

Spiritual Upgrades & Downgrades (*Pekudei*)

This Shabbat we read *Parshat Pekudei* which is the final *parasha* of *Sefer Shemot* and the last of the 5 *parashiot* focussing on the construction of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), while next week we will begin *Sefer Vayikra* whose first 5 *parashiot* focus on the sacrifices that were offered up in the *Mishkan*.

With this in mind, I would like to share a stunning insight penned by Rav Re'em HaCohen (*Badei Ha'Aron* pp. 460-463) on the transition between *Sefer Shemot* and *Sefer Vayikra*.

Rav HaCohen begins with *Parshat Pekudei*, and specifically, with two verses from the end of *Parshat Pekudei*:

‘And the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud rested upon it and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan’ (*Shemot* 40:34-35).

Here we read that once the *Mishkan* is complete, and before any sacrifice has been offered up therein, that it is filled with God's glory and covered with a cloud which then raises the *Mishkan* to such a high spiritual level that it becomes spiritually inaccessible to Moshe.

In contrast, *Vayikra* begins with the command:

‘And He called to Moshe, and the Lord spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying’ (*Vayikra* 1:1)

What this means is that, in contrast to what we read from *Parshat Pekudei*, Moshe is now able to access the *Mishkan*. But how is this so?

Basing himself on the Ramban (commentary to *Vayikra* 1:1) & the *Likutei Torah* (*Vayikra* 1), Rav HaCohen explains that when God called Moshe, He invested Moshe with a heightened level of spiritual energy on par with what he'd previously received while on Mount Sinai which thereby enabled Moshe to enter the *Mishkan*.

According to this approach, the end of *Sefer Shemot* depicts the high spiritual level of the *Mishkan*, while the beginning of *Sefer Vayikra* describes the solution which enabled Moshe to enter the *Mishkan* – namely his spiritual ‘call-up’ and his spiritual upgrade from God. On this basis, the sacrifices described in *Sefer Vayikra* were meant to achieve greater spiritual closeness to God.

However, Rav HaCohen then offers a radically different approach of interpreting *Sefer Vayikra* where, once the *Mishkan* was built, its high spiritual level needed to be reduced in order to enable Moshe and others to enter and serve therein. This reflects

the view of the Rambam that the sacrifices described in *Sefer Vayikra* were a concession to idolatrous tendencies.

According to the former, the transition from *Sefer Shemot* to *Sefer Vayikra* involved a spiritual upgrade of Moshe to be worthy to enter the *Mishkan*. According to the latter, the transition from *Sefer Shemot* to *Sefer Vayikra* involved a spiritual downgrade of the *Mishkan* in order to enable Moshe to enter.

Perhaps we may wonder why either of these options were necessary, and why Moshe was not able to immediately enter the *Mishkan* once it was complete?

While various commentaries have attempted to answer this question, I believe that this comes to show us that sometimes we need to upgrade ourselves to reach where we wish to go, while sometimes God chooses to show Divine grace by performing an act of *tzimtzum* (divine contraction) to enable us to enter His abode.

Whatever the case, we should understand and appreciate that Divine communion is a treasured gift, requiring spiritual movement by us and by God.

Shabbat Shalom