

For Friday night, "Coming Home From Israel"

From the biblical narrative onward, throughout the better part of five millenia, the Jewish People has been exceedingly attentive to the land of Israel. The term, "Zion Cycle" describes a biography of the Jewish People that unfolds in history and imagination, conscious and unconscious. Movement toward, incursion into, settling, conflict and destruction, exile, dwelling in Diaspora, yearning, and returning to the land of Israel form a complex and cyclical narrative. The flow toward and away from Israel beats at the heart of Jewish experience, puling life-blood into Jewish identity and agency. Both historically and in the modern Zionist period, motions to and from Israel transpire on the geographic territory of the earth. Even more, they have been transpiring in the Jewish psyche. Though a large proportion of world Jewry has not literally made the journey to Israel, Jews have been experiencing the journey to and from Zion in the realms of spirit and imagination. Patterns of immigration and war, mystic fantasy, prayers, anguish, and desperate longing all infuse the Zion Cycle with archetypal significance.

Each member of the Jewish people is on the Zion Cycle, whether coming or going, yearning, ignoring, resisting or condemning. For some, the relationship to Zion is one of endearment and mutual sustenance, for others, an undiscovered passion or a critical tension, for yet others, denial, repression or (self) hatred. Whatever the posture, the Jewish connection to Israel is as undeniable as one's personal family, lineage and roots. Zion organizes a Jewish national biography, a meta-narrative of world Jewry.

From Rereading Israel: The Spirit of the Matter by Bonna Devora Haberman, p. 16

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For Shabbat Afternoon, "Finding Our Way Home From Temple to Sanctuary"

At Mount Sinai, Moses receives God's instructions for constructing the mishkan. But the connection between the mountain and the mishkan is deeper than it might at first seem. As Bible scholar Victor Hamilton notes (developing an insight already found in Nachmanides 1194-1270), "It appears that Israel's experience of God at Sinai . . . is an archetype of the tabernacle. What the peak of Mount Sinai is in [chapters 19-24]," [Hamilton writes,] the Holy of Holies in in [chapters 25-40]." Just as only Moses may ascend to the peak of Mount Sinai, so also only Aaron may enter the Holy of Holies (kodesh kodashim). Just as seeing the top of Mount Sinai is a dangerous offense punishable by death (Exodus 19-21), so also is entering the Holy of Holies (Lev. 16:2). Just as, according to God's instructions, only Joshua, Aaron, Aaron's sons, and seventy of the elders may go part way up the mountain but no father (Exodus 24:1), so, similarly, only the priests may enter the Holy Place (hokodesh), but they may go no farther. The foot of the mountain, where Moses builes an altar, is parallel to the forecourt area of the mishkan, where the people bring their sacrifices.

According to Hamilton, the mishkan "perpetuates" Mount Sinai: Just as "the Presence of the Lord (kevod Hashem) abode on Mount Sinai" (24:16), so also "the Presence of the Lord filled the mishkan" (40:25). The mishkan also "intensifies" Mount Sinai: at Sinai "Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain" (24:18), but by the time the mishkan in built, he cant enter the cloud: "Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it and the Presence of the Lord filled the mishkan" (40:35). Further, the mishkan brings the formative moment at Sinai to fruition: If Sinai establishes the marriage

between God and Israel, the mishkan represents [them] cohabitating: “I will abide (veshakhanti) among the Israelites and I will be their God” (29:45). Finally, the mishkan “extends” Mount Sinai. As Hamilton puts it, “The Israelites cannot take a mountain with them when it is time to break camp, but they can take along a portable tent. To leave Sinai behind is [thus] not to leave the God of Sinai behind.”

From “God In the Mishkan: Present But Not Domesticated” by R. Shai Held

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The mishkan (tabernacle) is intended to serve . . . as an island of Eden in a decidedly non-Edenic world. Like Ezekiel’s future Temple (though less dramatically), the mishkan is portrayed in terms strikingly reminiscent of the Garden. Like the Garden, the mishkan and the Temple in Jerusalem are entered from the east. God commands Moses to make two cherubim of gold and station them on either side of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies (Exodus 25:18-20). This, too, echoes the Garden, which was similarly guarded by two cherubim (Genesis 3:24).

God commands Moses to erect a menorah (lampstand) in the mishkan. Bible scholar Carol Meyers points out that “the significance of the lampstand lies more in its iconic value than in its pragmatic function... The various terms used for its constituent parts are replete with botanical imagery: calyxes, petals, branches and almond blossoms.” More than that, the form of the menorah—a central stand with three branches extending from each side of it—is itself suggestive of a tree. Such stylized “trees of life” were common in ancient times; they “connote the divine power that provides the fertility of plant life.” It hardly seems like a leap to conclude that the menorah in the mishkan was intended, at least in part, to evoke the tree of life in the Garden. Just as God’s blessings and presence could be found there, the tree-like lampstand suggests, so also are they present here.

God places Adam in the Garden “to till and to tend it” (*le-ovdah u-le-shomrah*). This pair of verbs (*la’avod* and *lishmor*) is used together in only three other places in the Torah—all of them, tellingly, to describe the tasks of the Levites in guarding and doing the work of the mishkan (Numbers 3:7-8, 8:26, 18:5-6). Linguistically, a strong link is thus implied between the Garden and the mishkan.

From “Returning to Eden? An Island of Wholeness in a Fractured World” by R. Shai Held

Mah Norah HaMakom HaZeh -- מה־נֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה

How awesome is this place . . . (Gen 28: 17)