

Selected Shorts: Vayakhel-Pekudei
Rabbi Eliot Malomet March 13, 2021 Shabbat HaHodesh 29 Adar 5781

שמות ל"ו:י"ג

(יג) ... ויהי המשכן אֶחָד:

שמות ל"ה:א

(א) ויקהל משה את-כל-עדת בני ישראל ויאמר אליהם אלה הדברים אשר-צוה ה' לעשות אתם:

Exodus 35:1

(1) *Moses then convoked the whole Israelite community and said to them: These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do.* What follows is a further iteration of the Shabbat commandment, making the connection between the Tabernacle and Shabbat even stronger. But notice the subtle difference between this convocation and the last time the people assembled, in last week's parasha. There, they "ganged up against Aaron" - ויקהל העם על-אֶהֱרֹן. Here, Moses "convenes" the assembly. ויקהל is different from ויקהל. There, the people form a mob; here they are an assembly. There, the people coerce Aaron into fashioning an idol. Here, Moses reiterates Shabbat. It's hard not to conclude that Shabbat has a restorative function. The single, most important institution in Judaism, serves as a bulwark against anarchy, licentiousness, idolatry, and social unraveling.

שמות ל"ו:ה

(ה) ויאמרו אל-משה לאמר מרבים העם להביא מנִי העֲבֹדָה למלאכה אשר-צוה ה' לעשות אתה:

Exodus 36:5

(5) *and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than is needed for the tasks entailed in the work that the LORD has commanded to be done."* One of the most interesting moments in the Torah. It begs the question: why? Why are they bringing too much? People give for many reasons: generosity, obligation, peer pressure, the desire for recognition, and joy. But in light of the Golden Calf incident would they perhaps be giving out of guilt too? Moses issues a "stop" order to their giving, which may seem odd to us – wouldn't it have been a good thing to have a surplus? Actually, probably not. It would have necessitated an administrative apparatus; it would have created resentment; it would have shifted the focus away from serving God. Keeping the excess would have planted a seed of cynicism in the heart of the people: you can be exonerated of your sin if you pay up.

Exodus 36:13

(13) *the Tabernacle became one.* The Tabernacle is an integration of hundreds of boards, clasps, latches, objects, poles, basins, garments, skins, tassels, and other items. The assembly into one coherent whole is a cause for joy and reflection. One people serving one God, with one heart, in one place with one purpose.

שמות ל"ז:א

(א) ביעש בצלאל את-הָאָרֶן ...

Exodus 37:1

(1) *Bezalel made the ark ...* This is the only instance where a name is connected to an object. The ark was the most important item in the sanctuary requiring the highest level of craftsmanship. Rashi states the reason why the ark is attributed to Bezalel: *because he poured his soul into the work*, - יותר מושָׁאֵר חֲקָמִים, נקראת על שמו, *more than any of the other artisans*, - it was attributed to him by name. An exceptional item, by an exceptional artist.

שמות ל"ט:מ"ג

(מג) ויבִרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת-כָּל-הַמְּלָאכָה וְהִנֵּה עָשׂוּ אֹתָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' כִּן עָשׂוּ וַיְבָרַךְ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה: (פ)

Exodus 39:43

(43) *And when Moses saw that they had performed all the tasks—as the LORD had commanded, so they had done—Moses blessed them.* What was the blessing? *Moses said, יהי רצון – שתשרה שכינה במעשה ידיכם, – that God's divine presence reside in the work of your hands* (Rashi). Moses didn't bless the objects; he blessed the people who made them. His blessing validated the purpose of the objects and honored the artisans.

שמות מ"ז:י"ז

(יז) ויהי בחדש הראשון בשנה השנית באחד לחדש הוּקַם המשכן:

Exodus 40:17

(17) *In the first month of the second year, on the first of the month, the Tabernacle was set up.* A list of the major events of the first year:

Month	Day	Event
1	1	Designation of the first month and the issuance of the Passover rite.
1	10	Indexing the animal for the Paschal feast.

1	14	Dusk: Slaughter of the Paschal sheep.
1	15	Midnight: the exodus, arrival at Sukkot.
1	21	Traditionally associated with the splitting of the Sea of Reeds.
1	24	First complaint re. water, at Mara.
2	15	Second complaint re. food, at Elim.
2	15-29	Third complaint re. water at Masa U-Mriva; skirmish with Amalek; encounter with Yitro; organization of judiciary.
3	1	Arrival at Sinai desert. Various ascents and descents of Mount Sinai.
3	6	Moses receives the Torah.
4	17	Golden Calf incident
4	18	Moses re-ascends the mountain.
7	10	Moses descends with the second set of tablets.
7	11	Construction and assembly of the Tabernacle begins and extends through month 12.
Year	2,	Completion of the Tabernacle. (~7.5 months after the Golden Calf episode).
Month	1,	
Day	1:	

שמות מ':כ'

(כ) ויקח ויתן את־העֵדוּת אֶל־הָאָרוֹן וישם את־הכִּבֹּדִים עַל־הָאָרוֹן ויתן אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת עַל־הָאָרוֹן מִלְמַעְלָה:

Exodus 40:20

(20) *He took the Pact and placed it in the ark; he fixed the poles to the ark, placed the cover on top of the ark.* Although it receives surprisingly little attention from the traditional commentators, this had to be the most significant moment of the entire construction of the Tabernacle. The assembly of the ark is comprised of seven separate acts which emphasizes the ark's centrality within the Tabernacle, the people and God's universe and the people. Note also that the closure of the ark coincides with the anniversary of the issuance of the first set of commandments to Israel, namely, the establishment of the calendar and the preparations for the Exodus. Thus, Rosh Hodesh Nisan (the real Jewish new year) is a coalescence of the anniversaries of the first laws, the calendar, the preparations for liberation, and the completion of the Tabernacle.

כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת־מֹשֶׁה

As the Lord commanded Moses. In the final verses of the Book of Exodus this phrase appears seven times as an echo of creation and an emphasis on the wholeness of the Tabernacle.

שמות מ':ל"ד

(לד) וַיִּכֶס הָעֶנָן אֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיְכַבֹּד ה' מִלֵּא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן:

Exodus 40:34

(34) *the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and*

the Presence of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. The appearance of the cloud in the Tabernacle equates the Tabernacle with Mount Sinai. Just as God spoke to Moses from the midst of the cloud at Mount Sinai, God will speak to Moses and the people from the midst of the cloud in the Tabernacle during their desert trek. The cloud will appear yet again when Solomon dedicates the Temple centuries later.

Intended as an earthly representation of the heavenly abode, the Tabernacle enabled God to dwell among the people and allowed Israel and God to actualize their covenantal relationship. Israel offered sacrifices from the altar and God revealed himself from the Holy of Holies. Worship ensured God's protection and blessings, and channeled God's sustenance and healing power. Yet coming seven and a half months after the Golden Calf incident, the completion of the Tabernacle took on additional layers of meaning. It would become the place where Israel's relationship with God could be perpetually restored. It would become a place of compassion and forgiveness, reconciliation and atonement.

שמות מ':ל"ה

(לה) כִּי עָנָן ה' עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹמָם וְאֵשׁ תִּהְיֶה לַיְלָה בּוֹ לְעִינֵי כָל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל־מִקְעֵיהֶם:

Exodus 40:38

(38) *For over the Tabernacle a cloud of the LORD rested by day, and fire would appear in it by night, in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys.* The Book of Exodus begins with oppression and ends with liberation. It begins with acts of moral defiance and ends with artistic creativity - both profound reflections of God's image. At the beginning of the book, God speaks to a single individual from a fiery bush; at the end, God appears to an entire people from a fiery cloud. We detect great joy in the completion of the Tabernacle, with its literary echoes of creation, yet we also note that this first year of freedom has been complicated by deprivation, war, disillusionment, and defection. The Book of Exodus begins with a small family and ends with a large people. Perceived as an existential threat, they were oppressed and enslaved. Now a liberated nation, they are eager to embark on their journeys together with God's presence. *Hazak Hazak Venithazek! Shabbat Shalom!*