



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 11 | Terumah | Sicha 2

Opinion of Rambam and Ramban

According to the Rambam (Maimonides), the Biblical directive to construct the vessels of the *mishkan* (tabernacle) is not one of the six hundred and thirteen commandments. In his view, the vessels are included in the general commandment to construct the *mishkan* (“They shall make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them”).

The Ramban (Nachmanides) disagrees: “The vessels are not part of the commandment to build the structure; rather, there are two distinct commandments and one not dependent on the other. Nevertheless, the Ramban only counts the directive to construct the ark as one of the six thirteen commandments. (The Mishkan’s other vessels are included in the commandment to perform the service). The implication, according to the Ramban, is that, theoretically, we could bring offerings to the Temple even without vessels.

Question on Rambam:

The Rambam argues that the service is disqualified if there are no vessels. Thus the vessels are included in the commandment to perform the service. In other words, the Rambam rules according to the opinion of Rabbi Meir, who holds: “The absence of the table, menorah, altars, curtains disqualify the offerings.”. However, the majority of the sages rule that only the *kiyor* (wash basin) and its base are necessary for the offering to be valid. (As a general rule, the halacha follows the majority of the rabbis). Another question: Rambam appears to contradict himself because he rules that “we may offer offerings although there is no Temple.” This implies that the vessels are not critical for the offerings.

Question on Ramban:

The Ramban explains that the essence of the commandment to construct a Temple is to make “a place for the ark to rest.” If so, the commandment to “build for me a sanctuary” is in essence a commandment to make an ark. How then does Ramban consider “let them make an ark” an additional commandment?

Explanation:

The Rambam and Ramban disagree regarding the essence of the commandment to build the *mishkan*. According to the Rambam, the purpose of the commandment is a place to perform the service. He therefore writes: “it is a positive commandment to construct a house for Hashem prepared and ready to receive offerings”. It follows that the vessels (*menorah*, altars etc.) are all part of the commandment to build the Temple, because the purpose of the Temple is the service. Nevertheless, once the Temple has been built and made ready, it continues to exist spiritually. Therefore, any offerings are valid although there is no Temple. And at that point, the lack of vessels does not invalidate the offerings.

According to Ramban, however, the main purpose of the Temple is to have a place for the Divine Presence to dwell. Therefore, vessels for the service are not essential; for they are only a “preparation for the commandment.” The ark, however, is different because it is essential for the dwelling of the Divine Presence.

The blessing on the Seed of Aharon

The above explanation clarifies the language said when a priest was determined to be fit to serve in the Temple: “Blessed... that no blemish has been found in the seed of Aaron. Blessed is He who chose Aaron and his sons to stand to minister before the Lord in the Holy of Holies.” Seemingly, the order of clauses should have been reversed. First, Aharon and his sons were chosen and only then “no blemish has been found in the seed of Aharon.” Also, why does the blessing only mention the service of Yom Kippur “in the Holy of Holies” and not the service of the rest of the year?

According to the Ramban: A blessing is said upon something that is unique and essential, and not a detail for something else. In this case, the commandment to construct the Temple, and the resting of the Divine presence does not depend on the service of the priests. Similarly, the Holy of Holies is essential for the purpose of the Temple. Therefore, the blessing begins “no blemish has been found in the seed of Aaron”, which praises Hashem for the opportunity to perform the service in the Temple. The second clause “to stand to minister before the Lord in the Holy of Holies”, is a praise for the additional idea of their service in the Holy of Holies which is connected to the dwelling of the Divine presence in the temple - In the Holy of Holies.

There is however another version of the blessing, which omits the second clause. It is likely that this is the version of Rambam since his opinion is that the service, throughout the Temple, is the essential component of the commandment.).

(A question can be asked. How can we bless Hashem for the service in the Holy of Holies which is a part of the commandment on Yom Kippur? The answer: The blessing was said when the Sanhedrin would investigate the lineage of the priests. They did not do so on Yom Kippur. It follows then, that on the days the blessing was said there indeed was no applicable commandment to serve in the Holy of Holies).

Lesson:

Prayer, which was established as a substitute for the offerings, and studying the Torah's laws of the offerings draw down the Divine Presence just like the priestly service in the Temple. This highlights the great responsibility upon every individual. Their prayer and Torah study reveal the Divine Presence in the Holy of Holies, and from there the revelation disseminates to the entire world.