



Shabbat Pekudei/Teen Shabbat March 16, 2024

By Ruthie Holzer

Shabbat Shalom, my name is Ruthie Holzer.

This week's Torah portion is the last in the book of Shemot, Parshah Pekudei, which means the records, or the accounting of. This is a very appropriate name for what is in this Parshah. In it, G-d tells Moses, the Levites, and the Israelites about how to build the Mishkan, the Ohel Moed, and everything that goes inside. The amount of detail that was given is quite extreme. Imagine for a second that not only does Ikea tell you how to build your furniture, but also exactly where in your house it needs to go, and what you are allowed to do with that furniture, it would be a little much.

But also, there has to be a reason for this level of detail included for how to build the Mishkan. The word Mishkan comes from the root Shin Kuf Nun, the same word as Shechinah, or the divine presence of G-d on Earth. And if we are to have any representation of G-d, then it has to be perfect, and each detail needs to be perfectly planned out, a job too great for any person to do.

You would think, however, that there is some sort of order to these details. So if that's the case, then why do we talk about building the furniture inside, such as the menorah and altar, before talking about the larger structure? Why would you build the furniture before you have a house to put it in?

To answer this question, I have a little story. Our two characters are Bezalel, the chief builder we'll call him, and Moses, the boss. G-d tells Moses to build the Ohel Moed, the Aron, and all the vessels to go inside of them. But Boss Moses mixes the order up when he repeats the instruction to Bezalel. He says, "Build the Aron, the vessels, and then the Ohel Moed." Bezalel, our astute builder, thinks long and hard about this nonsensical instruction, because who would ever build the vessels before having somewhere to put them, and asks Moses about this instruction. Upon learning of his mistake, Moses thanks Bezalel in a way. He stated that he was "Betsel El, in the shadow of G-d". So Bezalel then goes on to do the logical thing and build everything in the correct order. I'm sure everyone here has heard the saying, "It's not about the destination, it's about the journey." Well, that phrase applies here too. If Moses just built the Mishkan without taking care of how it was made, then it is as if it was worthless. The Mishkan is only as holy as it is because of the intricate process involved in building it. I think we can get more meaning from Moses' mistake though. Is there ever a time that it would be acceptable to build the furniture first?

To this, I would answer yes. If there are times when it isn't certain whether it is possible to build the entire project, then start with something smaller. If that small piece is all you are left with, then that is okay. This gives you the opportunity to continue in the future if the time is right. I would argue that it is better to have a small section totally complete, than a larger one half done.

But why is it so important that everything is built perfectly, I mean, are we even going to use the Mishkan again? Well, I have a little inside knowledge about next week's parshah, and it turns out we do use the mishkan again, which I'll share with you all, sorry for the spoiler. Despite the fact that we're ending the book of Shemot, and starting the book of Vayikra, the story picks up perfectly. Ever since Parshat Terumah 4ish weeks ago, we have been talking about the Mishkan constantly. Today, we read how the Mishkan was finally finished being built. And it was constructed perfectly. We know this because, in chapter 40, verses 33+34, it says "When Moses had finished the work, the cloud covered the Ohel Moed, and the presence of the Lord filled the Mishkan". Now that the Mishkan had been constructed, the Israelites needed to do something with it. In the next book of the Torah, Vayikra, we learn the rules of offering sacrifices, and how the priests should act when in and around the Mishkan. Nachmonadies writes that the book of Shemot is meant to describe the exile that was foretold in Bereishit and to relate the salvation from that exile. The reason the book ends with Parshah Pekudei is because the exile was not completed until Bnei Yisrael

returned to the level of the Patriarchs. When they left Egypt, although they no longer were slaves, Bnei Yisrael was still "in exile," because they were "in a land that was not theirs", when they were wandering in the desert. When they came to Har Sinai and built the Mishkan, Hashem was among them again, and they returned to the level of Patriarchs. Only then are they considered to have been redeemed.

Now, we're at the part of the Drash where I tell you what you can learn and how what we just read applies to your life today. It may be easy to compare the Mishkan to a synagogue, but what about the Ohel Moed? Judaism has changed a ton since the time this all occurred, and there isn't one central location where a single person rules over all the Jewish people. There is no place that is so holy that only one person is allowed to enter. So we may have to shift our thinking if we want a modern-day comparison. In the Ohel Moed, Moses is at his holiest and receives messages from G-d. When are we at our most holy? Probably on Yom Kippur. So maybe the Ohel Moed is a state of mind that we long to enter during the Yom Kippur service, where we feel so holy that it is like we can personally talk to G-d. In this way only you can enter your own Ohel Moed, since it isn't a physical location but a place in each of our minds.

So while we might not be building Mishkans, or sacrificing animals in our daily lives, it is still important to pay attention to the details. After all, if Moses can mess up the order in instructions, anyone can make a mistake. So let's all strive for our best so we can reach our Ohel Moed.

Very quickly I would like to thank my partner in crime, Rimon Rosen, for helping pull this off. Without him, this would not have happened.

Shabbat Shalom