

MORASHAH

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668 American Legion Drive, Suite B, Teaneck, NJ 07666

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201.801.0707

Rabbi Jeffrey A. Shron

Parashat HaShavuah Series

Parashat Ki Teesah

I live close to Missouri, which is called the “Show-Me State.” That slogan gets its origin from a mindset that one needs to see it to believe it. This same mindset is apparent in this week’s *parasha*.

Moshe goes up to Har Sinai to receive Hashem’s gift to the world, the Torah. The game plan is for B’nai Yisrael to receive and live by the words of the Torah as they journey toward the Promised Land. Moshe does not return on the day the Israelites thought he would, and so they turn to Aharon, the *Kohain Gadol*, to create what was so familiar to them when they were in Egypt, a physical object to replace Moshe, which would serve as an intermediary and allow them to communicate with and receive their instructions from God. These are the same people who witnessed God’s miracles, the Exodus from Egypt, the Revelation at Mount Sinai, and the manna. How could these same people, who heard Hashem warn them against worshipping graven images, almost immediately go astray? What is going on here!

We have always been told that Hashem is everywhere. The problem is that most people want a God Who is somewhere. Up until this point, the Israelites had Moshe, someone physically present whom they could see and touch, to communicate Hashem’s will and relay back the people’s fears and concerns. Since Hashem’s presence could not be seen, B’nai Yisrael depended on Moshe’s presence to experience God. When Moshe fails to return on the expected day, the Israelites begin to panic. They see themselves as stranded in the middle of nowhere, with nowhere to go and no one to guide them. In their minds, there is only one solution.

Even Moshe himself, at the end of the *parasha*, asks Hashem to reveal Himself to him. Even Moshe says to God, “show me.” Hashem’s answer to Moshe is that you can see only My back. You just have to look around you, at the wonders of My creations, at your fellow human beings whom I created in My own image, and at all the good in the world, to see the results of My glory. However, knowing that mankind needs something physical, something tangible to keep their focus and prevent them from becoming distracted, especially since you will not be around forever, I will have B’nai Yisrael build a physical structure that will be the focal point of my presence among them. The Torah tells us in Parashat Terumah, “*v’asu li mikdash, v’shachanti b’tocham*,” – and you will make me a tabernacle, and I will

Rabbi Shron is Hazzan of Kehilath Israel Synagogue, Overland Park, Kansas.

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dwell in them. The *pasuk* should have ended, and I will dwell in it. The purpose of the *mishkan* was to replace a mortal human being as Israel's connection to God with an inanimate object that would endure for many generations to come. The *mishkan* was accessible to everyone to interact with and create their own relationship with Hashem through *korbanot*. This is why it was so important that the construction of the *mishkan* begin immediately after the sin of the *aygel hazahav*, the golden calf.

Today, shuls have replaced the *mishkan* as a physical structure to maintain our relationship with Hashem and feel His Shechina. However, as in the time of Moshe, our real mission is to observe the *mitzvot* and be a "light unto the nations." We only need recognize the wonders, blessings, and miracles that occur every day, so that we will also have the *z'chut* to see "the back of Hashem."

Shabbat Shalom!

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