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YESHIVAT MIGDAL HATORAH, MODI'IN



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**Rabbi Dr. Dvir
Ginsberg**
Rosh HaYeshiva

Not Quite Open for Business

The buildup to the grand finale – that's the best way to sum up much of the content of Parshat Pikudei. The Torah reviews in detail the final phase of construction and assemblage, ending with the *Mishkan* being open for business, so to speak. And at that moment where it should open, the Torah tells us the doors would remain shut.

First the completion (Shemot 40:33): *"He set up the enclosure around the mishkan and the altar, and put up the screen at the*

enclosure's entrance, and thus Moshe completed the work."

The Torah then reports (ibid 34-35):

"The cloud (anan) covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory (kavod) of Hashem filled the mishkan. Moshe was unable to enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud rested on it, and the glory of Hashem filled the mishkan."

It seems there were two distinct "manifestations" of the presence of Hashem. The cloud covered over the *Mishkan* entirely, while the *kavod Hashem*, contained within the cloud, filled the *Mishkan*. What was this *kavod Hashem*?

The Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 1:64)

explains that the term “*kavod Hashem*” when applied to the *Mishkan* referred to a light created by Hashem to delineate the importance of the place. We see this at Har Sinai. The *kavod Hashem* rested on Har Sinai, with the cloud enveloping it for six days. On the seventh day, Hashem called out to Moshe to enter the cloud. Taking the Rambam’s interpretation, this would mean the cloud covered the mountain and the light emanated from within.

The Talmud (Yoma 4b) notes an apparent contradiction regarding access to the cloud. On the one hand, we see that Moshe was unable to enter the *Mishkan* due to the presence of the cloud. Yet at Har Sinai, Moshe is able to walk right in. The simple answer offered is that Hashem’s intervention allowed Moshe to enter. Why was Moshe restricted?

A cloud and a light are ideal representations of Hashem. They both are observable in the physical world yet lack any tangibility – nobody can “touch” light or “feel” a cloud. Hashem is not physical, so there is no means of empirically representing Him. Yet there are times when God

chooses to reveal Himself to the nation, and we need a means of identifying God’s presence. We have what is observable and intangible.

Yet there is a difference. One can see a cloud – yet one cannot see through it. On the other hand, light serves to illuminate, aiding our vision. We are left with two representations that function dissimilarly.

How can we explain the dichotomy? It is possible the at-odds characteristics teach us a crucial formula in how to approach

learning about God. A freshman in college, taking his first class, would naturally approach the subject matter without any intellectual restrictions. His goal would be mastering the area, and he would not have any sense of limitation in his pursuit. Studying the wisdom of God requires a much different approach. A fundamental

premise due to being a human, there is no potential for mastery. This does not mean we cannot appreciate and gain insight into Hashem’s wisdom. When we study the universe around us, from vast galaxies to the subatomic world, the very analysis



is a study of that which God created. Ultimately, there is no finality to this pursuit.

On the other hand, there is the definitive knowledge we have of His existence, the reality that is the cornerstone of our faith. While we may not be able to perceive Him, we know Him to be true.

This could very well be the tie in between the cloud and the light. When these manifestations take place, they serve as vehicles to engage in the study of God. The cloud obscured the *Mishkan* from clear view – indicating that there were inherent limitations preventing the complete understanding of God and His relationship with Bnei Yisrael. On the other hand, there was the light inside, signaling the reality of God's existence. We can never see the light

directly – just like we can never have any positive knowledge of Hashem.

This would also help clarify the answer offered in the Talmud. While Moshe Rabbeinu was the greatest human to walk the earth, he was bound by the same limitations as any person. To allow Moshe to “walk in” to the cloud would imply that man has the capability to penetrate the depths of God's wisdom. God brings Moshe into the cloud – and in doing so relays the message that it was only with God's assistance that a human was capable of entering into this realm of knowledge.

Yes, the **physical** structure of *mishkan* indeed was completed. Yet without the proper approach, demonstrated through the idea of the cloud and the light, it was conceptually inaccessible. ■



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