



The Tent of Meeting: Central or Marginal?

Dr. Benjamin Sommer

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. A Hebrew edition of the book, *התגלות וסמכות: סיני במקרא ובמסורת*, 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.

אהל מועד: מרכז ושוליים
Tent of Meeting: Center and Periphery

Professor Benjamin D. Sommer
The Jewish Theological Seminary
פרופ' בנימין זומר
בית המדרש ללימודי יהדות

All translations are from the Jewish Publication Society Version (1985)

The P Document (ס"כ - ספרות כהונה)

⇒ Terms: אהל מועד (Tent of Meeting), משכן (Tabernacle, Dwelling-Place [cf. [שכינה]])

⇒ What makes the Tent special?

<p>Exodus 40:33-38, Leviticus 1:1-2</p> <p>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 LORD 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: ² 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. ...</p>	<p>שמות מ' ל"ג עד ל"ח, ויקרא א' א' עד ב' ³³ וַיִּקַּם אֶת-הַחֲצָר סָבִיב לַמִּשְׁכָּן וְלַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיִּתֵּן אֶת-מָסַךְ שַׁעַר הַחֲצָר וַיְכַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הַמְּלָאכָה: ³⁴ וַיִּכַּס הָעָנָן אֶת-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּכְבֹּד יְ-הוָה מְלֵא אֶת-הַמִּשְׁכָּן: ³⁵ וְלֹא-יָכֹל מֹשֶׁה לָּבוֹא אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד כִּי-שָׁכַן עָלָיו הָעָנָן וַיִּכְבֹּד יְ-הוָה מְלֵא אֶת-הַמִּשְׁכָּן: ³⁶ וּבַהֲעֲלוֹת הָעָנָן מֵעַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן יִסְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכֹל מַסְעֵיהֶם: ³⁷ וְאִם-לֹא יֵעָלֶה הָעָנָן וְלֹא יִסְעוּ עַד-יוֹם הָעֲלֹתוֹ: ³⁸ כִּי עָנָן יְ-הוָה עַל-הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹמָם וְאֵשׁ תִּהְיֶה לַיְלָה בּוֹ לְעֵינֵי כָל-בֵּית-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל-מַסְעֵיהֶם: ^{1:1} וַיִּקְרָא אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיִּזְבֹּר יְ-הוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר: ² דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אַתֶּם כִּי-יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קָרְבָן לִי-הוּא מִן-הַבְּהֵמָה מִן-הַבָּקָר וּמִן-הַצֹּאן תִּקְרִיבוּ אֶת-קָרְבָנְכֶם: ...</p>
--	--

⇒ Where is the tent located?
Numbers 2

⇒ Why is the tent important?

<p>Exodus 29.38-46</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>שמות כ"ט ל"ח עד מ"ו</p> <p>³⁸ וְזֶה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כְּבָשִׂים בְּנֵי-שָׁנָה שְׁנַיִם לַיּוֹם תָּמִיד: ³⁹ אֶת-הַכֶּבֶשׂ הָאֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֶּקֶר וְאֶת הַכֶּבֶשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה בְּיוֹן הָעֶרְבִים: . . . ⁴² עֹלֹת תָּמִיד לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם פְּתַח אֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי יְ-הוָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹעֵד לָכֶם שָׁמָּה לְדַבֵּר אֵלַיךָ שָׁם: ⁴³ וְנִעַדְתִּי שָׁמָּה לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִקְדַּשׁ בְּכַבְדִּי: ⁴⁴ וְקִדַּשְׁתִּי אֶת-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְאֶת-אֹהֶרֶן וְאֶת-בְּנָיו אֲקַדֵּשׁ לְכַהֵן לִי: ⁴⁵ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים: ⁴⁶ וַיָּדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְ-הוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְשִׁכְנִי בְּתוֹכָם אֲנִי יְ-הוָה אֱ-לֹהֵיהֶם:</p>
---	---

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

The E Document (ס"א - ספרות אלהיסטית)

- ⇒ Term: אהל מועד (Tent of Meeting)
- ⇒ How does it differ from the P Tent?

Exodus 33.7-11	שמות ל"ג ז' עד י"א
<p>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.</p>	<p>⁷ ומִשֶׁה יָקַח אֶת־הָאֹהֶל וַיִּטֵּה־לּוֹ מִחֻץ לַמַּחֲנֶה הַרְחֵק מִן־הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְהָיָה כָּל־מִבְקֵשׁ יְהוָה יֵצֵא אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר מִחֻץ לַמַּחֲנֶה: ⁸ וְהָיָה כִּצְאֵת מִשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֹהֶל יִקְוּמוּ כָּל־הָעָם וַיִּצְבּוּ אִישׁ פֶּתַח אֹהֶלוֹ וְהִבִּיטוּ אַחֲרֵי מִשֶׁה עַד־בֹּאוֹ הָאֹהֶל: ⁹ וְהָיָה כִּבְּאֵ מִשֶׁה הָאֹהֶל ירֵד עַמּוּד הָעָנָן וְעָמַד פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְדִבֶּר עִם־מִשֶׁה: ¹⁰ וְרָאָה כָּל־הָעָם אֶת־עַמּוּד הָעָנָן עֹמֵד פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְקָם כָּל־הָעָם וַהֲשִׁתַּחֲוּוּ אִישׁ פֶּתַח אֹהֶלוֹ: ¹¹ וְדִבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־מִשֶׁה פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים כַּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ וְשָׁב אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה וּמִשְׁרָתוֹ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נוּן נָעַר לֹא יִמִּישׁ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֹהֶל:</p>

Numbers 11.16-17, 24-30

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. . . . ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ A youth ran out and told Moses, saying, "Eldad and Medad are acting the prophet in the camp!" ²⁸ And Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, "My lord Moses, restrain them!" ²⁹ But Moses said to him, "Are you wrought up on my account? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD put His spirit upon them!" ³⁰ Moses then reentered the camp together with the elders of Israel.

במדבר י"א ט"ז עד ל'

¹⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר יְ-הוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה אֲסַפֶּה-לִּי שִׁבְעִים אִישׁ מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יִדְעוּת כִּי-הֵם זִקְנֵי הָעָם וְשֹׁטְרָיו וְלִקְחֹת אִתָּם אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְהִתְיַצְבוּ שָׁם עִמָּד: ¹⁷ וַיֵּרְדֹתִי וְדִבַּרְתִּי עִמָּדָה שָׁם וְאֶצְלֹתִי מִן-הָרוּחַ אֲשֶׁר עָלִיהָ וְשִׁמְתִי עֲלֵיהֶם וְנִשְׁאָו אִתָּהּ בְּמִשְׁאֵ הָעָם וְלֹא-תִשָּׂא אִתָּהּ לְבַדָּה: . . . ²⁴ וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה וַיִּדְבַר אֶל-הָעָם אֵת דִּבְרֵי יְ-הוָה וַיֹּאסֹף שִׁבְעִים אִישׁ מִזִּקְנֵי הָעָם וַיַּעֲמֵד אִתָּם סְבִיבֹת הָאֹהֶל: ²⁵ וַיֵּרֵד יְ-הוָה וַיִּהְיֶה בָעָנָן וַיִּדְבַר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאצֵּל מִן-הָרוּחַ אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו וַיִּתֵּן עַל-שִׁבְעִים אִישׁ הַזִּקְנִים וַיְהִי כְנוּחַ עֲלֵיהֶם הָרוּחַ וַיִּתְנַבְּאוּ וְלֹא יָסֹפוּ: ²⁶ וַיִּשְׁאַרוּ שְׁנֵי-אֲנָשִׁים בְּמַחֲנֵה שָׁם הָאֶחָד וְאֶלְדָּד וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִי מֵיָדָד וְתָנַח עֲלֵיהֶם הָרוּחַ וְהִמָּה בְּכַתְּבִים וְלֹא יָצְאוּ הָאֶהֱלָה וַיִּתְנַבְּאוּ בְּמַחֲנֵה: ²⁷ וַיֵּרֶץ הַנְּעָר וַיִּגֵּד לְמֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְדָּד וּמֵיָדָד מְתַנַּבְּאִים בְּמַחֲנֵה: ²⁸ וַיַּעַן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן-נוּן מִשְׁרַת מִשְׁעָה מִבְּחָרָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי מִשְׁעָה כָּלֵאִם: ²⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה הֲמִקְנָא אִתָּהּ לִי וּמִי יִתֵּן כָּל-עַם יְ-הוָה נְבִיאִים כִּי-יִתֵּן יְ-הוָה אֶת-רוּחוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם: ³⁰ וַיֹּאסֹף מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הַמַּחֲנֵה הוּא וְזִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

⇒ 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

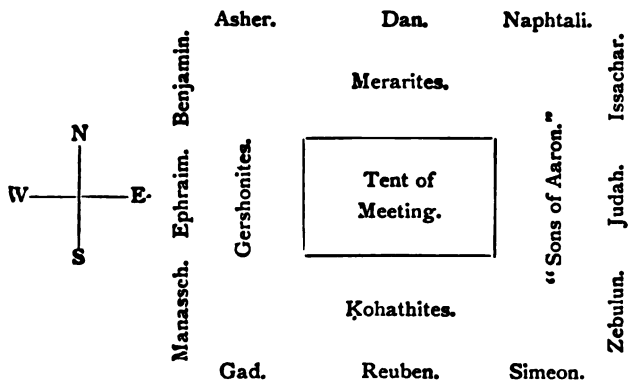
Oriented towards sacred place within the community / Tent in area of chaos

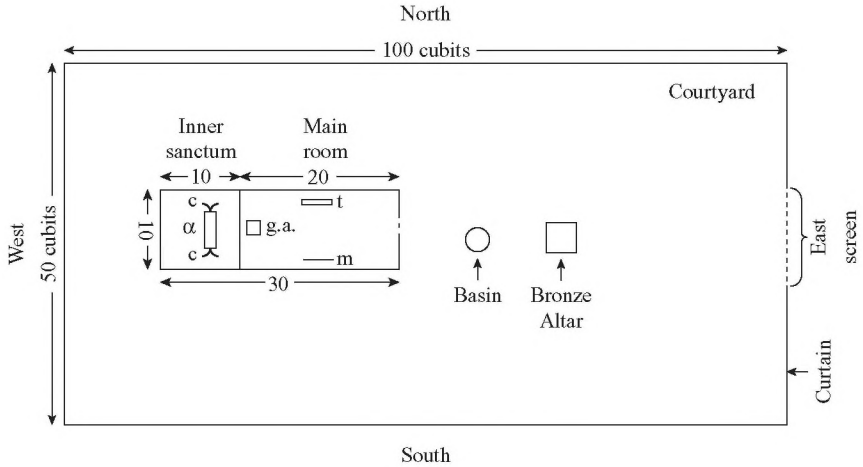
One central authority / ideal of many authorities (Num 11.29)

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:

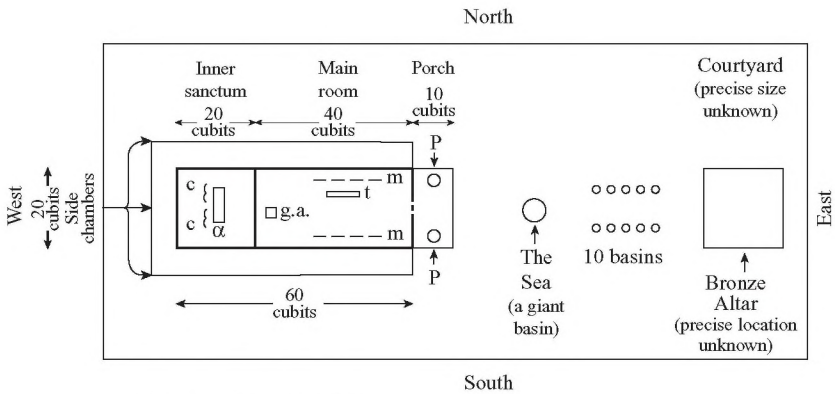
From George Buchanan Gray,
A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers
(Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903),
p. 17





α = Ark
 g.a. = Golden altar
 m = Menorah
 c = Cherubs (Kerubim) (2)
 t = Table

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



c = Cherubs (Kerubim) (2)
 g.a. = Golden altar
 m = Menorahs (10)
 t = Table
 α = Ark
 P = Pillars (2)

Note: The main structure of the temple is rendered in dark lines (—). Side structures attached to the temple (side chambers and the porch) are in a lighter line (---).

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