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בס"ד

Parashat Pequdeh Part II Completion of the Mishkan

1. Finalization

Upon the Mishkan's completion Moshe examined it in detail, checking all its components and furnishings (Ex. 39:33-41). The following verse (42) relates – in the Torah's "objective" mode – that all the work was done in accordance with Hashem's instructions to Moshe. In a way, this statement interrupts the narrative flow of Moshe's examination. The next verse, the final one in the paragraph, records the results of Moshe's examination of all the work: "and behold, they did it in accordance with Hashem's instructions," and וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם מִשָּׁה ("Moshe blesses them," v. 43). Finally, Moshe's personal disposition toward the people has become positive; he is convinced that their repentance was genuine. The "interruption" seems to reinforce the position that the Torah text had recognized the Israelites' genuine commitment to the Covenant before Moshe, who had been reluctant to do so until the completion.

G-d instructed Moshe to have the Mishkan assembled on the first day of the first month of the second year, counting from the Exodus (Ex. 40:2). The designation of the "first" month had been commanded the previous year to honor the Exodus that occurred at that time (12:2).* G-d had made a specific point that the great event was occurring in חֹדֶשׁ הַקָּאָבִיב (13:4; Deut. 16:1), a term that reflects the new season's sprouting of ears of barley, hence meaning the spring month. It was significant that He redeemed the nation in the month that brought the widespread rejuvenation of nature.

The first day of that month, with the spring equinox imminent, was viewed throughout the region as a marker for the end of the winter's agricultural stagnation and was an occasion of joyful anticipation. Many cultures of the ancient Near East celebrated

that day as the beginning of the year and initiations of sanctuaries were often scheduled for it. Since the Mishkan program was associated with atonement and a fresh start for Israel, it was especially appropriate to heighten its symbolic impact by linking its launching with the natural harbingers of rejuvenation as well as with the historic events of national redemption. Instead of being a celebration of nature that day became a milestone of national history in Israel.

G-d provided Moshe final instructions for setting up the Mishkan. He itemized the particulars that had to be done: assembling the tent, placing the furnishings in their proper location and performing the relevant services. The latter included anointing and sanctifying the tent, the furnishings and the high priest, anointing the other priests, as well as several procedures pertaining to priestly installation (Ex. 40:1-15). The paragraph concludes with a one-verse summary that informs us of Moshe's having complied with all particulars (v. 16). It is noteworthy that in this section the key roots of מ-ש-ח (anoint) and ק-ד-ש (sanctify) each appear eight times. The following paragraph provides a detailed account of Moshe's fulfillment of some of these instructions (vv. 17-33).

The one-verse summary of verse 16 is a formulaic statement that serves to complete a subsection; it is not an immediate continuation of the narrative, but was written from a future perspective looking back, when all was indeed done. It indicates that in the proper time Moshe completed everything according to Hashem's instructions. The detailed account of fulfillment that follows (beginning with verse 17) continues the narrative of verse 15, with Moshe doing all that had to be done. He alone had been shown the larger picture (literally) of all the particulars. This

included performing all the priestly services as installation of the priests had not yet taken place.

Viewing the total picture of the Torah's formulation of the Mishkan project at its conclusion, Robert Alter comments: "Throughout the Tabernacle passages, both in the directions and in the implementation, language has an incantatory or quasi-musical function in addition to the instructional aim, evoking in gorgeous syllables the sheer splendor and artisanal perfection of the sanctuary. This concluding catalogue is rather like the recapitulation of themes at the end of the last movement of a classical symphony, pulling all the previously stated elements together as the piece moves toward satisfying closure" (The Five Books of Moses, Translation with Commentary, p. 530).

2. On the Attachment to Leviticus

The detailed account of Moshe's setting up the Mishkan (vv. 17-33) omits mention of his anointing the sanctuary and its furnishings as well as his attending to the procedures associated with priestly installation. This is despite the fact that Hashem had mentioned those procedures to him in the preceding list of details that had to be attended to. The explanation appears to be that those rituals are to be narrated in Leviticus 8-9. As the compendium governing most aspects of priesthood and sanctuary, Leviticus is the more appropriate location for reporting on priestly initiation into sanctuary service. Thus, the narrative account at the end of Exodus anticipates the Torah's next major division and defers to it the discussion of a subject that more naturally "belongs" to it. This reflects an organizing principle governing the Books of Exodus and Leviticus.

Why does Leviticus not commence with the very next items on the agenda as per the above itemization, the anointment of the Mishkan and its furnishings and installation of the priests? Priestly installation required anointment with the sacred oil similar to that of the Mishkan and its furnishings, all of which were to be performed on the same occasion. But it was also necessary to perform various sacrifices for priestly installation as had been prescribed in a general way in Exodus 29. Sacrifices entailed many details that G-d had to first teach Moshe and which were organized as a somewhat

independent section. Accordingly, Leviticus 1-7 – chapters mostly devoted to regulations governing and associated with sacrifices – is interposed between the description of the construction of the Mishkan and the installation of the priests. Although these chapters contain some material not directly relevant to priestly installation, once the section was being composed it was done with its own imperatives and thus with the inclusion of some related subject matter.

In the concluding passage of Exodus the Torah states that the cloud covered the *Ohel Mo'ed*, Hashem's glory filled the Mishkan and Moshe was not able to enter the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Ex. 40:34-35). These verses appear to be directly linked to the first verse of Leviticus. There it states that Hashem called to Moshe from the *Ohel Mo'ed* – presumably inviting him to enter – and began instructing him regarding sacrifices. Thus, Leviticus straightaway continues the narrative account from the end of Exodus. The rare formula in Leviticus' first verse stating that וַיִּקְרָא אֵל מֹשֶׁה מִן הַיְהוֹדֵד ה' אֵלָיו ("He called to Moshe, Hashem spoke to him") is explained by Ibn Ezra as pointing to the special summoning required to enable Moshe to enter the *Ohel Mo'ed* for the first time. (It should be noted that twice previously Hashem used a *vayiqra* summons to Moshe, first at the Burning Bush when speaking to him for the first time (Ex. 3:4) and then at Mount Sinai (19:3). Some have seen its use as indicating the start of a new phase of prophecy.)

This chronology follows Rabbi Aqiba, who considered the day that the Mishkan was to be assembled – the first day of the first month of the second year – to be the day that the seven days of priestly initiation began. The actual dedication of the Mishkan was on the eighth day of that month (Lev. 9:1).

Other Sages interpreted the "eighth day," the day of Mishkan dedication, to be the first day of the first month, the day on which the Mishkan was to be officially assembled. According to them, Leviticus' first words were not transmitted on that day; rather, they refer to the beginning of the seven days of priestly initiation (Day 23 of the previous month, Adar) that preceded the first day of the first month of the second year. They assume that there had been preliminary assembly (and disassembly) of the Mishkan beginning seven days prior to the official

setting-up day so that the priests could be initiated and ready for the dedication day.

3. Mount Sinai-Mishkan Linkage

The concluding passage of Exodus begins with the following details: The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, the Divine glory filled the Mishkan, and Moshe was unable to enter the cloud-covered area (Ex. 40:34-35). The final verse states that Hashem's cloud was on the Mishkan by day and fire by night, manifest "to the eyes of Israel in all their travels" (v. 38). In the first verse of Leviticus, Hashem summons Moshe. This is strikingly parallel to the description pertaining to Mount Sinai when Hashem called Moshe to ascend the mountain to receive the Tablets (Ex. 24:15-18). That context has the cloud covering the mountain, G-d's glory dwelling on the mountain, and His glory being manifest "to the eyes" of Israel. Moshe was waiting, unable to proceed, until Hashem called to him.

To more fully appreciate these correspondences and recognize that the two passages are intended to be taken in association with each other, we will cite the more relevant Hebrew phrases: וַיִּכַּס הָעָנָן אֶת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (40:34a) parallels וַיִּכַּס הָעָנָן אֶת הַהָר (24:15b); וַיִּשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי (40:34b) parallels וַיִּשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי (24:16a); וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר קַם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל (40:38) corresponds to וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר קַם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל (24:17) and וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר קַם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל (Lev. 1:1) recalls וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר קַם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל (Ex. 24:16).

The Mount Sinai passage is precisely at the point in the text that is immediately followed by Hashem's instructions to Moshe to construct the Tabernacle (25:1). The Tabernacle was designed to parallel the experience at the mountain so as to duplicate it in a portable sanctuary. Thus, upon the Tabernacle's completion, Israel understood that the sign of the Divine presence – recalling Revelation and the Lawgiving – was transferred from Mount Sinai to the portable sanctuary. The nation was to have G-d's glory manifest in it as was the case at the mountain at the time of establishment of the Covenant. The prophecy that was now to emanate from the Tent of Meeting paralleled the prophecy at the mountain. The ongoing Lawgiving in the Mishkan is a continuation of the Lawgiving at Mount Sinai, a subject we will return to in our Leviticus studies.

A cluster of expressions similar to the above – the cloud filling the sanctuary, the priests unable to proceed and the Divine glory filling the sanctuary – is also found at the dedication of Solomon's Temple (I Kings 8:10-11), creating linkage between it and the Mishkan.

4. Follow Up in the Book of Numbers

The final three verses of the Book of Exodus are in the nature of a coda. They continue speaking of the cloud but from the perspective of a future time, referring to a phenomenon that at that point could only have been anticipated. We are told that when the cloud lifted from upon the Mishkan, and only then, Israel would proceed to travel. This practice applied to all their journeys. In the Book of Numbers, at the point when the nation was on the threshold of leaving Mount Sinai in the second month of the second year, the theme of G-d's leading the nation on its travels via the cloud is more fully elaborated (Num. 9:15-23). The Exodus verses are, as it were, a condensed version of that passage.

The cloud was the symbol of G-d's presence. Its leading the way for Israel is the most appropriate expression of a full reconciliation with G-d after the golden calf episode. It also is a most fitting close to the Mishkan construction section as well as to the Book of Exodus. Thus, in addition to the Book of Exodus looking toward the Book of Leviticus for narrative continuation, its final verses look toward the Book of Numbers and its wanderings (with its enormous problems). It strikes an optimistic note informing us that ultimately the venture was successful.

The Mishkan assembly described at the end of Exodus and the anointing of it and its furnishings on the dedication day described in Leviticus 8 are joined together in Numbers 7:1 in the introductory verse to another dimension of that celebratory occasion. The latter section deals with the twelve days of altar initiation ceremonies (procedures distinct from the sacrifices performed for the sanctuary dedication), in which the chieftains and their donations were prominent. It begins: "And it was on the day that Moshe concluded setting up the Mishkan, anointed it and sanctified it...and the altar with all its vessels, and anointed them and sanctified them, that the

chieftains of Israel stepped forth...and brought their offerings before Hashem..." (Num. 7:1-3). That passage was not placed in Leviticus since the chieftains' role does not directly fit into the purity-holiness program propounded in that Book, especially since their participation in the altar initiation ceremonies was a complex matter, as we shall point out in our study on Numbers 7.

5. Further on the Mishkan-Creation-Shabbat Association

In our essay on the Shabbat passage of *Parashat Ki Tissa* we noted a number of remarkable correspondences that link the Mishkan with Creation, particularly with the Shabbat passage at the conclusion of the account of the Six Days. In citing several clauses from the last two chapters of the Book of Exodus we did not point out the strategic location of those clauses, perhaps leaving the impression that they were attested somewhat unsystematically, scattered throughout the last sections of Exodus. The following is an enhancement of those comments.

Four stages of Mishkan completion are recorded in Exodus' final two chapters, each comprising a distinct section (and each concluding with a *petuha* break):

1. Completion of all the work (39:32)
2. Moshe's reviewing everything (39:33-43)
3. G-d's instructions regarding assembly, anointment and priestly installation with the retrospective statement that Moshe did everything according to instructions (40:1-16)
4. The final assembly, which actually consists of eight subsections (40:17-33).

The concluding verse of each of these four sections contains phraseology highly reminiscent of the concluding verses of the Creation account in Genesis 1-2. We will first cite the key phrases of the Exodus verses and then point out the correspondences.

- Ex. 39:32: ותקל כל עבדת משכן אהל מועד
 Ex. 39:43: וירא משה את כל המלאכה
 והנה עשו אתה כאשר צוה ה'
 ויברך אתם משה
 Ex. 40:16: ויעש משה...כן עשה
 Ex. 40:33: ויכל משה את המלאכה

The correspondences:

- The passive-active combination of the word "concluded," ותקל-ויכל (39:32 and 40:33), corresponds to the distinctive pair ויכלו-ויכל of Genesis 2:1-2; Moshe finished המלאכה (the work) while G-d concluded מלאכתו (His work).
- וירא משה את כל המלאכה (Moshe saw all the work) recalls the seven attestations of וירא (G-d saw the various items of His work in Genesis 1, especially the final one וירא (And G-d saw all that He had made, Gen. 1:31).
- והנה עשו אתה כאשר צוה ה' (behold, they did it as Hashem commanded) corresponds to והנה טוב מאד (and behold, it was very good, Gen. 1:31). "Very good," transposed to a human context, is "according to G-d's command."
- ויברך אתם משה (Moshe blessed them) corresponds to ויברך אלקים את יום השביעי (G-d blessed the seventh day, Gen. 2:3).
- ויעש משה...כן עשה (Moshe made and thus he made) recalls the several attestations in Genesis 1 of ויעש אלקים (G-d made, Gen. 1:7, 16, 25) as well as the two instances of G-d's ויעש (that He made) in the penultimate verse of the Shabbat passage (Gen. 2:2).
- Throughout the Tabernacle chapters, starting with describing the project as מקדש (a holy center, Ex. 25:8) in the opening passage, the ש-ק-ד stem is frequently used. This is particularly prominent in the eight attestations of this stem in the section of anointing, including the several locutions of וקדשת אתו (Ex. 40:9-13). Since this follows shortly after ויברך אתם משה, it recalls G-d sanctifying Shabbat, ויקדש אתו (Gen. 2:3) following ויברך אלקים את יום השביעי.

(For additional details on the linkage see our study *Ki Tissa Part III: On the Shabbat Passage*.)

It appears likely that the Mishkan should be viewed as a reflection of the world. The service of the priests that is performed in it to enhance the nation's relationship with G-d corresponds to the work Israel is designated to perform in the world, to be a ממלכת

פְּהָנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ (“a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” Ex. 19:6). At least the following aspect of the message is clear: G-d created a dwelling place for man in which He instilled the potential for harmony, blessing and sanctity. Mankind did not live up to its potential. Israel is now to make a dwelling place for G-d, to advance the goal that His plan for a world of harmony, blessing and sanctity for man may become a reality.

Endnote

* The general practice in Judaism is to count the new year as beginning from the month of the autumnal equinox – the seventh month, Tishri – despite counting the spring month, Nissan, as the first of the months. Some Sages considered the spring month to also be the beginning of the year, and to a very limited extent the tradition recognizes it so.

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