

Do We Interpret the Torah Literally? (Part 1)

PARSHA INSIGHTS - TZAV (5758)

DID MOSHE AND AHARON NOT BUDGE FROM THE MISHKAN FOR A WEEK?

A BRIEF CALENDAR REFRESHER: To put matters into chronological perspective, let us review six significant dates in order. *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel] had reached *Midbar Sinai* [the wilderness of Sinai], our first major destination after leaving Egypt, on *Rosh Chodesh* [first of the month of] *Sivan, 2448* (*Yisro* 19:1 with *Rashi*). The receiving of the Torah was on *Sivan 6, 2448*, or *Sivan 7* according to R. Yosi (*Yisro* 19:15 with *Rashi - Gemara Shabbos* 87A). The golden calf was worshipped and the *luchos* [tablets] shattered forty days after, on *Tamuz 17, 2448* (*Rashi Yisro* 18:13, *Ki Sisa* 32:1). More than eighty days later, on *Tishrai 11, 2449*, the day following *Yom Kippur*, Moshe advised *Bnai Yisroel* regarding the construction of the *Mishkan* [Tabernacle] (*Rashi Vayakhel* 35:1). The components of the *Mishkan* were finished being built on *Kislev 25, 2449*, but the structure was not actually set up and dedicated until *Rosh Chodesh Nissan, 2449* (R. Chanina in *Yalkut Shimoni Melachim* 184). We will now see that the *Miluim* [inauguration of the priests] ceremony began EIGHT DAYS BEFORE THIS *ROSH CHODESH NISSAN*.

A major segment of today's *parsha* [Torah portion] is devoted to *Miluim*, the inauguration of the *kohanim* [priests] to serve in the *Mishkan*. "It is taught in *Seder Olam* that the consecration of the *kohanim - Miluim* - began on *Adar 23* (2449). All seven days (of the ritual), Moshe would erect the *Mishkan*, offer his *korbonos* [sacrifices] each morning, and he would disassemble it. On the eighth day, he set it up but did not take it down. That (eighth day, the famous 'Yom Hashmini') was *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*" (*Rashi on Zevachim* 101B). We now know the time frame for *Miluim*. We will see later that the *Talmud Yerushalmi* has different opinions concerning when and how many times each day Moshe would set up the *Mishkan* during this week. Incidentally, Moshe's assignment during these days was to train Aharon and his sons to perform the *avodah* [service] properly.

Where were Moshe, Aharon, and his sons during the seven days of *Miluim*? One would assume that they spent a great deal of time in the vicinity of the most sacred part of the *Mishkan*, the *Ohel Moed* [Tent of Meeting]. "Do not leave the *Ohel Moed* entrance for seven days, until the concluding day of the days of your inauguration..." (our *parsha*, 8:33). This seems to say that Moshe, Aharon, and his sons had to remain right near the *Mishkan* CONSTANTLY during their instillation into the Divine service.

Was it really true that these people did not budge at all from that limited area for a full week plus more? Did they literally "camp out" by the *Ohel Moed*? Keep in mind that the *Mishkan* was not even in its erect state for the entire seven-day period, since Moshe was building and dismantling it. Let us check the *Talmud Yerushalmi* in *Yoma* 1:1 for some information. This *Yerushalmi* is cited as a major source for this discussion, so we will delve into it in some detail. For the sake of clarity, we will incorporate the words of the *Korban Aida*, a premier commentary on the *Yerushalmi*, into our statements.

Regarding the *Miluim* participants taking up residence at the door of the *Ohel Moed*, the *Yerushalmi* first examines two *psukim* [verses]. We already saw the first one before: "Do not leave the *Ohel Moed* entrance for seven days..." (8:33). The second one is 8:35: "At the *Ohel Moed* entrance you shall reside day and night for seven days..." It appears plain and simple, but it is not. You will now be reminded that the Written Torah and Oral Torah are inseparable; the only way to get the true meaning of *Torah Shebiksav* [Written Torah] is through *Torah Sheb'al Peh* [Oral Torah]. No, the people did not need to remain at the Tent of Meeting ceaselessly, the way one would understand the *psukim* on the surface. The Tent of Meeting did not even remain built for the whole week!

The above mentioned *Talmud Yerushalmi* explains that the second *pasuk* [verse] defines the first one. When the Torah says not to leave the *Ohel Moed* for seven days, it in fact means that for seven days, **while the *Mishkan* was erected and the *avodah* was being done**, the participants needed to be at the Tent. This is true because the second *pasuk* declares "DAY AND NIGHT", a term used elsewhere to mean THE LATTER PART OF THE DAY AND INTO A PORTION OF THE NIGHT. Consequently, "they were NOT dwelling by the door of the *Ohel Moed* all day and night" (*Korban Aida*). He goes on to point out that they would arrive at the end of the day and stay there for the rest of the day and part of the night. The *Oznaim L'Torah* on 8:33, commenting directly on the *Yerushalmi*, phrases it in the following way: "While the *Mishkan* was disassembled - we know that every day

Moshe would put it up and take it apart - THERE WAS NO 'DOOR OF THE TENT OF MEETING', so they were allowed to go home." This is the meaning of "day and night" - the day would lead into the night. In other words, the *Mishkan* would be standing at the end of the day into part of the night. There is an opinion in the *Yerushalmi* that the night should lead into the day as well, meaning that the *Mishkan* was to be erected a second time within each twenty four hour period - at the end of the night and into the early part of the day. If so, they would need to be present at that time also.

In summary, the term "day and night" is not to be read hastily and interpreted carelessly. Rather, the day was to turn into night with the *Mishkan* erect and the inaugurees present, practicing their *avodah*. **This could have been a relatively short time.** This authentic approach also elucidates the first *pasuk* (8:33) about not leaving the door of the *Ohel Moed* for seven days. As long as there WAS an entrance there, each time the *Mishkan* was erect, Moshe and the *kohanim* did not depart.

The *Oznaim L'Torah* remarks that this whole *pshat* [plain meaning] takes care of another problem. If they had been told to spend an entire week there, including all night every night, they would obviously have to sleep there. Isn't it true that it is forbidden to even sit down in the holy courtyard of the *Mishkan* or *Bais Hamikdosh* [Temple]? How could they sleep there? Rav Sorotzkin says that he had seen this question raised, but it is not a puzzle at all. As we have shown, they did not stay there for seven days straight. They returned home at intervals, when the *Mishkan* was in its dismantled state. They surely slept at home.

Is this the end of the story? Absolutely not! We have seen the *Talmud Yerushalmi* so far. What about the *Talmud Bavli*? It addresses the matter in the midst of another discussion. *Succah* 43A at the bottom says clearly that by *Miluim*, they were at the *Ohel Moed* ALL DAY. *Rashi* explains that they did not leave at all! *Tosfos* at the top of *Succah* 43B does point out that they could not **sleep** there. The *Mishkan* courtyard was like the courtyard of the *Bais Hamikdosh*, where no one was permitted even to sit down, except kings descended from Dovid's royal family (*Sotah* 41B near the top).

In short, the *Bavli* holds they remained there constantly; *Tosfos* clarifies that they just slept elsewhere. The *Yerushalmi's* position is that they spent the end of the day and beginning of the night there, plus the end of the night and beginning of the day according to one opinion. **We will continue this topic in the next lesson, on *Parshas Shmini, b'ezras Hashem*** [with G-d's help].

☞ Copies of the essay are available by clicking the following link, or online at TorahMax.com under: "Sefer Vayikra", "Parshas Shmini", "[Do We Interpret the Torah Literally? \(Part 2\)](#)"- R. Moshe Heigh.

Have a joyous *Pesach* [Passover], and join us again after *Yom Tov* [the holiday]!

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