

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Pekudei

Exodus 38:21-40:38

Torah Reading for Week of March 2-8, 2003

Pekudei: The Audit

Pekudei ("Accounts") is the closing Parshah of the Book of Exodus and last in a series of five Parshiot describing the making of the Mishkan. The Parshah includes: 1) an **audit** of the gold, silver and copper used in the Mishkan's construction; b) the making of the priestly garments; c) the erection and consecration of the Mishkan.

These are the accounts of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Testimony, as they were counted by the command of Moses...

The Menorah and the Kaporet (Ark cover) were of solid gold; the Ark, Table, Golden Altar, and the Mishkan's wall panels and posts were gold-plated; gold thread was added to the fibers in the roof coverings, the Veil (*Parochet*), screens and the High Priest's garments. Altogether,

The gold of the offering was twenty nine talents, and seven

hundred and thirty shekels, after the shekels of the sanctuary.

The silver for the Mishkan was supplied by the **half-shekels** contributed by each of those who "went to be numbered": 603,550 men of draftable age, each giving half a shekel, made 100 talents plus 1,775 shekels of silver (a "talent" is approximately 150 lbs.). The 100 talents were used to make the 100 foundation sockets that held up the Mishkan's wall panels and posts; the 1,775 shekels were used for the hooks and trimmings on the 60 posts that held up the wall-hangings which enclosed the Courtyard.

The copper totaled 70 talents and 2,400 shekels, and was used to make "the foundation sockets to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; the copper brazen altar and its copper grate and all the vessels of the altar; the foundation sockets of the court round about and the sockets of the court gate; and all the pegs of the tabernacle and all the pegs of the court round about."

The Priestly Garments

Although the priestly garments have already been described in detail in G-d's instruction to Moses related in the Parshah of *Tetzaveh* the Torah now devotes 30 verses (39:2-31) to repeat these details in describing the actual making of the garments:

And he made the Eford of gold, blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen...

Commentary

THESE ARE THE ACCOUNTS OF THE TABERNACLE... BY COMMAND OF MOSES... BY THE HAND OF ITAMAR THE SON OF AARON (38:21)

The Sages taught: Always appoint at least two people together as trustees over public funds. Even Moses, who enjoyed the full trust of G-d—as it is written (Numbers 12:7), "In all My house, he is trusted"—figured the accounts of the Sanctuary together with others, as it says: "By the hand of Itamar the son of Aaron."

Thus the Sages taught: the one who made the appropriation [of the monies donated to the Holy Temple] did not enter the chamber wearing either a hemmed cloak or shoes or sandals or tefillin or an amulet (i.e., nothing in which money can be hidden); lest if he became poor people might say that he became poor because of an iniquity committed in the chamber, or if he became rich people might say that he became rich from the appropriation in the chamber. For it is a man's duty to be free of blame before men as before G-d, as it is said (ibid., 32:22): "And be guiltless towards G-d and towards Israel."

(Midrash Tanchuma; Mishnah, Shekalim 3:2)

AND THE SILVER... WAS A HUNDRED TALENTS, AND A THOUSAND SEVEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY FIVE SHEKELS, AFTER THE SHEKEL OF THE SANCTUARY (38:25)

The Roman general Contrococ questioned Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai: If each gave half a shekel, there should have been 201 talents and 11 maneh of silver... Was Moses your teacher either a thief or a swindler or else a bad arithmetician? He gave a half, took a half, and did not [even] return a complete half? Replied Rabbi Yochanan: Moses our teacher was a trustworthy treasurer and a good arithmetician; these talents were

measured in "the shekel of the Sanctuary," which is double the common measure.

(Talmud, Bechorot 5a)

AND IT CAME TO PASS... THAT THE TABERNACLE WAS ERECTED (40:17)

Whenever the Torah uses the word *vayehi* ("and it came to pass"), this connotes a woeful event. What woe was there in the Mishkan's completion? This is comparable to a king who had a contentious wife. So he said to her: "Make me a purple cloak." As long as she was preoccupied with it, she did not quarrel. When her work was completed, she brought it to the king. The king saw it and was pleased with it, and began to cry out, "Woe! Woe!" Said his wife: "What is this, my lord? I have labored to do your will, and you cry, 'woe, woe?'" Said he to her: "The work is beautiful and favorable in my eye. But as long as you were preoccupied with it, you did not anger or provoke me; now that you are free of it, I fear that you will again anger me."

So, too, said G-d: "As long as my children were occupied with the Mishkan, they did not grumble against Me. Now they will again begin to provoke Me." Therefore it says *vayehi*—*vy' hii*, "woe is it."

(Midrash Tanchuma)

IN THE FIRST MONTH... ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE MONTH, THE TABERNACLE WAS ERECTED (40:17)

On the 25th of Kislev the work of Mishkan was completed, and its components sat folded up [for three months] until the 1st of Nissan, because G-d wanted that the Mishkan should be erected in the month that Isaac was born... The month of Kislev was thus deprived. Said G-d: "I must

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And he made the Breastplate... And they set in it four rows of stones ... inclosed in fixtures of gold in their settings. And the stones were according to the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names

And he made the Cloak of the Eford of woven work, all of blue... And they made upon the hems of the Cloak pomegranates of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and twined linen. And they made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates upon the hem of the robe...

And they made tunics of fine linen of woven work for Aharon, and for his sons; and the turban of fine linen... and linen breeches of fine twined linen; and a sash of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, the work of an embroiderer; as G-d commanded Moses.

And they made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold, and wrote upon it a writing, like the engravings of a signet, "Holy

to G-d." And they tied to it a lace of blue, to fasten it on the turban above; as G-d commanded to Moses.

"Thus was all the work of the tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting **finished**; and the children of Israel did according to all that G-d commanded Moses, so they did."

The Dwelling Assembled

And they brought the Tabernacle to Moses... And Moses saw all the work, and, behold, they had done it as G-d had commanded, even so had they done it; and Moses blessed them....

And it came to pass in the first month (Nissan) in the second year (from the Exodus), on the first day of the month, that the Tabernacle was erected.

And Moses erected the Tabernacle, and fastened its sockets, and set up its wall panels, and put in its bars, and reared up its pillars.

And he spread the tent over the Mishkan, and put the covering of the tent above upon it; as G-d commanded Moses.

And he took and put the [Tablets of] Testimony into the Ark, and set the carrying poles on the Ark, and put the Kaporet above upon the Ark. And he brought the Ark into the Tabernacle, and set up the Veil of the screen, and screened the Ark of the Testimony; as G-d commanded Moses.

Commentary

compensate it." How did G-d compensate the month of Kislev? With the dedication of the Temple by the Hashmoneans (on Chanukah).

(Pesikta Rabbati)

When did the consecration of the Sanctuary begin? On the twenty-third of Adar. And on the first of Nissan the days of consecration were completed. During each of the seven days of consecration Moses set up the Tabernacle and offered his sacrifices in it every morning and then pulled it down. On the eighth day he put it up but did not dismantle it again.

(Midrash Rabbah)

Seven times Moses erected the Mishkan and then dismantled it, presaging the seven Sanctuaries that would serve the Jewish people: the Tabernacle in the desert, those at Gilgal, Shiloh, Nov and Givon, and the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. Seven times Moses dismantled the Tabernacle and then set it up again, so that the future falls of these Sanctuaries should not be permanent, but be followed by a rebuilding. Thus we are guaranteed that the destruction of the seventh Sanctuary will be followed by the building of the Third Temple, which shall never be destroyed.

(Rabbi Avraham Mordechai of Gur)

AND THE GLORY OF G-D FILLED THE TABERNACLE (40:34)

What is the meaning of the verse (Song of Songs), "I have come into My garden, My sister, My bride"? This means [G-d says, "I have returned] to My bridal chamber, to the place which has been My principal abode from the very beginning." For was not the principal abode of the Shechinah (Divine Presence) in the terrestrial regions? For so it is

written (Genesis 3:8), "And they heard the voice of the L-rd G-d walking in the garden"...

But when Adam sinned, the Shechinah betook itself to the first heaven. When Cain sinned, it betook itself to the second heaven; when the generation of Enosh sinned, it ascended to the third heaven; when the generation of the Flood sinned it rose to the fourth heaven: when the generation of the Tower of Babel sinned, it moved up into the fifth heaven; when the people of Sodom sinned, it rose into the sixth heaven; and when the Egyptians sinned, it ascended into the seventh heaven.

Then arose seven righteous people who brought the Shechinah down from the celestial to the terrestrial regions: Abraham brought it down from the seventh heaven to the sixth, Isaac brought it down from the sixth to the fifth, Jacob brought it down from the fifth to the fourth, Levi brought it down from the fourth to the third, Kehat brought it down from the third to the second, Amram brought it down from the second to the first and Moses brought it down from the celestial to the terrestrial region... When did the Shechinah come to dwell on earth? On the day when the Tabernacle was erected, as it says, "And the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle."

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND MOSES WAS NOT ABLE TO ENTER THE TENT OF MEETING, BECAUSE THE CLOUD RESTED ON IT, AND THE GLORY OF G-D FILLED THE TABERNACLE (40:35)

Rav Zerika raised the following contradiction: One verse reads, "And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of meeting because the cloud rested on it," whereas another verse (Exodus 24:18) says: "And Moses entered into the midst of the cloud"? This is to tell us that G-d took hold

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And he put the Table in the Tent of Meeting, upon the northward side of the Tabernacle, outside the Veil. And he set the bread in order upon it before G-d; as G-d had commanded Moses

And he put the Menorah in the Tent of Meeting, over against the table, on the southward side of the tabernacle. And he lighted the lamps before G-d; as G-d commanded Moses.

And he put the Golden Altar in the Tent of Meeting before the Veil: and he burnt sweet incense upon it as G-d commanded Moses.

And he set up the Screen at the door of the tabernacle. And he put the Altar of Burnt Offering before the door of the Tabernacle... and offered upon it the burnt offering and the meal offering; as G-d commanded Moses.

And he set the Basin between the Tent of Meeting and the

altar, and put water there, for washing...

And he erected the Court round about the Tabernacle and the Altar, and set up the screen of the court gate. And Moses finished the work.

The **Dwelling** Inhabited

And the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle...

When the cloud was taken up from over the Tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: but if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up.

For the cloud of G-d was upon the Tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

Commentary

of Moses and brought him into the cloud.

(Talmud, Yoma 4b)

Said Rabbi Chama bar Chaninah: Can it be that Moses feared the cloud? Is it not already written, "And Moses entered into the midst of the cloud"? ... In what sense was he "not able"? Because Moses accorded honor to the Shechinah, and did not enter until he was summoned inside.

(Midrash HaGadol)

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From the Chassidic Masters

GOOD MORNING

Why are we here?

This, the mother of all questions, is addressed in turn by the various streams of Torah thought, each after its own style.

The Talmud states, simply and succinctly, “I was created to serve my Creator.” The moralistic-oriented works of *Mussar* describe the purpose of life as the refinement of one’s character traits. The Zohar says that G-d created us “in order that His creations should know Him.” Master Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria offered the following reason for creation: G-d is the essence of good, and the nature of good is to bestow goodness. But goodness cannot be bestowed when there is no one to receive it. To this end, G-d created our world — so that there should be recipients of His goodness.

Chassidic teaching explains that these reasons, as well as the reasons given by other kabbalistic and philosophical works, are but the various faces of a singular divine desire for creation, as expressed in the various “worlds” or realms of G-d’s creation. Chassidism also offers its own formulation of this divine desire: that we “Make a home for G-d in the material world.”

A Home For G-d

What does it mean to make our world a home for G-d?

A basic tenet of our faith is that “the entire world is filled with His presence” and “there is no place void of Him.” So it’s not that we have to bring G-d into the material world — He is already there. But G-d can be in the world without being at home in it.

Being “at home” means being in a place that is receptive to your presence, a place devoted to serving your needs and desires. It means being in a place where you are your true, private self, as opposed to the public self you assume in other environments.

The material world, in its natural state, is not an environment hospitable to G-d. If there is one common feature to all things material, it is their intrinsic egocentrism, their placement of the self as the foundation and purpose of existence. With every iota of its mass, the stone proclaims: “I am.” In the tree and in the animal, the preservation and propagation of the self is the focus of every instinct and the aim of every achievement. And who more than the human being has elevated ambition to an art and self-advancement to an all-consuming ideal?

The only thing wrong with all this selfishness is that it blurs the truth of what lies behind it: the truth that creation is not an end in itself, but a product of and vehicle for its Creator. And this selfishness is not an incidental or secondary characteristic of our world, but its most basic feature. So to make our world a “home” for G-d we must transform its very nature. We must recast the very foundations of its identity from a self-oriented entity into something that exists for a purpose that is greater than itself.

Every time we take a material object or resource and enlist it in the service of G-d, we are effecting such a transformation. When we take a piece of leather and make a pair of *tefillin* out of it, when we take a dollar bill and give it to charity, when we employ our minds to study a chapter of Torah — we are effecting such a transformation. In its initial state, the piece of leather proclaimed, “I exist”; now it says, “I exist to serve my Creator.” A dollar in pocket says, “Greed is good”; in the charity box it says, “The purpose of life is not to receive, but to give.” The human brain says, “Enrich thyself”; the brain studying Torah says, “Know thy G-d.”

The Frontier of Self

There are two basic steps to the endeavor of making our world a home for G-d. The first step involves priming the material resource as a “vessel for G-dliness”: shaping the leather into *tefillin*, donating the money to charity, scheduling time for Torah study. The second step is the actual employment of these “vessels” to serve the divine will: binding the *tefillin* on the arm and head, using the donated money to feed the hungry, studying Torah, etc.

At first glance, it would seem that the second step is the more significant one, while the first step is merely an enabler of the second, a means to its end. But the Torah’s account of the first home for G-d

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built in our world places the greater emphasis on the construction of the “home,” rather than its actual employment as a divine dwelling.

A sizable portion of the book of Exodus is devoted to the construction of the Sanctuary built by the children of Israel in the desert. The Torah, which is usually so sparing with words that many of its laws are contained within a single word or letter, is uncharacteristically elaborate. The fifteen materials used in the Sanctuary’s construction are listed no less than three times; the components and furnishings of the Sanctuary are listed eight times; and every minute detail of the Sanctuary’s construction, down to the dimensions of every wall-panel and pillar and the colors in every tapestry, is spelled out not once, but twice — in the account of G-d’s instructions to Moses, and again in the account of the Sanctuary’s construction.

All in all, thirteen chapters are devoted to describing how certain physical materials were fashioned into an edifice dedicated to the service of G-d and the training of the *Kohanim* (priests) who were to officiate there. (In contrast, the Torah devotes one chapter to its account of the creation of the universe, three chapters to its description of the revelation at Mount Sinai, and eleven chapters to the story of the Exodus).

The Sanctuary is the model and prototype for all subsequent homes for G-d constructed on physical earth. So the overwhelming emphasis on its “construction” stage (as opposed to the “implementation” stage) implies that in our lives, too, there is something very special about forging our personal resources into things that have the potential to serve G-d. Making ourselves “vessels” for G-dliness is, in a certain sense, a greater feat than actually bringing G-dliness into our lives.

For this is where the true point of transformation lies — the transformation from a self-oriented object to a thing committed to something greater than itself.

If G-d had merely desired a hospitable environment, He need not have bothered with a material world; a spiritual world could just as easily have been enlisted to serve Him. What G-d desired was the transformation itself: the challenge and achievement of selfhood transcended and materiality redefined. This transformation and redefinition occurs in the first stage, when something material is forged into an instrument of the divine. The second stage is only a matter of actualizing an already established potential, of putting a thing to its now natural use.

Making Vessels

You meet a person who has yet to invite G-d into his or her life. A person whose endeavors and accomplishments — no matter how successful and laudable — have yet to transcend the self and self-oriented goals.

You wish to expand her horizons — to show him a life beyond the strictures of self. You wish to put on *tefillin* with him, to share with her the divine wisdom of Torah.

But he’s not ready yet. You know that the concept of serving G-d is still alien to a life trained and conditioned to view everything through the lens of self. You know that before you can introduce her to the world of Torah and mitzvot, you must first make her receptive to G-dliness, receptive to a life of intimacy with the divine.

So when you meet him on the street, you simply smile and say, “Good morning!” You invite her to your home for a cup of coffee or a Shabbat dinner. You make small talk. You don’t, at this point, suggest any changes in his lifestyle. You just want her to become open to you and what you represent.

Ostensibly, you haven’t “done” anything. But in essence, a most profound and radical transformation has taken place. The person has become a vessel for G-dliness.

Of course, the purpose of a vessel is that it be filled with content; the purpose of a home is that it be inhabited. The Sanctuary was built to house the presence of G-d. But it is the *making* of vessels for G-dliness that is life’s greatest challenge and its most revolutionary achievement.

Based on the teachings of Lubavitcher Rebbe, rendered by Yanki Tauber