

The Place

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The Torah here in this week's reading, mandates a specific "place" where the Israelites were to sacrifice to God. Originally whenever anyone wanted to eat meat they had to bring it to the sanctuary where it was sacrificed, its blood, fats and inedible parts removed and then divided up between the owners and the priests.

During the wilderness period the sanctuary was collapsible and moved with the people. After the death of Moses in the Land of Israel the tabernacle continued to move for some two hundred years from Gilgal to Shiloh and to Nov with interludes where the enemy captured it. According to the Mishna in Zevahim for much of this period, people also sacrificed (killed for food) on Bamot, High places that were also associated with pagan worship. It was not until Solomon's reign that the Temple was built and a single permanent makom "place" became established in Jerusalem.

When the Northern Kingdom split after Solomon's death two temples were built at Dan and Bethel and once again pagan practices became widespread. The Samaritans established their Temple on Mount Gerizim. They argued that mounts Gerizim and Eyal (near Nablus today) were specifically mentioned in the Torah whereas Jerusalem and Mount Zion were not. To this day there, is where they worship and sacrifice. The Samaritans also reject the innovations of Rabbinic Judaism. There are very few of them left now, caught between Islam and Judaism. But in a way, they were right. Jerusalem was not specifically mandated in the Torah. It was established much later and reinforced by rabbinic tradition.

People often ask why, if Judaism has changed Judaism so much, do we have to abide by all their additional laws interpretations. But it is obvious that the genius of the rabbis was to know what it required to keep us alive in exile as a people and would enable us to reach the miraculous stage of re-establishing ourselves in our homeland. When the Temples were lost, the rabbis began to call God HaMakom, the place, meaning every place. God was, is everywhere. And although the Temple was special. It was only one location. In exile, we have come to realize God can be found in every and any space and place. That was the genius, the adaptability of Rabbinic Judaism.

Whereas those who rejected rabbinic Judaism, whether they were Samaritans, Karaite or assimilationists? They flourished for a while but eventually failed to become the dominant force in Judaism. In the long term the rabbis ensured our survival.