

# Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778\*

## Chapter XXIII: Pekudei (Ex. 38:21–40:38)

### Essay 6. Moses and the setting up of the Tabernacle

**גמרא** דנדרים (דף ל"ח) אין הקב"ה מְשַׁרְה שְׁכִינָתוֹ אֶלָּא עַל חָכְם גִּיבּוֹר וְעָשִׂיר, וְכֻלָּם מִמְּשָׁה, דְּכִתִּיב גַּבִּי הַמְּשַׁכֵּן "וַיִּפְרֹשׂ אֶת־הָאֹהֶל" וְכוּ'. וְאָמַר מִר מְשָׁה רַבִּינוּ פ[ ]רְשׁוֹ וְדִלְמָא אַרְוֵךְ וְקִטּוֹן הָיָה, וּפְרֹשׂ רַש"י אַרְוֵךְ בְּקוּמָה וְקִטּוֹן בְּפָח עכ"ל.

The **Gemara in Nedarim (page 38a)** says:

Rabbi Yochanan said: **The Holy One, Blessed be He, rests His Divine Presence only upon [one who is] wise, mighty, wealthy, and humble. And all of these [qualities are derived] from Moses.** [He was] mighty, **as it is written concerning the Tabernacle: “And he spread the tent over the Tabernacle”** (Ex. 40:19), **and the Master said: Moses, our teacher, spread it [himself].** And it is written: “Ten cubits shall be the length of a board [and a cubit and a half the breadth of each board]” (Ex. 26:16). [I.e., Moses was tall and strong enough to spread the tent over the boards alone. The Gemara asks:] **Suppose that he was tall and small?**

- Nedarim 38a

**Rashi explains** the last point, that perhaps Moses was **tall in height, but small in strength**, for example, tall and thin, and it was his height that allowed him to spread the tent, and that strength was not required.

ומהרש"א פתב בשם הרא"ש למה לא מביא הגמרא שיהיה גיבור מקרא הקודם, דכתיב "ויקם . . . את־המשכן", והקראשים היו כבדים. ותו ליכא להקשות פדלעיל? והקשה עליו מאי פריה, דילמא בנס היה, פדסמיה ליה "הוקם המשכן" דהוקם מאליו משמע, פדאיתא בתנחומא ובפרש רש"י עכ"ל.

In the Chiddushei Agadot on the Gemara, **the Maharsha<sup>1</sup> writes in the name of the Rosh:<sup>2</sup> “Why didn’t the Gemara bring the preceding verse as proof that [Moses] was strong, as it is written, “Moses set up the Tabernacle, placing its sockets, setting up its planks, inserting**

\* English translation: Copyright © 2021 by Charles S. Stein.

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555–1631), Polish rabbi famous for his Talmud commentaries, Chiddushei Halachot and Chiddushei Agadot.

<sup>2</sup> Asher ben Jehiel (“Rabbeinu Asher” or “the Rosh”) (c. 1250, probably Cologne–1327, Toledo).

its bars, and erecting its posts” (Ex. 40:18), **for the planks were heavy.**”<sup>3</sup> **Is there no one else to question as above? [The Maharsha] asks, what refutes this, i.e., that Moses was strong? Perhaps it was by a miracle that he was able to set up the Tabernacle, for support of which it is written, “In the first month of the second year, on the first of the month, the Tabernacle was set up” (Ex. 40:17), which has the meaning that it set itself up, as it brought in the midrash in the Tanchuma and in the explanation of Rashi.**<sup>4</sup>

ולדידן אין פאן קושניא על הרא"ש, שאפילו ידעינן בנדאי שהיה גיבור, מאן לימא לן שמי שהוא גיבור יכול להרים לבדו אלו הקרשים שהיו כל כך כבדים? וכי סלקא דעתך שמי שהוא גיבור יכול לעשות בכחו כמו מלאך, ואין הכי נמי שאף מי שהוא גיבור יש לו קץ וגבול לגבורתו, ואם כן אף על פי שהיה משה גיבור היה צריך סיוע האלהי להקמת אלו הקרשים, שלא היה אפשר אפילו כח אדם גיבור להקימם.

**For us, we have no difficulty on the question of the Rosh, asking why the Gemara didn't instead cite the verse the Moses set up the Tabernacle, including setting the planks. For even if we know that certainly [Moses] was mighty, who will say to us that one who is mighty is able to alone lift up these planks that were so heavy? It might enter your mind that one who is mighty is able to act with his power like an angel, but indeed, even one who is mighty has an end and a limit to his might. If so, even though Moses was mighty, he would have needed Divine assistance to raise these planks, for it was not possible even with the strength of a mighty man to raise them.**

ואדרבא יש מפאן ראנה שהיה גיבור, שהרי ידענו שלעולם הקדוש ברוך הוא עושה מעשה נסים היומר קרובים אל הטבע. ומן הראוי היה שיקים בצלאל את המשכן, שהמתחיל במצנה אומרים לו גמור. ולמה דוקא היה משה? אלא נדאי צריך לומר שאם היה בצלאל המקום הואיל שלא היה גיבור, היה צריך גם גדול, והיה חוץ מן הטבע לגמרי. אבל משה שהיה גיבור, במקצט גם סגי ואינו כל כך חוץ מהטבע.

**To the contrary, from here there is a proof that he was mighty, for we know that the Holy One, Blessed be He, always produces miraculous acts that are closer to nature. It would have been more appropriate for Bezalel to raise the Tabernacle than for Moses to do so, for [regarding] the one who begins a mitzvah, they say about him that [he should] complete it, because otherwise, according to Rabbi Yochanan, it will be credited to someone else who actually completes the work.<sup>5</sup> Why then was it specifically Moses that raised the Tabernacle, instead of Bezalel? Rather, it certainly needs to be said that if it had been Bezalel that raised it, since he was not mighty, it would have required a great miracle, and it would have been completely**

<sup>3</sup> The Zera Shimshon has paraphrased the text of the Maharsha and Rosh.

<sup>4</sup> Rashi on Ex. 39:33: “[Moses] appeared to be erecting it, but in fact it set itself up and rose of its own accord. That is why Scripture says, ‘The Tabernacle was erected’ (Ex. 40:17)—it was erected by itself. This is a Midrash of Rabbi Tanchuma.” See also Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 417:1.

<sup>5</sup> Tanchuma, Eikev, siman 6.

**outside of nature. But Moses was mighty, so a minor miracle would have been enough to accomplish the task, and it would not have been so far outside of nature.**

אֵלָא שְׂאָף קוּשְׁיָת הָרָא"ש יֵשׁ לְתַרְצָה, שְׂעָקָר הָרָאָה בְּאָה מ'וּיִפְרֵשׁ אֶת־הָאֵהֶל", שְׂאָם לֹא הָיָה לְנוּ אֵלָא הַפְּסוּק "וַיָּקָם . . . אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן", הָיִיתִי יָכוֹל לֹאמֵר דָּאִין הָכִי נְמִי שְׂמִשָּׁה לֹא הָיָה גִיבּוֹר אֵלָא שְׂרָצָה הַקַּב"ה שְׂגָם הוּא יִתְעַסֵּק בְּמִלְאָכָת הַמִּשְׁכָּן, כְּמוֹ שְׂהוּרִיד לְנִשְׂיָאִים מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲבָנֵי הַשֶּׁהֶם וְאֲבָנֵי הַמִּילּוּאִים כְּדִי שְׂיִבְיָאוּ אִף הֵם אֵינָה דְבָר לְנִדְבַת הַמִּשְׁכָּן. אֲמָנָם עֲתָה שְׂכַבְר כְּתִיב "וַיִּפְרֵשׁ אֶת־הָאֵהֶל" וְכוּ', אִם כֵּן כְּבָר עֲשָׂה מִשָּׁה חֲלָקוּ, וְלָמָּה לֹא הָקִים בְּצִלְאֵל אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן, אֵלָא וּדְאִי מִפְּנֵי שְׂמִשָּׁה הָיָה גִיבּוֹר.

**But even the difficulty of the Rosh has to be excused, that the main proof comes from the verse, “And he spread the tent over the Tabernacle.” For if we had nothing but the verse, “Moses set up the Tabernacle,” as the Rosh seems to have suggested, I still could have said that indeed Moses was not mighty, but that the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted that even he would be engaged in the work of the Tabernacle.**

In that way, **the onyx and other stones were brought down to the chieftains of the tribes from Heaven, in order that even they would bring something as a contribution to the Tabernacle.**<sup>6,7</sup> **Indeed, it is already written, “And he spread the tent over the Tabernacle,” and if so, then Moses already did his part.**

**So why didn't Bezalel set up the Tabernacle, and why did it instead fall to Moses? Rather it's certainly because Moses was mighty, and was able to set it up by himself with only a small miracle, and thus in a manner closer to the natural order, whereas for Bezalel to set up the Tabernacle by himself would have required a great miracle completely outside of nature.**

**אִי נְמִי** בְּדַרְדָּר אַחֲרָת, דְּדִילְמָא מִשָּׁה לֹא הָיָה גִיבּוֹר, וְהָא דְנַעֲשֵׂה הַגָּס עַל יַד מִשָּׁה לְפִי שְׂהֵיָה יוֹתֵר גְּדוֹל קוּמָה מְאַחֲרִים. וּבְנָה הָיָה הַגָּס יוֹתֵר קְרוֹב אֶל הַטֶּבַע, וְאִי הָיָה נְמִי נְקִט קְרָא שֶׁל "וַיָּקָם מִשָּׁה אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן" הָיָה שְׂיִיָּד לְהַקְשׁוֹת וְדִילְמָא אַרְיָד וְקִשְׁיִן הָיָה.

**Alternatively, another way to understand the Gemara, is that perhaps Moses wasn't mighty, but a miracle was created for Moses because he was greater in height than others. I.e., maybe he was tall but thin, and thus not very strong, and it was only thanks to a miracle that he was able to accomplish these matters by himself. In this way, the miracle was closer to nature, than if it had been Bezalel, who was of normal height. Even if the Gemara had also brought the Scripture of “Moses set up the Tabernacle,” it would have been appropriate to ask, “Perhaps he was long and thin,” i.e., tall and slender.**

\* \* \*

<sup>6</sup> Ex. 35:27, “And the chieftains brought onyx and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.”

<sup>7</sup> Ex. Rabbah 33:8: “The rabbis said: Together with the *manna*, there descended for the Israelites precious stones and pearls, which their princes gathered up and stored away.”