

# SEPHARDIC INSTITUTE

511 Ave. R Brooklyn, NY 11223-2093 718 998 8171 Fax: 718 375 3263  
Rabbi Moshe Shamah, Director Rabbi Ronald Barry, Administrator

בס"ד

## Parashat Pekudeh Part II Completion of the Tabernacle

### 1. Finalization

Upon the Tabernacle's completion Moses examined it in detail, checking all its components and furnishings (Exod. 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 Moses. In a way, this statement interrupts the narrative flow of Moses' examination. The next verse, the final one in the paragraph, records the results of Moses' examination of all the work as he saw it: "and behold, they did it in accordance with Hashem's instructions." The verse concludes with מִשֶׁה בֵּרַךְ אֹתָם מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם ("and Moses blessed them" [v. 43]) – finally, Moses is convinced that the people were genuinely repentant and his personal disposition toward them becomes positive. The "interruption" of verse 42 seems to reinforce the position that the Torah text had recognized the Israelites' authentic commitment to the covenant before Moses did, who had been reluctant to do so until he saw that they fulfilled their responsibility to completion.

G-d instructed Moses to have the Tabernacle assembled on the first day of the first month of the second year, counting from the Exodus (Exod. 40:2). The selection of the month that was to be considered first had been made 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 הַאֲזִיב (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 in which the widespread rejuvenation of nature occurred.

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 celebrated as an occasion of joyful anticipation. It was widely commemorated as the beginning of the year and initiations of temples were often scheduled for that day. Since the Tabernacle program was closely associated with atonement and a fresh start for Israel, it was especially appropriate to heighten its symbolic impact by launching it 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 Moses final instructions for setting up the Tabernacle. He itemized the particulars that had to be done: assembling the tent, placing the furnishings in their proper location and performing a number of 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 (Exod. 40:1-15). The paragraph concludes with a one-verse summary that informs the reader that Moses complied with all particulars (v. 16). The key roots of מ-ש-ח (anoint) and ק-ד-ש (sanctify) each appear eight times in this section. The following paragraph provides a detailed account of Moses' 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 finished. It indicates that in the proper time Moses 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 Moses doing all that had to be done. After all, he alone had been shown the larger picture of all the particulars. This included performing all the priestly services since installation of the priests had not yet taken place.

Viewing the total picture of the Torah's formulation of the Tabernacle 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 Moses' setting up the Tabernacle (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 that governs most aspects of priesthood and sanctuary, the book of Leviticus is the more appropriate location for reporting on priestly initiation into sanctuary service. Thus, the narrative account at the end of the book 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 tasks on the agenda as per the above itemization: the anointment of the Tabernacle and its furnishings and installation of the priests? The answer appears to be that 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 Moses and which were organized as a somewhat independent section at the beginning of Leviticus. Accordingly, Leviticus 1-7 – chapters mostly devoted to regulations governing and associated with sacrifices – is interposed between the description of the construction of the Tabernacle 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 subject matter extraneous to the immediate purpose at hand.

In the concluding passage of Exodus the Torah states that the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, Hashem's glory filled the Tabernacle and Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting (Exod. 40:34-35). These verses appear to be directly linked to the first verse of Leviticus. There it states that Hashem called to Moses from the Tent of Meeting – 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 אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו ("He called to Moses, Hashem spoke to him") is explained by Ibn Ezra as pointing to the special summoning required to enable Moses to enter the Tent of Meeting for the first time. (It should be noted that twice previously Hashem used a *vayiqra* summons to Moses, first at the burning bush when speaking to him for the first time (Exod. 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 Akiba, who considered the day that the Tabernacle 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 installation began. The actual dedication of the Tabernacle was on the eighth day of that month (Lev. 9:1).

Other sages interpreted the eighth day, the day of Tabernacle dedication, to be the first day of the first month, the day on which the Tabernacle 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 installation (the twenty-third day 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 Tabernacle 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–Tabernacle Linkage

The concluding passage of Exodus begins with the following details: The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, the divine glory filled the Tabernacle, and Moses was unable to enter the cloud-covered area (Exod. 40:34-35). The final verse states that Hashem's cloud was on the Tabernacle 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 Moses. All this is strikingly parallel to the Torah's description pertaining to Mount Sinai when Hashem called Moses to ascend the mountain to receive the tablets (Exod. 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. Moses 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 Hebrew phrases: וַיִּכַס הָעָנָן אֶת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (40:34a) parallels וַיִּכַס הָעָנָן אֶת הַהָר (24:15b); וַיִּשְׁכַּן ה' מְלֵא אֶת (40:34b) parallels וַיִּשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי (24:16a); וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה...מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (40:38) corresponds to וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה...מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (24:17) and וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה...מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (Lev. 1:1) recalls וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה...מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (Exod. 24:16).

The Mount Sinai passage is immediately followed by Hashem's instructions to Moses 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, the Israelites understood that the sign of the divine presence – recalling revelation and the lawgiving – was transferred from Mount Sinai to the portable sanctuary. They were to merit to have G-d's glory manifest in their sanctuary

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 Tabernacle 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 (1 Kings 8:10-11), creating linkage between it and the Tabernacle.

### 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 Tabernacle, and only then, the Israelites would proceed to travel. This practice applied to all their journeys, apparently to their whole, long trek through the wilderness. 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, again from the perspective of a future time (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 Tabernacle 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 Tabernacle 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 Moses concluded setting up the Tabernacle, 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 Tabernacle-Creation-Sabbath Association

In our essay on the Sabbath passage of *Parashat Ki Tissa* (referencing Nehama Leibowitz citing Buber) we noted a number of remarkable correspondences that link the Tabernacle with creation, particularly with the Sabbath passage at the conclusion of the account of the six days of creation. In quoting 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 unsystematically, scattered throughout the last sections of Exodus. The following is an enhancement of those comments.

Four stages of Tabernacle completion are recorded in Exodus’s final two chapters, each comprising a distinct section (and each concluding with a *petuḥa* break):

1. Completion of all the work (39:32)
2. Moses’ review of everything (39:33-43)
3. G-d’s instructions regarding assembly, anointment and priestly installation with the retrospective statement that Moses 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.

Exod. 39:32: ותָּכַל כָּל עֲבֹדַת מְשֹׁכֵן אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד  
 Exod. 39:43: וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל הַמְּלָאכָה  
                   וְהִנֵּה עָשׂוּ אֹתָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'  
                   וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה  
 Exod. 40:16: וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה...כִּן עָשָׂה  
 Exod. 40:33: וַיִּכַּל מֹשֶׁה אֶת הַמְּלָאכָה

The correspondences:

- The passive-active combination of the word “concluded,” ותָּכַל-וַיִּכַּל (39:32 and 40:33), corresponds to the distinctive pair וַיִּכְלוּ-וַיִּכַּל of Genesis 2:1-2; Moses finished אֶת הַמְּלָאכָה (“the work”) while G-d concluded מְלֵאכְתּוֹ (“His work”).
- וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל הַמְּלָאכָה (“Moses saw all the work”) recalls the seven attestations of וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים (“G-d saw” the various items of His work in Genesis 1, especially the final one וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה (“And G-d saw all that He had made” [Gen. 1:31]).
- וְהִנֵּה עָשׂוּ אֹתָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' (“Behold, they did it as Hashem commanded”) corresponds to וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד (“And behold, it was very good” [Gen. 1:31]). “Very good,” transposed to a human context, is “according to G-d’s command.”
- וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה (“Moses blessed them”) corresponds to וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי (“G-d blessed the seventh day” [Gen. 2:3]).
- וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה...כִּן עָשָׂה (“Moses made...thus he made”) recalls the several attestations in Genesis 1 of וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים (“G-d made” [Gen. 1:7, 16, 25]) as well as the two instances of G-d’s אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה (“that He made”) in the penultimate verse of the Sabbath passage (Gen. 2:2).
- Throughout the Tabernacle chapters, starting with the description of the project as מִקְדָּשׁ (“a holy center” [Exod. 25:8]) in the opening passage, the ק-ד-ש 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 “sanctifying” one or another object, וְקִדְשָׁתָּ אֹתוֹ (Exod. 40:9-13). Since this follows shortly after וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה [39:43]), it recalls G-d sanctifying Sabbath, וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי following וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ (“G-d blessed the seventh day” [Gen. 2:3]).

(For additional details on the linkage see our study *Ki Tissa Part III: Regarding the Sabbath*.)

It appears likely that the Tabernacle should be viewed as a reflection of the world. The service of the priests – performed in order to enhance the nation’s relationship with G-d – corresponds to the work Israel is designated to perform in the world, to be a מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ (“a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” [Exod. 19:6]). In addition, the following correspondence appears intended: G-d created the

world as 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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