

Parashat Terumah 5771, 2011:

The Mishkan: The Tent of Communion

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Dedicated to the sacred memory of my sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Sarah bat Rachel, Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, and Sheva bat Sarah Rivka.

I will arrange My meetings with you there, and I will speak with you from atop the ark cover from between the two cherubim that are upon the Ark of the Testimony, all that I will command you unto the children of Israel. (*Sefer Shemot* 25:22, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

There I will arrange meetings with the children of Israel, and it will be sanctified by My glory. (Ibid., 29:43, underlining my own)

The “there” referred to in these *pasukim* (verses) is the *Mishkan* (portable desert sanctuary). These two verses stipulate the place from which Hashem will communicate to Moshe (25:22) and the Jewish people (29:43) prior to the construction of the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) in Jerusalem. Within these verses, the Hebrew word “*v’noa’dati*” is translated and interpreted as “I will arrange My meetings.” Rashi (1040-1105), following in the footsteps of Onkelos (c.35-120 CE), utilizes this approach in both of his explications of our *pasukim*. This certainly is apropos, since the Torah frequently refers to the *Mishkan* as the “*Ohel Moed*,” which is most often translated as “the Tent of Meeting.”

Rabbeinu Saadiah Gaon (882-942) was the head of the world-renowned Sura Yeshivah in Babylonia. Among his countless talents and abilities was the art of Bible commentary. Throughout his works in this genre, Rav Saadiah repeatedly emphasized the need to interpret Biblical passages based upon the direct etymological meaning of their words. Using this approach as my guide, I decided to reexamine the translation of the word

“*v’noa’dati*.” It stems from the Hebrew infinitive “*l’da’at*,” which connotes “to know.” As such, this term encompasses all manner and variety of knowledge, including both intellectual and intimate understanding and communication, as depicted in the phrase: “Now the man knew (*v’haadam yada*) his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain...” (*Sefer Bereishit* 4:1).

Given the above, it seems that translating “*v’noa’dati*” as referring solely to arranging a meeting with the Almighty might very well ignore the underlying purpose of the *Mishkan*. In my estimation, this translation is far too utilitarian in nature. Instead, I believe that it should be interpreted to connote an intimate connection between G-d and Moshe in the first instance, and between G-d and the Jewish people in the second. Following this approach, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan *zatzal* (1934-1983), in his consummate translation of the Torah entitled, “*The Living Torah*,” translated “*v’noa’dati*” as “I will commune with you” in both of our passages. In doing so, he acted upon solid historical precedent, since he based himself upon the translation of “*v’noa’dati*” as “commune” as found in Rabbeinu Ibn Janach’s (990-1055) seminal work, “*Sefer HaShorashim*.” Therefore, our term means far more than to “arrange a meeting.” Instead, it denotes the highest sense of intimacy and communication between G-d and our people – a true communion of the spirit.

Further examination of our *pasukim* reveals a fascinating dissimilarity in the spelling of “*v’noa’dati*.” In our *parasha* (25:22), it appears in the complete form (*maleh*) with a *cholam* (the “oh” sound), whereas in Parashat Tetzaveh (29:43), it appears in the incomplete form (*chaser*) without a *cholam*. It should be noted that in both instances,

however, it is pronounced in the same manner. *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed Memory) often analyzed this kind of subtle grammatical difference, and thereby focused upon its inherent meaning. In light of this approach we may legitimately ask, “Why does “*v’noa’dati*” appear with these two different spellings?”

In my opinion, the Torah adopts these two spellings of “*v’noa’dati*” to reflect the two different subjects to whom the word is addressed. In our Torah portion, this word appears in the context of Hashem’s address to *Moshe Rabbeinu* (our teacher Moshe), whereas in Parashat Tetzaveh, it is found in the context of Hashem’s communication with the entire Jewish people. Moshe was different in kind and degree from any other Jew who had ever, or would ever, live. He, and he alone, was blessed with the ability to converse directly with the Almighty, “face to face.” As the Torah states: “And there was no other prophet who arose in Israel like Moses, whom the L-rd knew face to face.” (*Sefer Devarim* 34:10) As such, in reference to Moshe, “*v’noa’dati*” is spelled *maleh* to reflect his complete and total communion with the Master of the Universe. In stark contrast, even though each of us is blessed with the ability to relate to G-d through prayer and the performance of His commandments, this relationship pales in comparison to that which Moshe shared with the Creator. Thus, in my estimation, “*v’noa’dati*” is spelled *chaser* to symbolize G-d’s different and less lofty level of communication with the total nation.

While none of us will ever achieve the level of Moshe, we are nevertheless obligated to attempt to reach the highest heights we possibly can in our relationship with Hashem. Like all significant relationships in our lives, this requires an unswerving focus and active and consistent efforts in order to achieve our goals. The reward, however, is nothing less

than the ability to symbolically construct our own *Mishkan*, so that we, too, can commune with our Creator. May Hashem give us the wisdom, ability, and spiritual strength to do so. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past drashot may be found at my new website:

<http://reparashathashavuah.weebly.com/>

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added please do not hesitate to contact me via email at rdbe718@gmail.com.