these spaces could be imagined as sites of idolatry or as spaces of godliness. English theologians were interested in the *Mishkan* and *Beit ha-Mikdash* as templates for Christian worship, whether for good or for ill, and so their discussion tends to focus on the *human* aspect of the *Mishkan* and *Beit ha-Mikdash*'s construction and the worship that occurred within. What did the description of the *Mishkan* or the pomp of the *Beit ha-Mikdash* signify for humanity?

William Tyndale[2] (1494-1536) was one of the first English reformers, and he was eventually executed for his views. He vehemently opposed using the *Mishkan* and *Beit ha-Mikdash* as examples for the church. In a 1532 response to a work by the Catholic theologian and statesman Sir Thomas More, Tyndale launched an attack on ornate church ritual, construing it as "Jewish," and arguing that in truth, the "Jewish Temple" led directly to idolatrous worship. Tyndale was so concerned about the role the *Mishkan* and *Beit ha-Mikdash* played in leading to idolatry that he went so far as to dedicate an entire paragraph to describing the superfluity of Temple worship. Quoting both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, Tyndale argues "concerning the temple, Isaiah says in his last chapter, 'What house will you build for me, or in what place shall I rest? Heaven is my seat, and the earth my footstool.' As who should say, 'I am too great for any place that you can make,' and (as Stephen says, Acts 7, and Paul, Acts 17) 'I dwell not in a temple made with hands.'"[3]

Although the biblical text, which Tyndale knew quite well, might have invoked the "divine spirit" when describing the construction of the original *Mishkan*, the physical Temple held no true godliness—it was a space that led to idol worship and false belief. Interestingly, the translators of the 1560 Geneva Bible, the next significant English Bible translation after Tyndale's, took a different stance on the *Mishkan* and *Beit Ha-Mikdash.* Although they still did not think the *Mishkan* should be a physical precedent for the English church, the translators interpreted the passages regarding the priestly vestments as a positive example of obedience to the detailed laws that "the Lorde had expressly commanded."[4]

These early arguments set the stage for the dynamic use of the "Jewish Temple" in the work of Richard Hooker (1554-1600), one of the most significant theologians for the development of the Church of England; his most famous work, *Of the Laws of the Ecclesiastical Polity*, set out

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[2] Today Tyndale is most well known for his translation of the Bible into English, a precursor to later English Bibles like the King James.

[3] William Tyndale, "An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue," in *From Icons to Idols*, ed. David J. Davis (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 34

[4] George Moore, quoting the Geneva Bible editors, "The 'ornament of the Law': Vestments and the Translation of Judaism in the Geneva Bible." *Prose Studies* 37 (September 2, 2015): 170.

to describe the theology and worship of the English Church and its connection to the state.[5] Hooker defended the invocation of the *Mishkan* and *Beit ha-Mikdash* as a model for the English church against more radical Protestants, who like Tyndale, wished to imagine these dwelling places of God as sites of idolatry.

For example, Hooker argued that although his more radical critics might "have against the fashion of our churches, as being framed according to the pattern of the Jewish temple," this is "a fault no less grievous, if so be it were true, than if some king should build his mansion-house by the model of Salomon's palace."[6] For Hooker the biblical passages describing the *Mishkan* "as beautiful, gorgeous, and rich, as art could make" demonstrated the correctness of worshipping God with some level of pomp and majesty.[7]

Although some contemporary Christians wished to read the passages as "figurative," for Hooker they demonstrated certain truths about humanity, beauty, and God.[8] The ability to create visually stunning buildings and objects is a human skill and should be used to exalt God: if God gave humanity the ability to build cathedrals than these skills should be used to testify to God's greatness. Indeed the human ability to create beauty and build spaces like the *Mishkan* has "a natural conveniency" that allows worshipers to "give unto God a testimony of our cheerful affection;" man-made splendor serves "to the world for a witness of his almightiness."[9] Finally, Hooker asks rhetorically, "Besides, were it not also strange, if God should have made such store of glorious creatures on earth, and leave them all to be consumed in secular vanity, allowing none but the baser sort to be employed in his own service?"[10]

Beauty for Hooker is a human quality—humanity can create it (thanks in no small part to God) and so should use it in divine service. Accordingly, artistry and fine craftsmanship are helpful for worshippers. It is human nature to find beauty inspiring, and although God can be worshipped anywhere—in Hooker's rhetoric from "Moses in the midst of the sea, Job on the dunghill, Ezechias in bed, Jeremy in mire, Jonas in the whale, Daniel in the den, the children in the furnace, the thief on the cross, Peter and Paul in prison"—it is better for humanity to worship when inspired by man-made beauty.[11] And so, Hooker makes the following declaration:

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[5] For more on Hooker and the role of the Temple in English theology in the seventeenth century see Achsah Guibbory, *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[6] Richard Hooker, *The Works of That Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker with an Account of His Life and Death by Isaac Walton*, ed. John Keble (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 5.14.1.

[7] Ibid., 5.14.4.

[8] Ibid., 5.15.4.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 5.16.2.

> That the very majesty and holiness of the place, where God is worshipped, hath *in regard of us* great virtue, force, and efficacy, for that it serveth as a sensible help to stir up devotion, and *in that respect* no doubt *bettereth* even our holiest and best actions in this kind. As therefore we every where exhort all men to worship God, even so for performance of this service by the people of God assembled, we think not any place *so good* as the church, neither any exhortation so fit as that of David, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."[12]

The craftsmanship and visual splendor of the *Mishkan*, and so too of the contemporary church, are meant to inspire the best in human nature. It is "*in regard of us,*" rather than God, that beautiful spaces like the *Mishkan* is necessary and good for faith. Wondrous spaces inspire people to look up to the heavens and worship God "in the beauty of holiness." It is not the *Mishkan* and the spaces inspired by it themselves here that are necessarily godly, but rather the way they affect worshipers' minds and souls, and lead to better contemplation of the divine.

These Christian sources present a variety of attitudes towards the beauty of the *Mishkan* and *Beit ha-Mikdash*, but all stress the human response to these buildings. A lesson in biblical obedience can be learned from the Israelites enthusiastic construction in the dessert; the divine command to build a *mikdash* for God's presence is instructive of the human need for beauty to inspire true worship. English theologians in this period are worried about the physical church—passionately arguing about whether churches should have images and whether priests should wear vestments.

During this period the law went back and forth regarding the permissibility of visual elements in worship like altars, vestments, and rood screens, so these debates were of real practical significance; a fact which helps explain the focus here on practical lessons for human worshipers. These interpretations, however, downplay the way God's spirit can be read as at work in the *Mishkan's* construction and what that might mean about God, and God's connection with the people. Having seen the human focus of these Christian readings, we can now look back at how the rabbis interpreted the commands to construct the *Mishkan* and the calling of Betzalel, and see how they learned as much about God's nature as about humanity's.

For the rabbis the *Mishkan* reflects God's own creation of the world and other aspects of divinity—the command to the Israelites to construct the building is part of raising up the people as partners in divine creation. The rabbis are less concerned with how the *Mishkan* may operate as a physical template for synagogues, and so turn instead to the more supernatural aspects of these passages. Although synagogue architecture historically has been inspired by the biblical dwelling places of God, Jews, likely due to historical and economic realities, could often not construct grand permanent structures, and generally had a less

[12]Ibid.

visually ornate service, potentially leading the rabbis to focus more on the metaphorical meaning of these passages.[13]

The divine nature of the *Miskhan's* construction is even hidden in the name of Betzalel, which translates to the "shadow of God." In *Bamidbar Rabbah* 15:10 the rabbis tell how Moses could not craft the *menorah* despite God showing him how to do it numerous times. Finally, God tells him to get Betzalel who constructs it "immediately." Moses exclaims "For me, how many times did the Holy One Who is Blessed show me and I struggled to make it, but for you, who never saw it, you make it from your thoughts! Betzalel, you were standing in the shadow of God [*b'tzel el*] when the Holy One Who is Blessed showed me how to make it." Betzalel's ability to construct the utensils for the *Mishkan* is a divine supernatural gift, coming from God's own reflection; simple human ingenuity, even by someone as holy as Moses, could not build the *menorah*, instead it was a sacred task requiring God's spirit, God's shadow.

Nehama Leibowitz and other commentators have drawn parallels between the text of the *parshiot* of the *Mishkan* and the first creation narrative in *Bereshit*. In particular many of the verbs, such as "*Va-Yar*" "saw," "*Va-Yevarekh*" "blessed," "*Ve-Yekhulu*" "completed," and "*Va-Ya'as*" "made," are repeated in the two texts, making it appear as though the construction of the *Mishkan* requires the same actions as God's creation of the world.[14] Aggadic texts directly connect God's creation of the world to the *Mishkan*: *Bereshit Rabbah* 3:9 goes so far as to say that "it is as if on that day" of the setting up of the *Mishkan* that God had created the world. The *Midrash Tanhuma* in *Pekudei* 2:3 also ruminates on the connections between the creation of the world and the construction of *Mishkan*, linking the activities of each day of creation to the crafting of different aspects of God's dwelling place:

> Rabbi Jacob the son of Issi asked: Why does it say; *I love the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth?* Because the Tabernacle is equal to the creation of the world itself. How is that so? Concerning the first day, it is written: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth* (Genesis 1:1), and it is written elsewhere: *Who stretched out the heavens like a curtain* (Psalms 104:2), and concerning the Tabernacle it is written: *And thou shalt make curtains of goats' hair* (Exodus 26:7). About the second day of creation it states: *Let there be a firmament and divide between them, and let it divide the waters from the waters* (Genesis 1:6). About the Tabernacle it is written: *And the veil shall divide between you* (Exodus 26:33) With regard to the third day it states: *Let the waters under the heavens be gathered* (Genesis 1:9). With reference to the Tabernacle it is written: *Thou shalt also make a laver of brass ... and thou shalt put water therein* (Exodus 30:18).

These links between God's creation of the world and the tasks of constructing the *Mishkan* make the project of building and beautifying the structure part of a larger divine project. Only God could create the world, the activities God undertook to bring the world into

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[13] For some background on the religious meaning of synagogue architecture see Lee Shai Weissbach. "Buildings Fraught with Meaning: An Introduction to a Special Issue on Synagogue Architecture in Context," *Jewish History* 25 (2011): 1-11.

[14] Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot (Exodus)*, vol. II (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1986), 479-86.

existence are therefore godly and divine. So too the Israelites' sewing of curtains and molding of brass were godly acts, reminiscent of God's creation. The Israelites' chiseling and hammering and weaving was a type of *imitatio dei*—the *Mishkan* was "equal to the creation of the world itself" and in building it the Jews were acting like God, the creator of the world.

One further clue to the close links between God's creation and constructing the *Mishkan* comes right before Moses reports to the people the commands regarding the *Mishkan* and the calling of Betzalel. Before reporting the details of the *Mishkan's* instruction manual, Moses tells the people to keep *Shabbat*: "On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a *Shabbat* of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death," (Exodus 35:2).

The sages (*Shabbat* 49b) famously link the actions required for constructing the *Mishkan* to the categories of *melakhah*, forbidden creative work, that must be rested from on *Shabbat*: "One is only liable for performing a labor to which there was a corresponding labor in the *Tabernacle*. They sowed in order to grow dyes for the *Tabernacle*, and therefore you may not sow on *Shabbat*. They reaped, and therefore you may not reap on *Shabbat*." *Shabba*t is meant to serve as a memorial for the completion of creation and God's decision to stop working on the seventh day. Thus every week when we abstain from sowing and reaping, writing and cooking, since these were the activities required to construct the *Mishkan*, we are imitating God, who also rested from a parallel creation.

We can read these *parshiot*, and the associated *midrashim* about Betzalel and the *Mishkan's* construction, as a chance to see how artistic creation—designing, construction, crafting—can be part of divine work, part of godly creation, perhaps even require a bit of *Ruah Elokim*. By weaving or chiseling we too can participate in a type of creation, although we lack the divine command today to build a dwelling place for God. And when we stop these activities to enjoy the sacred rest of *Shabbat*, we continue as well in this divine (non-)creation participation. For Jewish theology, the beauty of the *Mishkan* and *Beit ha-Mikdash* is godly in its essence, containing the traces of the human-divine partnership in ongoing creation.

Although the passages about the *Mishkan* can meaningfully be understood as a lesson in obedience or human nature's tendency to be inspired by beauty, they also contain vital insights into our relationship with God. Rabbinic interpretations, less concerned about physical buildings and Reformation politics, focus on God's role within the construction of the *Mishkan* and how God offers the Jews a partnership in creation when commanding them to build a sanctuary for divine dwelling. And perhaps, today, when we engage in building a *shul*, designing an *aron*, or even just creating *sukkah* decorations, we follow in the footsteps of Betzalel—being inspired by splendor, harkening to God's commands—and also continuing the partnership with divine creation through creativity and beauty.

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From Forbidden Fruit to Milk and Honey

Yael Unterman

Humor me as I begin with a question: Off the cuff, what's your educated guess as to how many weekly Torah portions contain mentions of food? I'm looking for a concrete number here, no vague burblings in the vein of "quite a few" or "most." Do you have your number? Good. Hold that thought, we'll come back to it.

Of all the brilliant ideas generated by the rabbis, Jewish authors and publishers alike ought to be most grateful for the notion of dividing the Torah into portions. New books organized by *parasha* come to print constantly; and yet (as with haggadahs) people continue to buy and buy in this genre—and, even more importantly, to read, a few pages at a time until they have completed the entire thing. I know that when seeking enlightenment on the week's Torah reading, I have my 5-10 "go to" books on the shelf. I pull them down into a messy pile and presto, a wealth of different ideas appear at my fingertips.

Parashah books either emerge from the pen of one author or have some thematic connection binding essays by various writers. Recent years have seen interesting departures from more classic formats, for example into volumes of poetry on the parashah (such as that of Yaakov Azriel) and also a few cookbooks, bearing names such as *Eating the Bible*, *Melting Pot*, and *A Taste of Torah*. In these, the connection between the parashah and the recipes ranges from the convincing (lentil soup for Toldot) to amusing and downright tenuous (Babel Vegetable Towers?).

Diana Lipton's book *From Forbidden Fruit to Milk and Honey: A Commentary on Food in the Torah* is not a cookbook, however. It contains no recipes or mouth-watering photographs of prepared dishes (though the original format, at Leket Project Online, does indeed bring a recipe alongside each essay, and those may still be accessed).

What it does do is to delve into the references to food and drink in each *parasha*, analyzing the role played by these and using them as a springboard for an interesting discussion. The contributors hail from various walks of life, including writers, rabbis, educators, scholars, and more.

Diana Lipton not only collected these essays but also added her own insights to each essay, and authored one herself. Though certainly an academic, with a doctoral thesis on dreams in the book of Genesis, and a career at Cambridge and King's College London prior to her aliyah, what is most compelling is that for Lipton the book was born out of deep fascination. Food has shaped different periods in her life, as she became a vegetarian in the footsteps of her first husband and then returned to preparing animal-based dishes for her second husband, for whom meat eating is, she testifies, "something akin to a religious obligation." The laws of kashrut, the role of food in the land of Israel, the need for foods that can survive the heating time-lags of Shabbat—all of these gradually pushed the intersection between food

and religion into the center of her life, capturing her interest and imagination and driving her to seek further insight into this area.

It is this passion and attention that feeds (pun intended) and fuels this volume. Each week, as you are about to open the book, you know you are about to engage not only with the Torah but with the dimension of life we call eating. This is a significant dimension, demanding hefty amounts of our time, energy, and resources; and yet how much time do we spend actually thinking about it reflectively; through a spiritual, philosophical, anthropological, historical, psychological, or ethical lens? Certainly not enough; and this, despite the fact that a number of Jewish rituals around food are precisely intended to create reflection, most notably the blessings and the laws of kashrut.

This mindfulness that the book brings to my life is what I most appreciate about *From Forbidden Fruit to Milk and Honey*. I also enjoy the thrill of curiosity, in the moment before opening any essay, that frames itself as the question: "Now what food are they going to focus on in *this* week's parasha?" One's knee-jerk assumption is that food only appears in some, or at best many, of the *parshiot*—go back to the number you came up with earlier, I imagine most of you did not pass the forty mark.

But interesting food angles are found on almost every single weekly Torah portion, and there is only very occasional recourse to the haftarah. It certainly helps that the offerings in the Temple were edible. There are many surprises and the very specificity of the topic helps give the collection a fresh-baked (rather than stale-toast) feel.

I liked the fact that, the heavy-hitting credentials of the authors notwithstanding, the book is not afraid to adopt a delightfully playful tone at times. In the preface Lipton introduces herself as our "waitress" and brings her biography to explain the origins of the book, and in Hukkat she ends with A.A. Milne's poem "What's the Matter with Mary Jane?" Al Baumgarten consults with Rashi on grape growing in his piece on VaYehi, and Stefan Reif wonders in his essay on Vayeshev whether the Israelites of Jeremiah's day, by speaking of "their fill of bread" were referring to a tuna sandwich?!

I did find the formatting of the book confusing. After the main essay, framed in grey shading, we have Lipton's comments on several different verses and topics, and they are insufficiently differentiated from each other for my taste. Numbering, would have helped here, or a different kind of indentation. Moreover, the mix of somewhat unrelated ideas (except inasmuch as they connect to food) brought together in each essay gives a somewhat fragmented feeling.

I'll end with an apt quote from Joel Hecker, in his essay on Beha'alotekha: "While it is commonly thought that our experience of taste begins at the tongue's taste buds, what the premodern approaches demonstrate is that our most powerful organ of taste resides in the mind."

This book, in bringing our mind to bear on the topic of food, hones it to taste the Torah as sweeter, richer, and even more filling.

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Of Divine Nostrils and the Primordial Altar: A Pipeline of Sanctity

Shlomo Zuckier

Many of us are accustomed to mindlessly reading the *parshiyot* about building the *mishkan,* without thinking overmuch about the physical plant of the Tabernacle and later Temple. Whether we view such institutions as "a place to offer sacrifices to God", "a dwelling place for the Divine Presence", or both, we deem the existence of the edifice to be significant, but ignore its precise structure. However, at times questions regarding the minute details of the *mishkan* can open a window to much deeper questions pertaining to the nature of the institution and even the relationship between its builders and God. In this case, the altar's nostrils will aid in our quest for understanding.

While the Torah provides a general outline regarding the construction of the altar—e.g., at Exodus 38:1-7—it does not offer a fully detailed description. The Torah tells us that libations of both wine and water are to be placed on the altar at various points, but the precise process for doing so is unspecified. The *mishnah*, following a particular position in the Sifrei Numbers 107, fills in some of these lacunae in its description of the water libations (mSuk 4:9):

> שני ספלים של כסף היו שם. רבי יהודה אומר: של סיד היו אלא שהיו מושחרין פניהם מפני היין ... ומנוקבין כמין שני חטמין דקין, אחד מעבה ואחד דק, כדי שיהו שניהם כלין בבת אחת.
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> There were two silver basins there. Rabbi Yehudah says: they were two made of lime, but their faces were darkened from the wine. And they had holes, two narrow nostril-like [pipes], one wide and the other narrow, in order that both [water and wine] could [reach the] end [of the tube] simultaneously.

The nostril description is intriguing, and it parallels a description of another altar runoff, the pipes through which blood drains from the altar (mMid 3:2). The Tosefta (tSuk 3:14; Lieberman edition and numbering) provides further information on where the nostril-like pipes lead:

> ר' יהודה אומ': של סיד היו אלא שהיו משחירין מפני היין ומנוקבין כמין שני חוטמין דקין שבהן יורדין לסילון שבנאו מי שבנה את ההיכל
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> Rabbi Yehudah says: they were of lime, but would be darkened by the wine. They were perforated like two thin nostrils, through which [the libations] would descend to a tube built by the one who built the Temple.

We now know where the drainage "nostrils" lead, and that it was set in place by the one who built the Temple. But who did build the Temple? This is not immediately clear, and the Talmud features an extended discussion on the topic.

The Babylonian Talmud (Sukkah 49a-b) provides a more extensive treatment describing these pipes, called *shitin*.

אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: שיתין משׁשת ימי בראשית נבראו, שנאמר חמוקי ירכיך כמו חלאים מעשה ידי אמן. חמוקי ירכיך - אלו השיתין, כמו חלאים - שמחוללין ויורדין עד התהום, מעשה ידי אמן - זו מעשה ידי אומנותו של הקדוש ברוך הוא.

Rabbah bar bar Hannah said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: the pipes were created during the six days of creation, as it says "the hidden parts of your thighs are like the links of a chain, the making of a craftsman" (Song of Songs 7:2). "The hidden parts of your thighs"—these are the pipes; "like the links of a chain"—they are hollow (*mehulalin*) and descend to the Depths; "the making of a craftsman"—this is the craftwork of the Holy One, blessed be He.

This interpretation builds on Song of Songs 7:2, which—in its literal meaning—depicts the female character's concealed thigh. In a creative midrashic interpretation, this passage is interpreted as referring to the pipes of the altar: these pipes are unseen, and they run from the bottom and side of the altar, which is actually known as its "thigh" (*yerekh hamizbeah*; see Lev. 1:11). The thigh is compared to *hala'im*, which is read as *mehulalim*, "hollow," a perfect description of a pipe. Furthermore, this interpretation asserts that these pipes descend to the Depths, and that the "craftsman" referred to in the verse is none other than God.

In support of this interpretation, an earlier tradition from the House of Rabbi Ishmael is adduced.

תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל: בראשית, אל תיקרי בראשית אלא ברא שית.

It was taught in the [Study] House of Rabbi Ishmael: "*Bereshit*" (in the beginning)—do not read "*bereshit*" but "*bara shit*" ("He created pipes").

The creation of this altar and its pipes traces back to the beginning of creation, to the Genesis of the world itself, as is encoded in the most primordial word Bereshit. As God was creating the world, these preternatural pipes were brought into being as well. One is reminded of the ten supernatural phenomena created as the first Shabbat was beginning, as described in mAvot 5:6.

The continuation of the Talmud on bSuk 49a cites another Tannaitic interpretation to support the idea that these hollow pipes descend to the Depths:

תניא, רבי יוסי אומר: שיתין מחוללין ויורדין עד תהום, שנאמר אשירה נא לידידי שירת דודי לכרמו כרם היה לידידי בקרן בן שמן. ויעזקהו ויסקלהו ויטעהו שורק ויבן מגדל בתוכו וגם יקב חצב בו. ויטעהו שורק - זה בית המקדש, ויבן מגדל בתוכו - זה מזבח, וגם יקב חצב בו - אלו השיתין.

It was taught: Rabbi Yose says: The pipes are hollow and descend to the Depths, as it says: "Let me now sing to my beloved a lover's song for his vineyard; my beloved had a vineyard at the very fruitful hill (*bi-keren ben shamen*); and he dug it and removed its rocks and he planted it with quality vines and he built a tower at its center, and even carved a wine receptacle within it" (Isaiah 5:1-2). "And he planted it with quality vines"—this is the Temple. "And He built a tower at its center"—this is the altar. "And even carved a wine receptacle within it"—these are the pipes.

Employing several different levels of word play, the Talmud presents the building of the altar. Focusing on the literary elements pertaining to the altar, it is understandable that the "quality vines" would be interpreted as God's chosen Temple, and the tower at its center would naturally

be seen as the altar. The "wine receptacle" carved inside it can very reasonably be interpreted as referring to the pipes chiseled in the altar that held the wine (and water) libations.

[Alternatively, as the parallel Tosefta (tSuk 3:15) has it, the "tower" is the Temple, the "wine receptacle" is the altar, and "he carved within it" teaches that the altar has the pipes chiseled inside.]

The broader context of the passage is also relevant. For one, the location of this vineyard in *Keren ben Shemen* (understood as "the very fruitful hill") is important, as the Bible in many places refers to the altar as having horns, or *keranot* (see, e.g., Ex. 37:25). Furthermore, there may be a hint here as to who built this altar. The reference to the "beloved" in Is. 5:1, that same *dod* appearing throughout the Song of Songs (and the speaker of Song of Songs 7:2 cited above), might indicate that God is the one who built this Temple. However, it is also possible that the *dod* here is a cipher not for God but for King David, as both are spelled דוד! In some Talmudic traditions (see bSuk 53a and below), it is David who sets up the *shitin* in preparation for his son Shlomo's construction of the Temple. The Talmud does not clarify with this statement who built the altar and its pipes, and the parallel tradition in the Tosefta is also open to interpretation, with no hint throughout the text that God was directly involved at this stage.

Having presented the various textual interpretations as to the origin of the altar and its pipes, the Talmud then moves on to raise some questions as to its physical makeup:

> תניא, אמר רבי אלעזר בר צדוק: לול קטן היה בין כבש למזבח במערבו של כבש, ואחת לשבעים שנה פרחי כהונה יורדין לשם ומלקטין משם יין קרוש שדומה לעיגולי דבילה, ובאין ושורפין אותו בקדושה, שנאמר בקדש הסך נסך שכר לה'
>
> It was taught: Rabbi Eleazar bar Tzadok said: A small chamber existed between the ramp and the altar on the western side of the ramp. Once every seventy years the priest youths would descend there and gather congealed wine that appeared to be like dried fig cake, and would come and burn it in holiness, as it says: "In the holy offer a libation of wine to the Lord" (Num. 28:7).

According to this tradition, which follows one opinion in the Tosefta, the pipes with the libations do not descend to the Depths, as we saw in several other interpretations. Rather, they run to the end of the line and remain accessible for retrieval and liquidation every seventy years. This allows for a second offering, as it were, of the wine, as the congealed wine concentrate is taken and burned. The Talmud's continuation (49b) spells out, invoking Numbers 28:7, the word "*kodesh*" ("holy") means that these wine libations are burned in the Temple.

A series of disputes over various details of the altar's structure emerges from this Gemara. For one, there is the question as to whether the pipes descend to the Depths or if they don't descend beyond the point of retrieval. Additionally, there appears to be a dispute as to whether they were built by God or by "whoever built the Temple," possibly David (or Shlomo, as some later glosses to the Tosefta would have it). Building on a relatively straightforward Mishnah and its description of two nostril-like pipes, we end up with a fair amount of divergence on the details.

These positions differ on more than just the particulars of the tubular basins, as they point to a much larger question regarding the very nature of the altar.

We might best consider this question by returning to the *mishnah*. What exactly are we meant to understand when the *mishnah* says that these pipes resemble two nostrils? Is this simply a

physical description, or is something more profound at work here? The poetic verse in Deuteronomy (33:10) writes:

יורו משפטיך ליעקב ותורתך לישראל ישימו קטורה באפך וכליל על מזבחך

> You will teach Your Law to Jacob, Your Torah to Israel;
> They will place incense in Your nose, a burnt offering on Your altar.

Here, God's altar appears in synonymous parallel to God's nose, as these two sacrificial receptacles are compared. Just like burnt offerings are brought onto the altar, the incense enters God's nose, as it were, after being turned to smoke. Given the broader context, this metaphor is not too surprising; if sacrifices are called God's "offering and bread" (Num. 28:2), it is a simple logical extension away to call the altar, where God receives the offering, God's nose. [For reasons of space we will not enter the question of divine anthropomorphism; however one understands these matters, though, these metaphors are applied for a reason and need to be understood.]

Our *Mishnah* might be read as the next logical step following this verse. If the altar is God's nose, it would only make sense that the nose has nostrils—two nostrils, in fact! And, just as the "nose"-altar serves as the point of intake for burnt offerings like the incense and *olah* in Deut. 33:10, the "nostril"-pipes serve as the receptacles for the libations.

But where do the libations go? On this account, they go all the way to the Depths (*tehom*). If the smoke of burnt offerings ascends upwards to Heaven, the liquid libations instead run downwards, out of the human world and into the divinely fashioned nether-realm of the Depths.

But how could the man-made Temple connect to such otherworldly realms? How could such a construction have been carried out, even by such great kings of Israel as David or Shlomo? On this approach, the answer is simple—it wasn't created by human agency. Hence the Talmudic teaching, מעשה ידי אמן - זו מעשה ידי אומנותו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, "'the work of a craftsman'—it was the craftwork of the Holy One, blessed be He."

We might even take this teaching a step further. Not only were the pipes of the altar created by God at the time of the creation of the world, but these pipes might have been the very basis of the creation of the world. The Midrash Aggadah (ed., Buber) on the Torah's first word reads: ברא שית, משיתין של מזבח ברא העולם, "*bereshit* [should be read as] *bara shit*: from the pipes of the altar God created the world." This teaching not only points to the centrality of the primordial altar but also highlights some parallels to another Temple object of great significance, the *even shetiyyah*, or foundation stone of the world, which sits in the Holy of Holiness. (See mYom 5:2.)

On the other side of this debate, we have a much more mundane understanding of the creation of the altar and its pipes. This position maintains that they were not created by God, but simply by "whoever built the Temple," as the Tosefta has it. In fact, we find later, at bSuk 53a, a tradition that David built the *shitin*:

> אמר רבי יוחנן: בשעה שכרה דוד שיתין, קפא תהומא ובעי למשטפא עלמא, אמר דוד חמש עשרה מעלות והורידן.
>
> Rabbi Yohanan said: When David dug the pipes for the Temple, the waters of the Depths rose and tried to drown the world. David recited the fifteen [Songs of] Ascents and made them subside.

As it appears, David's attempts to build these pipes were nearly thwarted by his dangerous run-in with the Depths. The netherworld was about to overpower his attempt to dig even the humanly attainable distance, until God intervened. [One might distinguish between the pipes of the Temple here on 53a and the pipes of the altar on 49a. Even so, there would still be the *mishnah*, cited above, which says that the pipes of the altar were built by "whoever built the Temple."]

In any case, the perspective that a human dug the pipes fits very well with the approach that these pipes go not all the way down but simply to "a small room" between the ramp and the altar. The purpose of the pipes was not to connect the human world to the divine one. Rather, they served a functional purpose, providing a physical location for the runoff from the libations. Continuing this more pragmatic view, the teaching of Rabbi Eleazar bar Tzadok notes that the dried wine would have to be disposed of (ritually, of course!) every seventy years. And on this account, when the *mishnah* says that the pipes resemble nostrils, it is simply meant to describe these pipes, not to attribute any deep metaphysical meaning to the issue at hand.

Our presentation up to this point, largely supported by Tosafot (49a, s.v. Al Tikrei) as well, has presented a frontal dispute as to whether these altar pipes were created by human or divine hands and where precisely they reached. These are not mere technical disputes. They add up to a fundamental, conceptual question as to the nature of the altar, its construction, and the relationship between the altar pipes and God. We might even connect this to the dispute regarding whether humans or God will build the Third Temple.

But maybe it's not necessary to choose between the two approaches.

If we combine the two tacks, we might suggest a third, hybrid approach to this question. Ritva (49a, s.v. Amar Rabbah; see also Rashi, 53a, s.v. *be-sha'ah*) raises a contradiction between two statements of Rabbi Yohanan – in one he implies that God created these pipes, and in the other that David built them. The Ritva is open to the possibility that there is a dispute as to Rabbi Yohanan's position, but also proffers another answer: אי נמי שנבראו מששת ימי בראשית ונסתמו ובא דוד וכראן, "Alternatively, they were created during the six days of creation and were subsequently closed up; David then came and (re-)dug them." On this view neither human nor divine agency enjoys a monopoly on the creation of the altar. Both work together in partnership to accomplish the goal. Such a view might be supported from the point noted above that David's re-digging of the pipes almost led to disaster when he came into contact with the Depths, possibly the Depths that God had earlier connected to the altar pipes.

This concept of a joint human-divine effort holds great theological significance. It presumes that, when building the realm of holiness, neither a purely human nor a solely divine initiative is sufficient. Both parties must combine forces to create the idyllic House of God. Especially for constructing the altar pipes, the conduit connecting the human and the divine realm, it is essential that both parties participate in the process.

One might see this theme of joint human-divine action manifest more broadly in matters relating to holiness. As the Gemara explains (bNed 13a), although the firstborn animal is sanctified from the womb, there is nevertheless a commandment to sanctify it. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik develops this theme further, applying it in various places to the sanctification of Shabbat and to Jewish sanctity. Although Sabbath is sanctified by God, Jews are bidden to recite *Kiddush* and thus sanctify it once again; although Jews are chosen by God to be God's holy nation (Ex. 19:6), they are still charged with the task to make themselves holy by following religious and ethical guidelines (Lev. 19:2). [The former appears in the essay "*Kiddush* as Sanctifier of Shabbat" in

Shiurim li-Zekher Abba Mari and the latter point is implicit in several of Rabbi Soloveitchik's teachings.]

In so many areas of sanctity, an inherent aspect of holiness exists, but is only fully realized when tapped into by human action. Following the Ritva, we might say the same for the "nostrils" of the altar. A primordial divine creation, this connector between the holiest location on earth and the netherworlds must yet be uncovered by human agency in order to properly manifest its powers. And that may be why the Tosefta so cryptically stated that the pipes were created by "whoever built the Temple." More than any one party, it was the fusion of human and divine agency that combined to build this pipeline between the divine and human realms.

The road to the divine netherworld is paved with bilateral intentional actions.

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