

## Tzav: A Dual Transformation

### I.

At the very conclusion of the sedra, after the last *korban* was brought, the last blood and last oil were sprinkled, Aharon and his sons were given one final command before their installation as Kohanim. As Moshe relays to them, ומפתח אהל מועד לא תצאו שבעת ימים עד יום מלאת ימי, מילואיכם כי שבעת ימים ימלא את ידכם. And then, just two *pesukim* hence, a seeming repetition of the same mandate, to remain within the Mishkan for seven days, ופתח אהל מועד תשבו יומם ולילה, שבעת ימים ושמרתם את משמרת ה' ולא תמותו. What is the nature of this commandment, and why is it repeated?

With respect to the mandate itself, classical authorities differed as to its scope. Seforno understood the restriction in its most direct form. That is, for seven days and nights, one sixty eight consecutive hours, there would be no leaving the Mishkan. At the other end of the spectrum, Ibn Ezra maintained that it would be possible for Aharon and his sons to leave both during day and night, should there be sufficient justification for doing so.

Ramban, basing himself in earlier, rabbinic sources, argues that the restriction was only during the time when the sacrificial service was being conducted, and, as such, it would be considered paradigmatic for future generations, prohibiting Kohanim from leaving the Mikdash during periods of sacrificial rite. The Talmud Yerushalmi explicitly permitted retiring from the Mishkan in the evening.

### II.

To develop both a deeper and fuller perspective of the nature of this mandate, perhaps it would be fruitful to consider the one other instance in which the Torah develops an injunction of a similar nature, with a strikingly parallel formulation.

As the Jewish people were being informed of their coming salvation, and of the role Korban Pesach was to play in the monumental events of the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, they were told, ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בקר, they were restricted from leaving their homes the entire evening.

For all of the obvious distinctions between the contexts- the number of days, the destruction which was raging outside- there are a number of salient parallels. First, as far as the night of the fifteenth was concerned, each Jewish home did function as a quasi-Mishkan, with the doorway itself as

the locus of the sprinkling of the blood, in lieu of a standing altar. Second, and most significantly, the night of the fifteenth of Nissan was the moment when the Jewish people began their transformation into a *mamlekheth kohanim v'goy kadosh*, they were being elevated into a sacred people, a nation of kohanim.

In this respect, there is a profound parallel between what the Jewish people experienced at a macro level, and what Aharon and his sons experienced at the familial level. As the Jewish people were being elevated relative to the other nations of the world, Aharon and his sons were being elevated relative to the rest of the Jewish people. The mechanism, in both cases, was enclosure in the sacred space, ומפתח אהל מועד לא תצאו שבעת ימים, ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בקר, mirrored by עד יום מלאת.

And yet, to return to our initial question, we are still left with an unexplained repetition of the injunction in our sedra, ופתח אהל מועד תשבו יומם ולילה שבעת ימים ושמרתם את משמרת ה' ולא תמחו, which lacks any analogue in the narrative of the Korban Pesach.

### III.

In truth, there is no repetition altogether. The first verse, with its antecedent in the context of Korban Pesach, is indeed an injunction against leaving the Mishkan, with an emphasis on the prohibition per se, ומפתח אהל מועד לא תצאו שבעת ימים.

The second verse, carefully scrutinized, contains no prohibition whatsoever. On the contrary, it is a positive commandment, ופתח אהל מועד תשבו יומם ולילה שבעת ימים, with an emphasis on the affirmative obligation to remain in the Mishkan.

These are not merely two sides of the same coin. For, in the second verse, we are given an explanation as to the nature of this positive obligation, 'ושמרתם את משמרת ה', to stand in guard of the Mishkan itself, though, admittedly, the nature of this obligation is very much in question.

Netziv, in a remarkable yet somewhat radical suggestion, argues that this was an obligation to immerse oneself in intensive Torah study regarding the laws of *kodshim*. R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, argues that this was a restriction against intimate familial relations, on the assumption that they would be permitted to go home in the evenings. In a particularly striking passage, the Talmud Yerushalmi interprets the verse in an anticipatory fashion, alluding to seven days of mourning for Nadav and Avihu.

All of these suggestions, while intriguing, might fairly be described as departing from the simple reading of the text. Indeed, Rambam, both in *Sefer HaMitzvot* and in *Mishneh Torah*, understands this formulation as a positive obligation to guard the Mishkan itself, as a means, not of providing for pragmatic security, but consecrating and elevating the status of the sanctuary as Divine palace, אינו דומה פלטרין של מלך שיש עליו שומרים מפלטרין של מלך שאין עליו שומרים.

If so, it is entirely obvious why there would be no parallel, affirmative obligation for the Jewish people to remain in their homes, their quasi-Mishkan, on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan in Egypt. Those homes were about to be abandoned. They had no lasting sanctity, nor any need for investiture with status as repositories for the Divine presence. The single transformation which occurred on that auspicious night concerned the Jewish people themselves, who were elevated to a nation of Kohanim.

#### IV.

If we permit ourselves this interpretation, a remarkable reciprocity emerges in the context of our sedra, a dual transformation. Aharon and his sons, as a result of the prohibition of leaving the *Ohel Mo'ed*, were elevated to the status of the Kohanim: the Mishkan elevated them.

Reciprocally, by standing vigil in the Mishkan for seven days, ופתח אהל מועד תשבו יומם, Aharon and his sons elevated the Mishkan into the permanent dwelling place for the *shechinah*, ולילה שבעת ימים.