

Kol Nefesh Masorti Synagogue

Sedra T'rumah

(Exodus 25:1-27:9)

Robert Stone, 5 February 2022

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם:

And they shall make me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell among them (Ex. 25:2).

We're going to start, appropriately enough, by looking at the beginning of our Sedra, and particularly at the passages marked in blue:

שמות כה	Exodus 25
וַיְדַבֵּר יי אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:	¹ And the ETERNAL spoke to Moses, saying:
דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ-לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּבוּ לְבָבוֹ תִקְחוּ אֶת-תְּרוּמָתִי:	² Speak to the Children of Israel that they take Me a donation from every man, as his heart may urge him you shall take My donation.
זֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר תִקְחוּ מֵאֲתָם זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְנִחְשֵׁת:	³ And this is the donation that you shall take from them: gold and silver and bronze,
וּתְכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְעִזִּים:	⁴ and indigo and purple and crimson, and linen and goat hair;
וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאֻדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים וְעֵצֵי שִׁטִּים:	⁵ and reddened ram skins and ochre-dyed skins and acacia wood.
שָׁמֶן לַמָּאָר בְּשָׂמִים לְשֶׁמֶן הַמְּשֻׁחָה וְלִקְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים:	⁶ Oil for the lamp, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense.
אֲבִנֵי-שֵׁהָם וְאֲבִנֵי מְלֵאִים לְאַפָּד וְלִחְשׁוֹן:	⁷ Carnelian stones and stones for setting in the ephod and in the breastplate.
וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם:	⁸ And they shall make Me a Tabernacle that I may abide in their midst.

Translation: Based on Robert Alter¹

Let's look at three terms that that are particularly significant. :

- תְּרוּמָה, *terumah* – translated as a donation, a tribute or a contribution: it comes from the same root as להרים, *leharim*, to lift or to elevate and תְּרוּמָה means literally 'what is lifted'. This is the first time in Torah that the word תְּרוּמָה is used, and it occurs three times in quick succession in verses 2 and 3.

- אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לִבּוֹ, *asher yedavenu libnu*— which his heart shall urge him, which Everett Fox translates as ‘whose heart makes-him-willing’. It is from the root נָדַב, *nadav*, to decide voluntarily.
- And finally the last two words, וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם, *veshachanti b'tochem*. and I will dwell among them. It is often, rightly, pointed out the last word is בְּתוֹכְכֶם, so the meaning is, I will dwell among them, not בּוֹ, *bo*, in it, as one might expect. The word שָׁכַנְתִּי, I will dwell, is from the same root as שָׁכַן, *shachan*, neighbour. This is the very first time this word occurs in Torah, and it is of course the precursor of the word שְׁכִינָה, *Shechina*, the Presence of God.

Let's read a comment on these verses by Yehuda Halevi in *The Kuzari*, written about 900 years ago.

From Yehuda Halevi, *The Kuzari*

Soon after [the Tabernacle] was completed the Divine Presence encamped within it, because the construction fulfilled the two criteria which form the pillars of the Torah. The two criteria are: one, that the commandment must come from God, and two, that the commandment must be accepted by the community wholeheartedly. The Tabernacle [fulfilled these two criteria, in that] it was commanded by God and it was constructed by the entire community, as it says, ‘[from every person whose heart inspires him to give.](#)’ It was done with the community’s complete desire and will, and the resulting resting of the Divine Presence was therefore completely appropriate, as it says, ‘[they shall make for me a Tabernacle, and I will rest in their midst.](#)’ (Third Essay, 23.3)

Translation by N Daniel Korobkin²

In this passage, Halevi seems to want to have it both ways: at the beginning he writes about the שְׁכִינָה, the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence, residing in the מִשְׁכַּן, the *Mishkan* [Tabernacle of Sanctuary]; and then at the end he writes about the שְׁכִינָה dwelling amongst the people. The passage is significant because it is part of a process by which Halevi, like Bahya ibn Paquida and other medieval Andalusian philosophers, introduced new concepts into Judaism, concepts that draw directly and explicitly from Sufi mystics like Ibn Sina and al Ghazzali, as we shall see.

In the Torah before the beginning of Terumah, the relationship of human beings with God is rather one sided: God tells people what to do, and they do it, or God punishes them if they don't. That is the relationship, for example, between God and Adam, and Cain, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses. Two weeks ago, we read Yithro, when Mount Sinai was all in smoke and the mountain trembled and the horn blared and God spoke in thunder, and God gave the Children of Israel the Ten Commandments. Last week, we read Mishpatim, a compendium of laws laid down by God.

Now, suddenly, we have a different relationship. We are to make an offering as our heart inclines us to do, and use it to build a Sanctuary, so that God can dwell among us. Bahya ibn Paquida spoke Arabic as his first language and wrote *Duties of the Heart* in Arabic. Yehuda Halevi also spoke Arabic as his first language and wrote *The Kuzari* in Arabic. In doing so, they both adopted Sufi terms for the relationship with God, terms like *ijtihad*, the striving of human beings to achieve *wusul*, union with God, and *mushahada*, direct experience of God. The relationship with God was thus a two-way experience, notwithstanding the greatness and transcendence of God.³

This is one of the reasons why Halevi is sometimes called ‘the father of Kabbalah.’ The great historian of Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem, wrote, ‘In my opinion, there is a direct connection

between Jehudah Halevi, the most Jewish of Jewish philosophers, and the Kabbalists. For the legitimate trustees of his spiritual heritage have been the mystics, and not the succeeding generations of Jewish philosophers.⁴

This was also the stance with Halevi took in his Hebrew poetry, as in this poem:

**From Yehuda Halevi,
?אָנָה אָמְצָאָךְ? 'Where can I find you?'**

מְקוֹמְךָ נִעְלָה וְנִעְלָם.	יְהִי אָנָה אָמְצָאָךְ?
כְּבוֹדְךָ מְלֵא עוֹלָם.	וְאָנָה לֹא אָמְצָאָךְ?

....

בְּכֹל לְבִי קָרָתִיךָ,	דָּרָשְׁתִּי קִרְבְּתְךָ
לְקִרְאתִי מְצָאתִיךָ,	וּבְצִאתִי לְקִרְאתְךָ

....

Where can I find You, God?
But where can I not find You?

Your place is high and hidden/
Your glory fills the world!

....

I longed to be near You,
Went out to seek You,

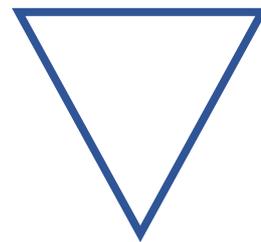
I called You sincerely,
and found You *me* seeking!

Translation based on Raymond P. Scheindlin⁵

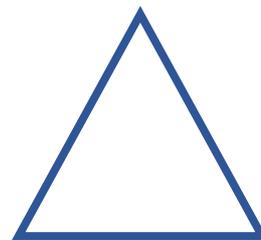
Note the chiasmus in the fourth line, which is particularly beautiful in the Hebrew. Raymond Scheindlin says that this line, literally rendered, means ‘When I went out to greet You, to greet me I found You.’⁶

Many years ago at Limmud I learnt a particularly striking illustration of this mutuality from a student rabbi. Unfortunately, I cannot remember his name, or who the source was that he cited for this illustration, which is rather anachronistic in our case, but which still appeals to me.

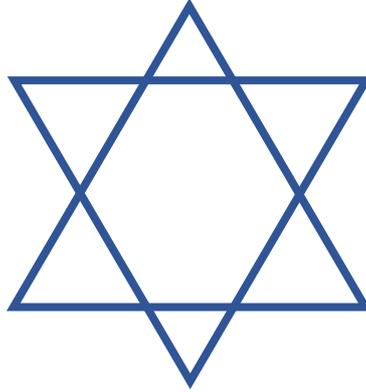
He said that the first relationship, God reaching down to human beings, might be shown thus:



While the second, people reaching up to seek God, might be shown thus:



Put the two together, and what you get is this:



Notes

¹ Translations of Torah based on Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary by Robert Alter* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2019)

² Yehuda Halevi, *The Kuzari: In Defense of the Despised Faith* translated and annotated by N. Daniel Korobkin (Jason Aaronson, 1998)

³ See, especially, Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Halevi's Kuzari* (State University of New York Press, 2000). In my citation above, however, I have referred to the Hebrew equivalents of Arabic terms, from the translation of *The Kuzari* into Hebrew by Yehuda Ibn Tibbon in 1167, 26 years after Yehuda Halevi's death.

⁴ Gershon Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken Books, 1945/1995)

⁵ Raymond P. Scheindlin, *The Song of the Distant Dove: Judah Halevi's Last Pilgrimage* (Oxford University Press, 2008)

⁶ Ibid.