Benjamin D. Sommer joined The Jewish Theological Seminary faculty as professor of Bible in July 2008. Previously, he served as director of the Crown Family Center for Jewish Studies at Northwestern University, where he had taught since 1994. Dr. Sommer has been a fellow at the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the Tikvah Center for Jewish Law and Civilization at the New York University School of Law, and the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. He has served as a visiting faculty member in the Department of Bible of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and at the Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas. He has received fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies and the Yad Hanadiv/Berakha Foundation.

Dr. Sommer’s most recent book, Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition received the prestigious Goldstein-Goren Prize in Jewish Thought from Ben Gurion University for the years 2014-2016 and was a finalist for both for the National Jewish Book Award for 2015 and the Association for Jewish Studies’ Jordan Schnitzer Prize for 2014-2016. An Hebrew edition of the book, הנסלה ווסמכות: שני במקרא ובעברות, was published by Carmel Publishing House in Jerusalem in 2022. An earlier book by Professor Sommer, The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel, received the Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion in 2010 awarded by the American Academy of Religion, as well as the Jordan Schnitzer Award from the Association for Jewish Studies for the years 2006-2009. The first book Dr. Sommer published, A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66, was awarded the Salo Wittmayer Baron Prize by the American Academy of Religion.

Dr. Sommer has long been active as a lecturer and scholar-in-residence, teaching rabbis, Jewish educators, and laypeople in a variety of settings in the United States and Israel.
Tent of Meeting: Center and Periphery

Professor Benjamin D. Sommer
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All translations are from the Jewish Publication Society Version (1985)

The P Document (ס"פ - ספרות מהנה)

Terms: אהל מימד (Tent of Meeting), meshıḥ (Tabernacle, Dwelling-Place [cf. שבעה])

What makes the Tent special?


33 And he set up the enclosure around the Tabernacle and the altar, and put up the screen for the gate of the enclosure. When Moses had finished the work, 34 the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. 35 Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud had settled upon it and the Presence of the filled the Tabernacle. 36 When the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set out, on their various journeys; 37 but if the cloud did not lift, they would not set out until such time as it did lift. 38 For over the Tabernacle a cloud of the LORD rested by day, and fire would appear in it by night, in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys. 1:1 The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying:

Speak to the Israelite people, and say to them: When any of you presents an offering of cattle to the LORD, he shall choose his offering from the herd or from the flock. ...
Where is the tent located? Numbers 2

Why is the tent important?

Exodus 29:38-46

38 Now this is what you shall offer upon the altar: two yearling lambs each day, regularly. 39 You shall offer the one lamb in the morning, and you shall offer the other lamb at twilight. 40 . . . 42 a regular burnt offering throughout the generations, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. For there I will meet with you, and there I will speak with you, 43 and there I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified by My Presence. 44 I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and I will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve Me as priests. 45 I will abide among the Israelites, and I will be their God. 46 And they shall know that I the LORD am their God, who brought them out from the land of Egypt that I might abide among them, I the LORD their God.

What happens there? Who goes there? For what reasons?
The E Document (ס"א - ספירת אלפים תמותה)

Term: אהל מועד (Tent of Meeting)

How does it differ from the P Tent?

Exodus 33:7-11

7 Now Moses would take the Tent and pitch it outside the camp, at some distance from the camp. It was called the Tent of Meeting, and whoever sought the LORD would go out to the Tent of Meeting that was outside the camp. 8 Whenever Moses went out to the Tent, all the people would rise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he had entered the Tent. 9 And when Moses entered the Tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the Tent, while He spoke with Moses. 10 When all the people saw the pillar of cloud poised at the entrance of the Tent, all the people would rise and bow low, each at the entrance of his tent. 11 The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another. And he would then return to the camp; but his attendant, Joshua son of Nun, a youth, would not stir out of the Tent.
Then the LORD said to Moses, "Gather for Me seventy of Israel's elders of whom you have experience as elders and officers of the people, and bring them to the Tent of Meeting and let them take their place there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will draw upon the spirit that is on you and put it upon them; they shall share the burden of the people with you, and you shall not bear it alone." Moses went out and reported the words of the LORD to the people. He gathered seventy of the people's elders and stationed them around the Tent. Then the LORD came down in a cloud and spoke to him; He drew upon the spirit that was on him and put it upon the seventy elders. And when the spirit rested upon them, they spoke in ecstasy, but did not continue. Two men, one named Eldad and the other Medad, had remained in camp; yet the spirit rested upon them -- they were among those recorded, but they had not gone out to the Tent -- and they spoke in ecstasy in the camp. A youth ran out and told Moses, saying, "Eldad and Medad are acting the prophet in the camp!" And Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, "My lord Moses, restrain them!" But Moses said to him, "Are you wrougth up on my account? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD put His spirit upon them!" Moses then reentered the camp together with the elders of Israel.

What happens there? Who goes there? For what reasons?

**Sum: Two religious viewpoints.**
Center / periphery
One center / many centers
Permanent / temporary
Immanence / transcendence
Locative / utopian
Place matters a lot / place matters less
Oriented towards sacred place within the community / Tent in area of chaos
One central authority / ideal of many authorities (Num 11.29)

*The Torah is not somewhere in-between these two views; rather, it holds onto both sides at the same time.*
The map in Numbers 2:

From George Buchanan Gray, 
*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers* 
(Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 
p. 17
From Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 91

1a. The Priestly tabernacle according to Exodus 25–40.

1b. Solomon’s temple according to 1 Kings 6–7.