

Parshat Pekudei: From Pharaoh's Builders to God's Builders

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Sometimes you need to read the end of a story to understand the beginning. This is why the story of the completion of the *mishkan*, the tabernacle, in all of its glorious detail, is really here to answer the fundamental question: Why do we need a *mishkan*, and why do we need to be the ones to build it?

In *parshat* Teruma, God tells Moshe (Shemot 25:8):

V'asu li mikdash v'shakhanti b'tokham:

And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.

No explanation is given at the beginning of this process as to why God might legislate the building of a *mishkan*. Five *parshiyot* later, every detail has been commanded, and every detail has been fulfilled. All the pieces have been designed, lovingly created, and assembled. As the components of the *mishkan* are brought to Moshe, the Torah states:

Vateikhel kol avodat mishkan ohel mo'ed v'yaasu Bnei Yisrael k'khol asher tzivah et moshe kein asu: v'yaviu et hamishkan el Moshe et ha'ohel v'et kal-keylav k'rasav b'rikhav v'amudav v'adanav...k'khol asher tzivah Hashem et Moshe kein asu Bnei Yisrael et kol ha'avodah: **Va'yar** Moshe et kol a milakha v'hinei asu o'tah k'asher tzivah Hashem kein asu **v'yivareikh** o'tam Moshe:

Thus **was completed** all the work of the tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting. The Israelites did so; just as YKVK had commanded Moses, so they did. Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses, with the tent and all its furnishings: its clasps, its planks, its bars, its posts, and its sockets...Just as YKVK had commanded Moses, so the Israelites had done all the work. And when Moses **saw** that they had performed all the tasks—as YKVK had commanded, so they had done—Moses **blessed** them (Shemot 39:32-33, 42-43).

A careful reading reveals three key words: *Va'takhel* (it was completed), *Va'yar* (he saw), and *V'ayivareikh* (he blessed). The work of the *mishkan* **is completed**, Moshe **sees** the work and deems it acceptable, and Moshe **blesses** the people who did the work, that is, Bnei Yisrael. These words echo in our minds from the first time we saw them together:



6 Adar II 5784 | March 16, 2024

Va'yar elokim et kol asher asah, v'hinei tov m'od va'yih-erev, va'yih boker, yom ha'shishi. **Va'yakhulu** hashamayim v'ha'arets v'kol tziva'am: Va'yikhal elokim ba'yim ha'shvi'i milakhtu asher ase. **Va'yivarekh** elokim et-yom ha'shvi'i va'yikadesh o'to ki vo shabbat mikal m'lakhto asher-bara elokhim la'asot:

And God **saw** all that had been made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. The heaven and the earth **were finished**, and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work that had been undertaken: [God] ceased on the seventh day from doing any of the work. And God **blessed** the seventh day and declared it holy—having ceased on it from all the work of creation that God had done (Bereishit 1:31-2:3).

The work of creation **is completed**. God **sees** the work and deems it very good, and God **blesses** the seventh day of creation. God has created the world, and God blesses its completion. In our story, Moshe has led Bnei Yisrael in the creation of the *mishkan*, Bnei Yisrael have completed the work according to God's instructions, that is, they have done it well, and Moshe blesses the people upon its completion. The world is God's big building project; the *mishkan* is ours.

There are many reasons why a building project was a good idea for Bnei Yisrael. Back in Egypt, they were builders. They made bricks and turned them into cities. So, when they were transformed from Pharaoh's slaves to God's chosen people, they had a transferable skill. The people were full of generosity, and in possession of diverse talents, which could be utilized and appreciated in such a project. A physical, visible focal point was going to be helpful in relating to an incorporeal, invisible God. And anyone who has ever related to children knows how a joint Lego project can bring together the most contentious crowd.

The project itself would bring home to Bnei Yisrael the ways in which they were like God, and the ways in which they were not. The *mishkan* is seen by our sages as a microcosm of the world, and its creation by Bnei Yisrael as the human version of creation. Midrash Tanchuma details this correspondence:

Amar Rabbi Ya'akov b'rabbi asi, lamah hu omer, Hashem ahavti, ma'on beitekha u'makom mishkan kivodekha (Psalms 26:8) bishvil sheshakul, k'neged b'riat olam. Keitzad, b'rishon kitiv: Bereishit barah elokim eit hashamayim v'eit ha'arets (Bereishit 1:1), u'khitiv: noteh shamayim ka'yiriah (Psalms 104:2) u'bimishkan mah ki'tiv: V'asiti yiriot izim (Exodus 26:7) (Midrash Tanchuma Pekudei 2:3).



6 Adar II 5784 | March 16, 2024

R. Jacob the son of Issi asked: Why does it say; *I love the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth* (Ps. 26:8)? Because the Tabernacle is equal to the creation of the world itself. How is that so? Concerning the first day, it is written: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth* (Gen. 1:1), and it is written elsewhere: *Who stretched out the heavens like a curtain* (Ps. 104:2), and concerning the Tabernacle it is written: *And thou shalt make curtains of goats' hair* (Exod. 26:7) (Midrash Tanchuma Pekudei 2:3).

The Midrash goes on to enumerate the day by day correspondence between God's acts of creation and the components of the *mishkan*. It concludes with the idea that the *mishkan* serves the same purpose for Bnei Yisrael as the heavens and earth: to bear witness to their behavior, and to keep them in line.

God has set a challenge for Bnei Yisrael: Create the *mishkan*, so that I may dwell among you. It will be in the middle of your camp; it will be a physical manifestation of My presence. I am a Builder and you are builders. I created the world with ten utterances (Pirkei Avot 5:1), and you need 500 *pesukim* to get the job done. I stretched out the heavens and you will stretch out the curtains. We have a joint project, so we are partners, but we are unlike, as I am God and you are My people. And finally, I am going to sprinkle references to the laws of Shabbat throughout the process, to remind you that I, God, rested on the seventh day of creation, and you, My people, must do so as well. What better demonstration of the principles of this new relationship.

No wonder Moshe saw the final product and blessed the people. They were finally worthy of the *Shechina*, God's Divine Presence, to rest among them.

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