

Title: The Purpose of the *Beis HaMikdash*

Note: Following is a beta version translated by Sichos In English. Final version to follow later this week. In this version, explanatory words are interpolated into the text in brackets.

Defining the *Mitzvah* of Building the *Beis HaMikdash*

1. From the verse in this week's Torah reading, "They will make a Sanctuary for Me,"¹ *Rambam* derives² that there is a positive commandment: INDENT

that we have been commanded to build [G-d's] Chosen House for sacrificial service. In it, that sacrifices should be offered [there], there be a fire continually burning there, and to there will [the people] journey and ascend on the pilgrimage festivals. [This command] was communicated in the verse, "They will make a Sanctuary for Me"³.... This general [command] includes [fashioning] many [specific] types [of articles,] the *Menorah*, the Table, the Altar, and other [sacred utensils (*keilim*).] They are all elements of the Sanctuary and they are all called the Sanctuary. A separate command was given [to make] each element.

Thus, according to *Rambam*, there is not a distinct *mitzvah* to make [each] of the *keilim* in the Sanctuary. [Although the Torah mentions a Divine command to make the different *keilim*,⁴ fashioning each of them is not considered as an independent *mitzvah*. Instead, crafting all of them] was included as an element of the *mitzvah* to build the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Ramban differs with him, writing:⁵

The rationale given by the master [why the fashioning of the *keilim* was not considered separate *mitzvos* –] that they are all [integral] elements of the Sanctuary – is not suitable in my eyes. [I do not accept that explanation] because *keilim* are not parts of buildings. Instead, they are two *mitzvos* and one is not dependent on the other. [Sacrifices] may be offered in the *Beis HaMikdash* even though it lacks these *keilim*.... Accordingly, I

¹. *Shmos* 25:8.

². *Sefer HaMitzvos*, positive commandment 20. See General Principle 12 in that text; *Rambam*, *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* 1:2; *Sefer HaChimuch*, *mitzvah* 95.

³. See *Kessef Mishneh* to *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*, *loc. cit.*

⁴. [The term *k'li*, pl. *keilim*, is a term that has multiple meanings, including container, implement, article, garment, etc. In the present context, it is used to refer to the components of the Sanctuary that served a specific function and purpose.

See *Shmos* 25:10 with regard to the command to fashion the Ark, *ibid.* 25:23, with regard to the command to fashion the Table, *ibid.* 25:31, with regard to the command to fashion the *Menorah*, etc.]

⁵. *Hasagos* to *Sefer HaMitzvos*, positive commandment 33.

maintain that fashioning the Ark and its cover in which to place the [Tablets of] Testimony should be considered an independent *mitzvah*.

[However,] *Ramban* does not consider fashioning each [of the *keilim*] – the Table, the Altar, and the *Menorah* – as independent *mitzvos*, because [fashioning them is included in the *mitzvah* governing their performance,] as he explicitly [writes:]

We were commanded to place the showbread before G-d at all times, and He commanded us to make possible this service, placing this [bread] on a Table described [as commanded in the Torah] and arranging kindling in a Golden *Menorah* of such-and-such weight and such-and-such a design. These [*keilim*] are considered as sacred articles.⁶

Is Fashioning the *Keilim* a Separate *Mitzvah*

2. In resolution of *Rambam's* understanding [of why fashioning the *keilim* are not considered as separate *mitzvos*, *Megilas Esther* writes:⁷ INDENT

Even though [the absence of the *keilim*] does not invalidate the sacrificial service in the *Beis HaMikdash*, this does not prevent [the *keilim*] from [deemed] being elements of [the *Beis HaMikdash*,] for there are many entities [whose absence] does not invalidate [the presence of] another entity [and yet] they are [both] elements [of a greater whole,] for example, [the absence of] the sky-blue (*techeiles*) cords do not invalidate the presence of the white cords, nor [do the absence of the white cords invalidate the presence of the sky-blue cords. Yet] they are each elements of the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*. END INDENT

Nevertheless, this explanation is not entirely sufficient, for (as other texts have mentioned),⁸ [citing] the instance of the sky-blue and white cords as support is not appropriate in this instance, because *Rambam* himself writes with regard to the sky-blue and white cords not invalidating each other:⁹ INDENT

⁶. [According to *Ramban*, fashioning the Table, the Altar, and the other *keilim* of the *Beis HaMikdash* can be compared to building a *sukkah*. In that instance, the construction of the *sukkah* is considered as a preparatory act that enables the *mitzvah* of dwelling in the *sukkah* to be fulfilled. See sec. 641:1, where the Alter Rebbe writes: “{The rationale is} that constructing the *sukkah* is not the consummation of the *mitzvah*, for the core of the *mitzvah* is to dwell in {the *sukkah*} during the festival.” This is implied by the term *tashmishei kedushah*, articles used for a sacred purpose.] MAKE BRACES BRACKETS

⁷. A similar explanation is given by *Minchas Chinuch* (*mitzvah* 95), which states: “In truth, there are many laws whose lack of fulfillment do not invalidate a *mitzvah*. Thus, it is possible that there are elements of a *mitzvah* [whose absence] does not invalidate it.” Nevertheless, [*Minchas Chinuch*] does not offer this explanation regarding *Rambam's* [conception of the *mitzvah* of building the *Beis HaMikdash*. Instead, that text states] that logic dictates that [fashioning] these *keilim* is not an element of the *mitzvah* of building the Sanctuary, but rather (as *Ramban* writes), [“Fashioning] the *Menorah* is an element of the *mitzvah* of kindling the lights.” Consult that text.

⁸. See the explanations of Rav Yehudah Yerucham Fishel Perlow to Rav Saadia *Gaon's Sefer HaMitzvos, parshah* 52. (He does not mention [the statement of] *Rambam* cited later in the main text.)

⁹. *Sefer HaMitzvos*, General Principle 11; see positive *mitzvah* 14.

When [a *mitzvah* has two elements] and [the absence of] one does not invalidate the other, one might think... that each element is a distinct *mitzvah*. [For example,] with regard to the sky-blue and white cords..., were there not to be an explicit statement, “and they will be *tzitzis* for you,”¹⁰ [indicating] that they are one *mitzvah*, [one would think that they were separate *mitzvos*. This shows] that even when [the absence of] one element does not invalidate the other, it is possible they will be considered as one *mitzvah* when there is one subject.” END INDENT

If so, with regard to the *Beis* [*HaMikdash*] and the *keilim*, since there is no explicit statement that they are one subject and they are distinct entities – [indeed,] to a greater degree than the sky-blue and white cords – they should be considered as separate *mitzvos* since the absence of one does not invalidate the other.

The above applies according to those who maintain that *Rambam* [follows the] approach that the absence of the *keilim* does not invalidate the *Beis* [*HaMikdash*.] There are, however, commentaries¹¹ who maintain that *Rambam* [follows the] approach that *keilim* are an [integral and] indispensable element of the *Beis HaMikdash*. Without them, [the complex as a whole,] is not considered as a [*Beis Ha*] *Mikdash* and their absence precludes the offering of sacrifices in it.

There are commentaries¹² who added [to the above,] explaining that the source for the difference of opinion between *Rambam* and *Ramban* is a difference of opinion between the Sages of the *Mishnah* in Tractate *Shekalim*:¹³ INDENT NEXT

[““The absence of] the Table, the *Menorah*, the Altars, and the Curtain [Separating between the Sanctuary and the Holy of Holies] preclude the offering of the sacrifices,” these are the words of Rabbi Meir. The Sages maintain, ‘There is nothing [whose absence] precludes the offering of the sacrifices except the basin and its base.”” END

[These commentaries maintain that] *Rambam* follows the approach of Rabbi Meir [and maintains that the absence of] the *keilim* precludes the offering of the sacrifices, [leading to the conclusion] that they are “all [integral] elements of the Sanctuary,” because [the Sanctuary] includes the structure and the *keilim* as one. *Ramban*, by contrast, follows the approach of the Sages [and maintains that the absence of] the *keilim* does not preclude the offering of the sacrifices, [leading to the conclusion] that “the *keilim* are not parts of buildings.”¹⁴

However, there are also difficulties according to this [explanation:]

¹⁰. [*Bamidbar* 15:39.]

¹¹. *Lev Sameach, shorsh* 12.

¹². See *Tzafnas Panei'ach al HaRambam* at the beginning of the reckoning of the *mitzvos*, *mitzvah* 20; *Mahadura Tanaina*, p. 73; quoted in *Tzafnas Panei'ach al HaTorah, Shmos*, p. 144; *VeEschanan*, p. 30; see pp. 29-30 in that source. See the sources cited in footnote 39 below.

¹³. *Shekalim* 4:2.

¹⁴. In the words of *Tzafnas Panei'ach, Mahadura Tanaina*, [the difference of opinion centers on whether] “The Sanctuary and its *keilim* are a single entity with many details or each entity is a distinct unit.”

a) It would follow that *Rambam* is ruling according to Rabbi Meir who is a lone authority when the Sages differ with him.

b) More fundamentally, *Rambam* rules¹⁵ that “All the sacrifices should be offered [on the site of the *Beis HaMikdash*] even though the building is not standing.”¹⁶ Since the *Beis HaMikdash* is not standing, the *keilim* are not situated in their places in the [*Beis Ha*]Mikdash. This demonstrates that *Rambam* does not maintain that the absence of the Table, the *Menorah*, etc. preclude the offering of the sacrifices.

Is Fashioning the Ark a *Mitzvah*?

3. Another point requires clarification: At the beginning of this week’s Torah reading, *Ramban* explains the reason [why,] in this Torah reading, the command to fashion the Ark and its covering were issued before the command [to fashion] the other *keilim*:¹⁷

[G-d’s] primary desire in [the construction of] the Sanctuary was for the place where the Divine presence would rest, i.e., the Ark, as it is written,¹⁸ “I will commune with you there and I will speak to you from above the cover.” Therefore, [G-d] mentioned the Ark and its covering first here, because it is most prominent. END INDENT

[On the surface,] there is a difficulty: In [the passage from his commentary to] *Sefer HaMitzvos* [cited above,] *Ramban* writes that the fashioning of the Ark should be counted as a *mitzvah* in its own right and is not included in the *mitzvah* of building the [*Beis Ha*]Mikdash.¹⁹ [How can this be?] He maintains that “[G-d’s] primary desire in [the

¹⁵. *Rambam, Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* 6:15.

¹⁶. See *Meiri to Shekalim, loc. cit.*, who explains that the reason [“the absence of] all [the *keilim*] does not preclude offering the sacrifices is because the sacrifices should be offered even though the building is not standing.”

¹⁷. [*Ramban, Shmos* 25:1.] See also his commentary to *Devarim* 10:5.

¹⁸. *Shmos* 25:22.

¹⁹. According to *Rambam*, [Rav Yehudah Rosanes] writes in his [commentary to] *Sefer HaMitzvos* entitled *Derech Mitzvosecha* (Vol. 1, *Ramban’s mitzvah* 18), that *Rambam* did not count fashioning the Ark [as a *mitzvah* because it is an element of the *mitzvah* of building the *Beis HaMikdash*. *Kin’as Sofrim*, positive commandment 33, offers a similar interpretation. *Minchas Chinuch, loc. cit.*, writes: “[The absence of] the Ark does not invalidate [the *Beis HaMikdash*.] Although [*Rambam*] considers [building] the Ark as one of the laws [fundamental to the *Beis HaMikdash*,] there are nevertheless, many laws concerning this *mitzvah* [whose lack of fulfillment] does not invalidate that structure.” [*Minchas Chinuch* considers the question] why *Rambam* does not detail the laws of fashioning the Ark.

Megilas Esther writes that [*Rambam*] did not count fashioning the Ark as a *mitzvah* “because it is not a *mitzvah* observed for posterity since there was never a need to make another Ark.” Rav Yehudah Yerucham Fishel Perlow (*loc. cit.*) questions his explanation. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 4, p. 1346, footnote 26, [which focuses on this question.]

Note that in his General Principle 12, [*Rambam* writes that when the performance of a *mitzvah* involves many details, performing those details should not be considered as separate *mitzvos* even when the Torah explicitly commands that they be performed. As an example, he cites the

construction of] the Sanctuary was for... the Ark.” [Since *Ramban* maintains that the fundamental purpose of the Sanctuary is the Ark, seemingly, its construction should not be deemed a separate *mitzvah*.]

A Blessing for the *Kohanim*

4. All of the above can be clarified by first explaining the conclusion of Tractate *Middos*. This tractate focuses on “the measures, design, and building of the [*Beis Ha*]Mikdash and everything concerning it.”²⁰ [That tractate concludes:] INDENT

The Chamber of Hewn Stone: There, Israel’s Great *Sanhedrin* would hold sessions and judge the *kohanim*.²¹ When a *Kohen*... was not disqualified, he would wear white garments, robe himself in white, enter [the *Beis HaMikdash*,] and serve with his priestly brethren. A festive day would be celebrated²² that a disqualifying factor was not discovered among the descendants of Aharon *HaKohen*. They would make the following statement:

“Blessed be the Omnipresent, blessed be He, that a disqualifying factor was not found among the descendants of Aharon. Blessed be He Who chose Aharon and his sons to stand and serve before G-d in the House [that is] Holy of Holies.” END INDENT

There are several points that [require] clarification:

a) [The *kohanim*] would first say: “Blessed be the Omnipresent... that a disqualifying factor was not found among the descendants of Aharon,” and then “Blessed be He Who chose Aharon and his sons...” Seemingly, the opposite order would have been more appropriate because the praise for the specific fact, “Blessed be the Omnipresent... that a disqualifying factor was not found among the descendants of Aharon,” is relevant only after [G-d’s having] chosen “Aharon and his sons to stand and serve before G-d.”

b) The second blessing [praising G-d for] choosing “Aharon and his sons to stand and serve... in the House [that is] Holy of Holies” requires explanation. The *Kohen Gadol* served [in the Holy of Holies] only once a year, on Yom Kippur. However, [G-d’s] choice of

commandment to build the *Beis HaMikdash* and explains,] “It is not fitting to considered [the fashioning of] all [its elements] as distinct *mitzvos* even though [the Torah explicitly] states וַעֲשֶׂה, ‘and you shall make,’ [regarding that particular element.” [The fashioning of] the Ark [should not be considered an exception to this principle even though concerning it, the Torah] states (*Shmos* 25:10), וַעֲשֶׂה, “they shall make.” [When stating this general principle, *Rambam*] used a common verb form. It was not necessary for him to state all the other conjugations of the verb. [In conveying the latter point, the Rebbe employed] a Talmudic idiom found in *Gittin* 33a, *et al*.

²⁰. *Rambam*’s Preface to his Commentary on the *Mishnah*, cited and explained by *Tosfos Yom Tov* in his introduction to Tractate *Middos*.

²¹. In *Hilchos Bi’as HaMikdash* 6:11, *Rambam* writes: “The High Court would sit... and judge the *kohanim*, e.g., examining the lineage of the priests and [inspecting] their physical blemishes.”

²². *Tosfos Yom Tov* (at the conclusion of his commentary to this tractate) [explains:] “Those who were not disqualified would each call to their friends and associates who would rejoice with him. They would also offer thanks and praise to G-d.” See [also the glosses of] *Tiferes Yisrael* and *Ezras Kohanim* to the conclusion of the tractate.

Aharon and his descendants to serve as *kohanim* included all the priestly service [that was carried out] in the entire *Beis HaMikdash* throughout the year. Why did the blessing not refer to all those aspects of service?

In his *Chiddushei Aggados*, [Maharsha explains:] INDENT

They would say, “Blessed be the Omnipresent, blessed be He, that a disqualifying factor was not found among the descendants...” referring to an ordinary *kohen*. “Blessed be He Who chose Aharon and his sons” who are exclusively selected from among the *kohanim* to enter and “serve before G-d in the House [that is] Holy of Holies” on Yom Kippur – this refers to Aharon and his sons, [i.e., the *Kohanim Gedolim*.] END INDENT

Nevertheless, according to his understanding, there is still a need for explanation. Firstly, one of the points mentioned above still requires explanation: Why did ordinary *kohanim* not bless [G-d] for choosing them [to serve? They could have been] included in the blessing, [praising G-d] for [choosing] the *Kohen Gadol* or a special blessing [could have been ordained] for them. Conversely, the difficulty arises: Just as a blessing [was ordained] that “a disqualifying factor was not found among the descendants of Aharon” for an ordinary *kohen*, seemingly, it would have been appropriate to bless G-d [either in the same blessing or in a different one] that a disqualifying factor was not found in Aharon or the [later] *Kohanim Gedolim*.

There are commentaries²³ who explain that the term “the House [that is] Holy of Holies” used here refers to the *Beis HaMikdash* as a whole which is holier than other holy places.²⁴ [This interpretation is] relates to the teaching in ch. 1²⁵ of Tractate *Keilim*: “There are ten [levels] of sanctity. *Eretz Yisrael* is more sanctified than all other lands.... Walled cities [in *Eretz Yisrael*] are more sanctified...” Since the *Beis HaMikdash* is holier than other places, it is called “Holy of Holies,” i.e., the holiest of the holy places.

Nevertheless, this interpretation requires further analysis. [Firstly, that chapter] in Tractate *Keilim* mentions several different levels [of holiness] in the *Beis HaMikdash* itself. Only one of them is described as “Holy of Holies.” Moreover, Tractate *Middos* [– whose conclusion is being discussed –] mentions the term “Holy of Holies” in reference to the chamber of that name, delineating its measurements in contrast to those of the Holy Chamber (קדש).²⁶ Moreover, [that tractate] explicitly mentions²⁷ [making a distinction] “between the Holy Chamber and the Holy of Holies.” How could it be that the definition of the term “Holy of Holies” changes [from one place] in the tractate to its conclusion?

True, with difficulty, one could answer that [the earlier *mishnah* speaks of קדש הקדשים, “the Holy of Holies,” while the conclusion] speaks of בית קדש הקדשים, “the house [that is] Holy

²³. See *Biurei HaGra* to that source.

²⁴. Note *I Divrei HaYomim* 23:13, [which states,] “The sons of Amram: Moshe and Aharon. Aharon was distinguished to sanctify him as holy of holies, he and his descendants.” Thus, the term “holy of holies” is used to refer to all *kohanim*.

²⁵. *Keilim* 1:6ff.

²⁶. *Middos* 4:7.

²⁷. *Ibid.* 4:5.

of Holies,” [and that term could be understood as referring to the *Beis HaMikdash* as a whole. However, a more satisfying resolution would be desirable.]

Defining What is of Primary Importance

5. To explain all the above: The Sanctuary and the *Beis HaMikdash* served two general purposes:²⁸

a) To quote *Ramban's* [commentary] cited above, [that there should be] “a House... sanctified unto His name... [from which] He will command the Children of Israel.” Accordingly, “[G-d’s] primary desire in [the construction of] the Sanctuary was for the place where the Divine presence would rest,” the Ark [from which] He would communicate [with the Jewish people.] This purpose is reflected by the conclusion of the verse cited by *Rambam* as the proof-text for the positive commandment to build [G-d’s] Chosen House, “They will make a Sanctuary for Me and *I will dwell among them.*” Similarly, [Psalms]²⁹ explicitly states with regard to the *Beis HaMikdash*, “This is My resting place forever; here I shall dwell for I desired it.” The fundamental resting place for the Divine presence was in the Holy of Holies.³⁰

b) The service – primarily the sacrificial worship – carried out in these structures and [the people’s] ascent to them on the three pilgrimage festivals.

This constitutes the difference of opinion between *Rambam* and *Ramban*: Which of these two [purposes] is of primary importance in G-d’s command to build the *Beis HaMikdash*?³¹ Their difference of opinion regarding the commandment to fashion [the Ark and] the other *keilim* in the *Beis HaMikdash* stems from this fundamental difference of opinion: [Which of the purposes of the *Beis HaMikdash* deserves prominence?]

According to *Rambam*, the ultimate purpose of building the [*Beis Ha*]Mikdash is for the sake of offering sacrifices there. (This includes all the services performed by the *kohanim*, the most fundamental of [those services being the offering of the sacrifices].)³² As he writes in his [*Mishneh Torah*,] a text of *halachic* rulings:³³ “It is a positive commandment to

²⁸. One [purpose is accomplished] through a revelation [of G-dliness] from Above and the other, through the Divine service [of the Jewish people] on this material plane.

²⁹. *Tehillim* 132:14, quoted by *Rambam*, *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* 1:3. See *Zevachim* 119a.

³⁰. See the verses cited by *Ramban*, *loc. cit.* See *Moreh Nevuchim*, Vol. 3, ch. 45, [which states,] “We were commanded to build a temple for His name and place in it the Ark containing the Two Tablets.”

³¹. [These sages each recognize both of these purposes as significant. The difference of opinion between them centers on which is of primary importance.]

³². [This is reflected in *Rambam's* wording in *Sefer HaMitzvos*,] positive commandment 20 (cited at the beginning of this *sichah*): “We were commanded to build [G-d’s] Chosen House for [His] service.”

³³. [*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* 1:1. In his Introduction to the *Mishneh Torah*, *Rambam* writes that] “I sought to compose {a work which would include the conclusions}... regarding the forbidden and the permitted, the impure and the pure, and the remainder of the Torah’s laws, all in clear and

construct a House for G-d, prepared³⁴ for sacrifices to be offered within.” [The implication is that] the commandment is not to build a Temple [for G-d per se,] but rather “to construct a House for G-d, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within,” i.e., if the House is not “prepared for sacrifices to be offered within,” the positive commandment, “They will make a Sanctuary for Me” will not have been fulfilled.

Thus, it is simply understood that “the *Menorah*, the Table, the Altar, and other *keilim*... are all elements of the Sanctuary,” i.e., by commanding to make the *keilim* of the Sanctuary, [G-d] was commanding to make elements of the Sanctuary, [completing its structure.] For what made the Sanctuary “prepared [for the sacrifices to be offered within]?” Fashioning the *Menorah*, the Table, and the Altar, for [the term] “sacrifices” includes all the services of the *Beis HaMikdash*,³⁵ kindling and preparing³⁶ the lamps, arranging the showbread, etc. This was the intent of the commandment issued initially, [before] constructing the Sanctuary [and the *Beis HaMikdash*.]

Nevertheless, once the *Beis [HaMikdash]* was prepared [for the sacrificial service in a complete sense,] even though it was [later] destroyed, sacrifices should be offered [on its site] “even though the House” – and its *keilim* – “no longer” exist. [The rationale is that] the absence of the *keilim* and the House in and of themselves does not preclude [offering] the sacrifices.

However, according to *Ramban*, “{G-d’s} primary” intent and “desire in {the construction of} the Sanctuary was for the place [where the Divine presence would rest,] that there be “a place sanctified unto His name and from there He would speak.” According to that [conception,] the commandment, “They will make a Sanctuary for Me and I will dwell among them,” applies solely to the *Beis [HaMikdash]* itself, [i.e., the commandment is] to build a Sanctuary for the Divine presence to rest. The commands to make the *keilim* were not included in this commandment, for their fundamental purpose was [– not to draw down G-d’s presence –] but [to enable] the sacrificial service carried out in the Sanctuary.³⁷ [For

concise terms.] In contrast, *Sefer HaMitzvos* is not [a book of] *halachic* rulings. [Another difference between the two is that] the *Mishneh Torah* was written in the Holy Tongue, while *Sefer HaMitzvos* was written in Arabic. [Furthermore, the *Mishneh Torah* was written] later [than *Sefer HaMitzvos* and it is an authority’s later rulings that are significant (see *Tosafot, Berachos* 39b, *et al.*.)]

³⁴. See similar wording [regarding the *Beis HaMikdash* in *Sefer HaMitzvos*,] General Principle 12, “that we have a House prepared to ascend to.” Similar wording is found in the Heller edition [of *Sefer HaMitzvos*.] The Kapach edition [uses slightly different wording,] “that we have a House to look toward.”

³⁵. [Kindling the *Menorah* and arranging the showbread are considered as offering sacrifices as reflected by] the second understanding in the commentary of *Korban HaEidah* in *Shekalim* 4:2 (quoted footnote 17 above), [“It is forbidden to] offer sacrifices on them, e.g., the Showbread on the Table, etc.”

³⁶. According to *Rambam (Hilchos Temidim UMusafim* 3:12; *Sefer HaMitzvos*, positive commandment 25), [the term] *hatavah* (translated as “preparing” in the main text) refers to the kindling of the lamps. *Hatavah* and *hadlakah* are one *mitzvah*.

³⁷. According to this, it is necessary to say that *Ramban*’s statement (*Hasagos* to *Sefer HaMitzvos*, positive commandment 33): “They are two *mitzvos* and one is not dependent on the

this reason, *Ramban*] found it necessary to explain that the reason [fashioning] the *keilim* is not considered as an independent *mitzvah* is because the *keilim* were merely [auxiliaries,] holy articles [that made possible] the sacrificial service performed with them.

Accordingly, [*Ramban* maintains that] “fashioning the Ark and its cover in which to place the [Tablets of] Testimony should be considered an independent *mitzvah*,” because the Ark “is not an [auxiliary] to make possible the observance of other *mitzvos* as are the *Menorah*, the altars, and the Table.”³⁸ [On the contrary,] there is a unique commandment to fashion the Ark that is reckoned [as one of the 613 *mitzvos*.³⁹ Fashioning it] is not included in the *mitzvah* “to make a House sanctified unto His name,” because the Ark and the Holy of Holies are [unique and deserving special focus because in them is vested “{G-d’s} primary desire.” However, even without them, [the *Beis HaMikdash*] is still “a House sanctified [unto His name.” Hence, there is a separate *mitzvah* to build the *Beis HaMikdash*.]

Different Versions of the *Mishnah*

6. Some printings (and primarily, manuscript copies)⁴⁰ of Tractate *Middos* lack the concluding [clause containing] the blessing, “Blessed be He Who chose Aharon and his sons to stand and serve before G-d in the House [that is] Holy of Holies.” [According to this version,] the *mishnah* concludes with the blessing, “Blessed be the Omnipresent, blessed be He, that a disqualifying factor was not found among the descendants of Aharon.” It would appear that *Rambam* followed this version.⁴¹

It is possible to explain that [the variance between these different versions of the *mishnah*] is dependent on the abovementioned difference of opinion between *Rambam* and *Ramban*.

[In his Introduction to his Commentary on the *Mishnah*,] *Rambam* writes that the purpose of Tractate *Middos* is that: INDENT BRACES BELOW BRACKETS

other. [Sacrifices] may be offered in the *Beis* [*HaMikdash*] even though it lacks these *keilim*,” was made primarily according to *Rambam*’s approach.

³⁸. *Ramban* [(*Hasagos* to *Sefer HaMitzvos*,] positive commandment 33). According to this, it would appear that [*Ramban*] follows the opinion of the authorities (*Yoma* 55a; *Talmud Yerushalmi*, *Yoma* 5:4) that the blood sprinkled [by the *Kohen Gadol*] on Yom Kippur need not reach the cover [of the Ark,] for were that mandatory, [the Ark’s cover] would an [auxiliary] to make possible the observance of other *mitzvos* like the [other] *keilim*. See *Tzafnas Panei’ach al HaTorah*, the beginning of *Parshas Terumah* and *Parshas Vayakhel*, p. 169.

³⁹. This is also evident from the words of *Ramban* [(*Shmos* 25:1),] “Therefore, [G-d] mentioned the Ark and its covering first here, because of its prominence.”

⁴⁰. See [the commentaries who record] the different versions of the *Mishnah*, *Middos*, *loc. cit.* *Meiri*’s version also [omits this conclusion.]

⁴¹. It would appear that *Rambam* wrote the text of the *mishnayos* together with his commentary. See the *Kapach* edition of *Rambam*’s Commentary to the *Mishnah*, and the version of this *mishnah* there.

“{a person} remember the dimensions of the {*Beis Ha*}*Mikdash*, its design, its structure, and all its particulars. The benefit from doing so is that when it will be {re}built – {may it be} speedily in our days – it is necessary to be careful and make it according to this design.”
END INDENT

It is logical that the conclusion of the Tractate will clarify the purpose of building the *Beis HaMikdash*. *Ramban* [maintains] that [G-d’s fundamental] intent and desire for the Sanctuary was [to create] a resting place for the Divine presence, which was primarily in the Holy of Holies. Accordingly, it follows that the entire service carried out in the Sanctuary and the [*Beis Ha*]Mikdash was directed to this purpose, to bring about a resting place for the Divine presence in the Holy of Holies. According to his view, it is appropriate to conclude the *mishnah* with the [words,] “Blessed be He Who chose Aharon and his sons to stand and serve before G-d in the House [that is] Holy of Holies,” for the entire structure and service there was intended [to create] a resting place for the Divine presence, which was primarily in the Holy of Holies.⁴²

However, [this logic is not appropriate] according to *Rambam*, who maintains that the fundamental intent of the *Beis HaMikdash* is [“to construct] a House for God, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within, where [the pilgrimage festivals] are celebrated three times a year.”⁴³ The primary service of offering the sacrifices and ascending for the pilgrimage festivals is carried out throughout the entire year and in the [*Beis Ha*]Mikdash as a whole, not in the Holy of Holies. Therefore, it is not befitting [for the tractate to conclude with] a blessing that emphasizes only the service in “the House [that is] Holy of Holies,” that was [carried out only] once a year.

Where Did the *Kohanim* Serve?

7. Clarification is still required: According to *Rambam*, why doesn’t [the tractate conclude] with a blessing whose wording reflects his approach, [e.g.,] “Blessed be He Who chose Aharon and his sons to stand and serve before G-d in the *Beis HaMikdash*.”

Similarly, further explanation is also required according to *Ramban*’s approach: True, since “{G-d’s} primary desire” in the *Beis HaMikdash* [was a resting place for the Divine presence,] it is appropriate to say, “Blessed be He Who chose Aharon and his sons to stand and serve before G-d in the House [that is] Holy of Holies.” However, since the overwhelming majority – indeed, almost all – the service of Aharon and his descendants, for whom the blessing is being recited [was performed outside the Holy of Holies,] it would have been more appropriate to [conclude the blessing,] “to stand and serve... in the *Beis HaMikdash*.” [That wording] would also include the Holy of Holies, [since it is part of the *Beis HaMikdash*.]

Where Focus is Deserved

⁴². See *Ramban*’s sermon *Toras HaShem Temimah (Kisvei HaRamban, Vol. 1, p. 165)* and the sources cited in footnote 64.

⁴³. [*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* 1:1.]

8. [These questions] can also be explained based [on the above discussion] regarding the approaches of *Rambam* and *Ramban* regarding the [*Beis Ha*]Mikdash and its *keilim*.

To explain: Blessing and praise are appropriate only when the object for which the blessing and praise is recited is unique and distinct, not when that object is a necessary element for another purpose. [(The rationale is that] if a blessing is necessary, it should be connected with the subject that is the fundamental reason for the blessing and not with a subject that is an auxiliary, [albeit a] necessary one, that enables that fundamental reason [to be brought to fruition.]

With regard to the matter at hand: According to *Rambam*, the purpose of the positive commandment, “They will make a Sanctuary for Me,” is “to construct a House for G-d, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within.” [Accordingly,] just as fashioning the *keilim* is not considered as an independent *mitzvah* – because the *keilim* are elements [necessary for the fulfillment] of the inclusive command to “construct a House... prepared for offering” – so too, it is not appropriate [to recite] a unique blessing for the choice of the *kohanim* [to serve in] the *Beis HaMikdash*. The choice of them to perform service is an element of the building the [*Beis Ha*]Mikdash. The commandment “to construct a House for God, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within” requires the choice of *kohanim* to be prepared to offer these sacrifices.⁴⁴

Similarly, [on this basis, a resolution can be offered] according to *Ramban*: Even though the *keilim* are not part of the *Beis* [*HaMikdash*,] nevertheless, fashioning the *keilim*, the Table, the *Menorah*, and the altar, is not considered as an independent *mitzvah* because [the *keilim*] are merely [auxiliaries,] holy articles that [make possible] the sacrificial service. [Fashioning them is merely a] preparatory [stage] for the fundamental *mitzvah* – [to quote *Ramban*,] “We were commanded to place the show bread before G-d at all times. As preparation for this service, He commanded us [to] place it on a Table described in this-and-this manner.”

Similarly, it is not appropriate to define the service of the *kohanim* with these *keilim* as an independent matter and recite special praise [to G-d] for choosing them [to perform] this service, [(as suggested above,] “Blessed be He Who chose Aharon and his sons to stand and serve... in the *Beis HaMikdash*.”) [The reason is that] this choice is necessary because of the commandments to offer sacrifices, place bread before G-d, etc., for it is impossible to perform these commands without [the altar,] the Table, [the other *keilim*,] and the *kohanim* chosen “to stand and serve.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴. Note *Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvos*, positive commandment 32, [which states,] “We have been commanded to honor the descendants of Aharon and to glorify them,” and positive commandment 36, [which states,] “We have been commanded that *kohanim* serve in watches.” However, [*Rambam*] does not mention a positive *mitzvah* for the *kohanim* to serve in the *Beis HaMikdash*, as [he does regarding] the Levites [(see] positive commandment 23; *Hilchos K'lei HaMikdash* 3:1). (See, however, *ibid.* 4:1; and [*Sefer HaMitzvos*,] positive commandments 24-30, [which mentions that G-d] “commanded the *kohanim*....”

⁴⁵. Note *Menachos* 20a, “Just as it is impossible for there to be sacrifices with *kehunah* (‘priesthood’)....”

When the Divine Presence is Manifest

9. [The above does not apply] regarding the fundamental purpose of the Sanctuary and the [*Beis Ha*]Mikdash, [i.e.,] the resting place of the Divine presence in the *Beis HaMikdash*. According to *Ramban*, just as this purpose is not dependent on the fashioning of the utensils, as explained previously, it is also not dependent on the choice of Aharon and his sons to serve with these *keilim*. Through the fulfillment of the *mitzvah*, “They will make a Sanctuary for Me,” [G-d’s] “dwelling among them,” will be accomplished even without the service of the *kohanim*.

Even if for whatever reason G-d desired the resting of the Divine presence be brought about only through service in the [*Beis Ha*]Mikdash – this can be connected to the concept of the *chinuch* (“dedication”) of the Sanctuary and its *keilim*; this is not the place for further discussion of the matter – the dedication and the initial service performed [directly] after the erection of the Sanctuary were sufficient [to achieve that purpose.] Thus, we see that immediately after the erection of the Sanctuary, “the glory of G-d filled the Sanctuary.”⁴⁶ and it could be said that this took place even before service [in the Sanctuary. Or it could be said that it was only] after the Sanctuary was erected, on the first of Nissan, when the *ketores* offering and the sacrifices were brought that, “The glory of G-d was revealed to all the people.”⁴⁷ [However, once] the Divine presence rested within [the Sanctuary] after it was first erected and the service [there began, the Divine Presence] would not depart even were the *kohanim* not to serve afterwards.

Based on the above, the service of Aharon and his descendants in the *Beis HaMikdash* is a particular element [necessary for] the offering of the sacrifices (or the other services performed) in the *Beis HaMikdash* and is unrelated to the fundamental purpose of the *Beis HaMikdash*, the resting place for the Divine presence in the Holy of Holies.

For this reason, [the *mishnah*] adds [the blessing,] “Blessed be He Who chose Aharon and his sons to stand and serve before G-d in the House [that is] Holy of Holies,” a unique expression of praise for their service that [ultimately] relates to and brings about the resting of the Divine presence in the *Beis HaMikdash* [and in] the Holy of Holies. True, the fundamental fact that they were chosen to perform service is necessary, for there must [be someone to offer the sacrifices that generate] “a pleasing fragrance for G-d.”⁴⁸ Nevertheless, their service [as a whole, independent of any specific required activity,] possesses a unique positive quality; it brings about a resting place for the Divine presence. Accordingly, it warrants a special blessing that emphasizes the loftier dimension of the

⁴⁶. *Shmos* 40:34.

⁴⁷. *Vayikra* 9:23. A similar phenomenon occurred after the dedication of the *Beis HaMikdash* [(see *I Melachim* 8:10).]

See *Ramban’s* sermon *Toras HaShem Temimah* (*Kisvei HaRamban*, Vol. 1, p. 163), “The Divine presence rested in the Sanctuary solely by virtue of the sacrifices.... Similarly, [the site of] the *Beis HaMikdash* was chosen via a sacrifice.”

⁴⁸. See the detailed [explanation of] the concept [of “a pleasant fragrance”] in *Ramban, Vayikra* 1:9.

service of the *kohanim*, that it relates to [G-d's] primary desire in the *Beis HaMikdash*, the resting place of the Divine presence in the Holy of Holies.

Why Praise is Recited

10. On this basis, it is understandable why [the *mishnah* first states,] “Blessed be the Omnipresent, blessed be He, that a disqualifying factor was not found among the descendants of Aharon” and then “Blessed be He Who chose Aharon and his sons to stand and serve before G-d in the House [that is] Holy of Holies.”

Saying “Blessed be He Who chose Aharon and his sons” was not intended to praise G-d for the fundamental choice of Aharon and his sons to carry out service in the *Beis HaMikdash*. ([Were that the intent,] it would have been appropriate to mention this blessing before the blessing,⁴⁹ “that a disqualifying factor was not found among the descendants of Aharon,” as stated above.) Instead, [blessing G-d for choosing Aharon and his sons] praises them for “the House [that is] Holy of Holies,” that through their service they bring about the resting of the Divine presence in the Holy of Holies. That is not an inevitable result of Aharon and his sons being chosen to serve in the *Beis HaMikdash*. Therefore, the first blessing recited is “Blessed be the Omnipresent, blessed be He, that a disqualifying factor was not found among the descendants of Aharon.” This praises and blesses [G-d] for the potential granted [the *kohanim*] to serve (anywhere) in the *Beis HaMikdash* that day. Afterwards, praise is given for the additional and wondrous result brought about by their service that day – and every day – that they “stand and serve before G-d in the House [that is] Holy of Holies,” making it possible for the Divine presence to rest in the [*Beis Ha*]Mikdash, in the Holy of Holies.

To present the concept in a different way: [The phrase,] “the House [that is] Holy of Holies,” refers solely to [the phrase,] “before G-d,” and not to the word, “to serve.”

What About Yom Kippur?

11. A question can nevertheless be raised: All the above is appropriate throughout the year, when the *kohanim* serve throughout the *Beis HaMikdash*. However, on Yom Kippur, [the *Kohen Gadol*] was commanded to serve in the Holy of Holies – to sprinkle blood and offer incense. [On such a day,] how is it appropriate to recite a blessing [that, as explained above, is not connected to a specific element service, but rather applies to the *kohanim's* service as a whole,] “to stand and serve before G-d in the House [that is] Holy of Holies”? [His service] in the Holy of Holies was necessary because of the commands to sprinkle blood and offer incense.

There is, however, a straightforward answer to this question: “A festive day would be celebrated that a disqualifying factor was not discovered among the descendants of Aharon” only when the *Sanhedrin* “would hold sessions [in the Chamber of Hewn Stone] and judge the *kohanim*.” [Now,] the *Sanhedrin* would hold sessions in the Chamber of

⁴⁹. Moreover, the recitation of such a blessing would not have been entirely appropriate, as explained above, section 8.

Hewn Stone only during the week. On *Shabbosos* and festivals, they would descend and hold sessions in the *Chayl* (“Surrounding Rampart”).⁵⁰

Based on the above, it follows that this praise and blessing were recited only during the week and not on *Shabbosos* and festivals (and not on Yom Kippur). [The weekdays] are an appropriate [time] for praising Aharon and his descendants whose service [as a whole – not any specific activity –] leads to the resting of the Divine presence in the Holy of Holies. As explained above, [this praise is] appropriate with regard to the service [the *kohanim* perform] in the *Beis HaMikdash* as a whole and not to the specific service required to be performed in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.

The Responsibility Each of Us Carries

12. The above leads to a remarkable lesson [relevant to our] Divine service in [the observance of] the Torah and its *mitzvos* in the present age. Our Sages taught⁵¹ that [our] prayers were ordained in place of the daily sacrificial offerings. Moreover, through the study of the Torah, “We compensate for [the sacrifice of] bulls [through the utterances of] our lips.”⁵² [And our Sages taught,]⁵³ “Whoever studies the laws of the burnt-offering is considered to have brought a burnt-offering.” This applies in any time and any place.

[Through his prayer and study, every individual can bring about a two-fold effect,] similar to that brought about through the service of the *kohanim* during the era of the *Beis HaMikdash*. In addition to generating “a pleasant fragrance to G-d,” elevating [himself and his surroundings,] he also draws down and causes the Divine presence to rest within [the material realm,⁵⁴ establishing] a dwelling for G-d on this lowly plane.⁵⁵

Thus, the person draws down the Divine presence and causes it to rest within his own being. [Thus,] on the phrase, “I will dwell among them,” our Sages commented,⁵⁶ “[The verse] does not say, בתוכו, ‘within it,’ but בתוכם, ‘among them,’ within each and every Jew.” [Not only does he affect himself and his surroundings,] he draws down the Divine presence and causes it to rest in the site of the Holy of Holies, the Holy of Holies of the entire world.⁵⁷

⁵⁰. *Sanhedrin* 88b; see *Rambam, Hilchos Sanhedrin* 3:1.

⁵¹. *Berachos* 26b.

⁵². *Hoshea* 14:3.

⁵³. *Menachos* 110a, [cited by] the Alter Rebbe [in his] *Shulchan Aruch, mahadura kama* 1:11, *mahadura tanina* 1:9.

⁵⁴. See *Kuzari*, part 2, ch. 26; *Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar*, p. 76a; *Siddur im Dach*, p. 33a ff.; *Or HaTorah, Bereishis*, Vol. p. 188a ff., *Bamidbar*, Vol. 4, p. 1072ff., and the sources mentioned there; the *maamar* entitled *Basi LeGani*, 5710; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 12, p. 10ff.

⁵⁵. See *Tanya*, ch. 37.

⁵⁶. *Reishis Chochmah*, near the beginning of ch. 6; *Shelah (Shaar HaOsios, os lamed*, Tractate *Taanis*, s.v., *mei'inyan haavodah, Parshas Terumah, Torah Or*, pp. 325b, 326b); *Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar*, p. 20b, *et al.*

⁵⁷. See *Tanya*, ch. 53; *Siddur im Dach*, p. 97c ff.

[The person's individual (prayer and) study of the Torah parallels the service of Aharon and his son's in the Courtyard of the *Beis HaMikdash* which drew down G-d's presence and caused it to rest in the Holy of Holies.

From the above, we can appreciate the tremendous responsibility incumbent on every individual regarding his Divine service of the Torah and its *mitzvos*. If his service is lacking, not only will there be a lack in [the extent to which the Divine presence] rests within him, it will also affect [the extent to which] the Divine presence is drawn down to the entire Jewish people and in the world at large.

Conversely, we can appreciate the wondrous positive quality possessed by every Jew's Divine service of the Torah and its *mitzvos* and the effect it has throughout the entire world, including [the most important effect,] that it draws close and hastens the time when we will be able to [actually] offer sacrifices "in accordance with the commandments of Your will,"⁵⁸ in the Third *Beis HaMikdash*; may it descend and be revealed⁵⁹ speedily in our days, in the very near [future.]

Adapted from the *sichos* delivered on *Yud Shvat* and *Tu BeShvat*, 5732 (1972)⁶⁰

⁵⁸. See [the explanation of this phrase in] the series of *maamarim* entitled *VeKachah*, 5637, sec. 17ff.

⁵⁹. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 11, p. 185, footnote 39.

⁶⁰. [The *sichos* that served as the basis for this text were delivered as a] *siyum* to the Tractate of *Middos*.