**SALT – PARASHAT PEKUDEI 5782 / 2022**

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Motzaei Shabbat

In Parashat Pekudei, the Torah completes its account of the construction of the *Mishkan* and its furnishings. The Torah concludes this lengthy section by stating, “All the work on the *Mishkan*…was completed; the Israelites did in accordance with everything that the Lord commanded Moshe…” (39:32). The plain reading of this verse is that the Torah here emphasizes *Benei Yisrael*’s compliance with all the details of God’s commands regarding the construction of the *Mishkan*.

Rav Yosef Patzanavsky, in *Pardeis Yosef*, offers a creative explanation of this verse. He notes that the Torah would not need now to emphasize *Benei Yisrael*’s compliance with God’s commands, as this point had already been made on several earlier occasions (see, for example, 38:22). Therefore, Rav Patzanavsky writes, this verse should be understood to mean that after the *Mishkan* was completed, those involved in the project of its construction resumed their observance of other *mitzvot*. The famous rule of “*oseik be-mitzva patur min ha-mitzva*” (Sukka 25a) exempts someone involved in a certain *mitzva* from other *mitzvot.* It thus stands to reason that during the period of the *Mishkan*’s construction, those who performed the work were absolved of other *mitzva* obligations. Thus, the Torah informs us that when the project was completed, those who had performed the work once again “did in accordance with everything that the Lord commanded Moshe” – meaning, they resumed their observance of the *mitzvot* from which they had been exempt while working to build the *Mishkan*.

Although this reading seems difficult to accept, nevertheless, Rav Patzanavsky here offers a valuable insight regarding the challenge of resuming routine *mitzva* observance after a period of exemption. When extenuating circumstances require suspending certain religious obligations, it might be difficult to recommit oneself to those obligations once they again become practically relevant. Once we lose our routine, and the consistency is broken, resuming that routine can be a challenge. The depiction of the artisans resuming their standard *mitzva* performance upon completing the construction of the *Mishkan* should remind us that if we ever find ourselves temporarily exempt from certain *mitzvot*, we must not allow them to fall into permanent neglect. Once the opportunity presents itself to resume the performance of those *mitzvot*, we should eagerly do so, recognizing the precious value and each and every *mitzva* we are privileged to observe.

Sunday

Parashat Pekudei begins with an accounting of the precious metals – gold, silver and copper – which *Benei Yisrael* donated towards the construction of the *Mishkan*. The Torah informs us that the silver for the *Mishkan* was supplied through the *machatzit ha-shekel* – the half-shekel tax levied upon each adult male. Each of the 603,550 men donated a half-shekel silver coin, for a total of 301,775 silver shekels. This amounted to 100 *kikar* – as a *kikar* is the equivalent of 3,000 silver shekels (as Rashi computes – 38:24) – and 1,775 shekels. The Torah tells that the 100 *kikar* of silver were used to form the 100 sockets that were placed underneath the forty-eight wooden planks of the *Mishkan*, and underneath the four pillars that supported the *parokhet* (cloth partition) inside the *Mishkan*. Two sockets were used for each plank (36:24,26,30) – a total of 96 sockets – and one socket underneath each of the four pillars that held the *parokhet* (36:36), for a total of 100. One *kikar* was needed for each socket, and thus 100 *kikar* of silver were needed for the sockets. The small amount of silver that remained – 1,775 shekels – were used to make the hooks, plating and decorations of the pillars that surrounded the outdoor courtyard of the *Mishkan*, all of which were silver (see 38:19).

As Rav Zalman Sorotzkin notes in *Oznayim La-Torah* (38:27), it emerges from the Torah’s account that just enough silver was supplied to make all the necessary sockets. If even a single additional socket had been necessary, there would not have been enough silver, as only 1,775 shekels remained after all 100 sockets were made, and each socket required 3,000 shekels (one *kikar*) of silver.

Rav Sorotzkin suggests explaining on this basis why God commanded building only four pillars to support the *parokhet* (26:32), whereas five pillars were used for the curtain at the entrance to the *Mishkan* (26:37). The *parokhet* extended through the entire width of the *Mishkan*, as Rashi (26:32) cites from *Berayta Melekhet Ha-Mishkan*, and it was thus the same length as the curtain at the entrance. Yet, it was supported by only four pillars, instead of five. Rav Sorotzkin explains that the pillars of the *parokhet* were inserted in silver sockets (26:32), whereas the pillars at the entrance of the *Mishkan* were inserted in copper sockets (26:37). As mentioned, the silver was supplied solely through the *machatzit ha-shekel* donation, which provided only enough for 100 sockets, and not a single additional socket. Therefore, the *parokhet* could not have had a fifth pillar, as there was not enough silver to make a fifth silver socket.

Monday

The opening verses of Parashat Pekudei present a brief accounting of the precious metals which were donated toward the construction of the *Mishkan* and its furnishings. The Torah introduces this section with the words, “*Eileh fekudei ha-Mishkan*” – “These are the accountings of the *Mishkan*…”

The Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 51:8) draws a curious association between this verse and an earlier verse where the word “*eileh*” appears. When *Benei Yisrael* fashioned the golden calf, it was announced, “*Eileh elohekha Yisrael*” – “This is your god, O Israel!” (Shemot 32:4). The Midrash comments that God introduced the accountings of the materials donated for the *Mishkan* specifically with the word “*eileh*” as a veiled reference to the sin of the golden calf. He was telling the people, “At the time when you made the calf, your angered Me with [the words], ‘*Eileh elohekha*’; and now that you made the *Mishkan* with ‘*eileh*’ I have forgiven you.”

Why would the Midrash link the word “*eileh*” inthese two verses – a verse that speaks of the materials donated for the *Mishkan*, and one which describes the worship of the golden calf?

The answer, perhaps, lies in the stark contrast between these two instances of the word “*eileh*.” In the context of the golden calf, the word “*eileh*” speaks of the final product, the graven image which the people worshipped. Here in Parashat Pekudei, however, “*eileh*” refers not to the completed *Mishkan*, but rather to the raw materials which the people donated. The Midrash is perhaps teaching that God’s forgiveness was secured not as a result of the final product, but rather because of the self-sacrifice and the efforts that were invested. By enthusiastically responding to Moshe’s call for donations, and coming forward to contribute their wealth, *Benei Yisrael* earned God’s compassion and forgiveness, even before the final product was completed.

Often, we are deterred from striving to grow and improve because we doubt our prospects for success. We wonder whether we can permanently break our bad habits and negative behavior patterns, and truly become better. The Midrash’s association between the two instances of “*eileh*” perhaps instructs that our “donations” – our efforts and work – are valuable and meaningful regardless of the final outcome. Even if we ultimately do not succeed in building the “*Mishkan*,” in becoming the people we want to become, our “donations” of time, thought and effort to this goal are lovingly accepted by God, and bring us closer to Him irrespective of the end result.

Tuesday

We read in Parashat Pekudei that after *Benei Yisrael* completed the construction of the *Mishkan* and its furnishings, Moshe blessed them (39:43). Rashi explains that he said, “May it be His will that the divine presence shall rest upon your handiwork,” and proclaimed, “May the pleasantness of the Lord our God be upon, and our handiwork shall be successful for us” (Tehillim 90:17).

A number of different variations of Moshe’s blessing appear in other sources. The Tosefta (Menachot 7:3) brings Rabbi Meir’s comment that Moshe said to the people, “Just as you involved yourselves in the work of the *Mishkan* and the divine presence rested upon your handiwork, so may you have the privilege to build before Him the *Beit Ha-bechira* [permanent Temple in Jerusalem] and the divine presence shall rest upon your handiwork.” According to Rabbi Meir, Moshe not only congratulated the people on the completion of this successful project, but wished them that they should likewise succeed in the future, when the time would come to build the permanent sanctuary, the *Beit Ha-mikdash* in Jerusalem.

Rav Simcha Bunim Sofer, in *Sha’arei Simcha*, suggests an additional insight into Rabbi Meir’s comment. When constructing a grand, magnificent site of religious worship, he writes, *Benei Yisrael* faced the challenge of completing this task with sincere motives. It was critically important that they went through this process not for their own pride and self-aggrandization, but rather for the sake of bringing glory to God. The goal of this project was for God’s honor, not for theirs. And so the people needed to approach the construction of a sanctuary with the proper mindset, driven by noble motives, without seeking the esteem and admiration of other people. In the Sinai desert, Rav Sofer explains, this was not much of a challenge. *Benei Yisrael* lived in general isolation from other peoples, and it was thus unlikely that their motives in building the *Mishkan* were anything but purely for the sake of fulfilling God’s will. Moshe therefore blessed them, “Just as you involved yourselves in the work of the *Mishkan* and the divine presence rested upon your handiwork” – meaning, just as the people invested in this effort solely to bring God into their midst, and not for any egotistical purposes, so would they construct the Temple in Jerusalem with this goal in mind. Once they would establish their kingdom in the Land of Israel and take their place among the nations, they might be tempted to build a *Mikdash* as a source of vain national pride, rather than for the sake of bringing God into their midst. Moshe therefore blessed them that just as they built the *Mishkan* in the wilderness with sincere motives, they would likewise erect the permanent Temple in Jerusalem for the sake of bringing glory to God, rather than to bring glory to themselves.

This message, of course, applies to every “sanctuary” that we set out to “build,” to any meaningful, sacred endeavor which we undertake. Such projects could easily be transformed into opportunities for self-aggrandizement, to draw attention to oneself, and to feel superior to others. Any “*Mishkan*” that we wish to build must be built with sincerity, out of a genuine desire to bring honor to God. We must resist and overcome the ever-present temptation to turn *mitzvot* into sources of competition and one-upmanship, to use inherently precious religious undertakings into cheap ways to earn recognition and esteem. We are to approach *mitzvot* out of a sincere devotion to God and genuine desire to faithfully serve Him and bring Him into our midst each day of our lives.

Wednesday

We read in Parashat Pekudei that after the completion of the construction of the *Mishkan* and its furnishings, Moshe assembled all its various components, and placed the “*eidut*” (“testimony”) – the stone tablets bearing the inscription of the commandments, which he received from God – inside the ark.

The Rambam, towards the end of *Hilkhot Sefer Torah* (10:10), indicates that the ark used in the synagogue, where the Torah scroll is kept, is modeled after the ark in the *Mishkan*. He writes that there is a *mitzva* to designate a special site for the *Sefer Torah* and to treat the site with great respect and reverence, adding, “the words in the Tablets of the Covenant are the same as in each and every scroll.” Meaning, the text inscribed on the stone tablets are also written in the *Sefer Torah*, and therefore, just as the tablets were kept in a special ark which was treated with great respect, so must the *Sefer Torah* be kept in a special ark in the synagogue which we must treat with great respect.

The *Hagahot Maimoniyot*, commenting on this passage in *Hilkhot Sefer Torah*, raises the question of why, if the ark in the synagogue is modeled after the ark in the *Mikdash*, we place the Torah scrolls standing upright. The tablets were stored in the *aron* (ark) lying flat along the base of the ark, and thus, seemingly, we should lie the Torah scrolls horizontally across the bottom of the ark, too, instead of having them stand vertically. The *Hagahot Maimoniyot* writes that Rabbeinu Tam had no answer for this question, and even said that he regretted not having the *Sifrei Torah* lie down in the ark in his synagogue.

The Radbaz addresses this question in one of his responsa (3:530), and offers a number of different answers. His first answer is that the *Sefer Torah*, unlike the tablets in the ark, is used for reading. The tablets were stored in the *aron* as “*eidut*,” testimony of the covenant between God and *Am Yisrael*, but were never used for any practical purpose. The Torah scroll, however, is to be regularly read, and so it stands upright in the *aron*, in a position to be read at any moment.

[Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm](https://archives.yu.edu/gsdl/collect/lammserm/index/assoc/HASH010e/f265d8fc.dir/doc.pdf?_ga=2.93446365.1587094008.1645909236-691678723.1645691500) explains the significance of this distinction between the stone tablets in the ark and the *Sefer Torah* in the synagogue, noting that this underscores the fundamental difference between an abstract symbol and a practical guide. He writes:

What we are taught…is that the Torah must be for us more than a symbol… It must be a guide, a code for conduct…

A symbol is reverenced; a guide is used and experienced. Because of its very sacredness, a symbol often…is remote and is less prone to be involved in the turmoil and bustle of life. It is treated with antiseptic respect. A guide…is of course sacred; but its sanctity is enhanced by its involvement in life with all its complexities and paradoxes, its anxieties and excitements. A Torah, in order to fulfill its holy function, must stand ready — literally stand! — to be read and applied.

Rabbi Lamm proceeds to lament those who show great respect for Torah, but without turning to it as a source of instruction for how to conduct their lives. There are those who pay homage to the Torah as “*eidut*,” a symbol of something sacred and meaningful, but without opening it to read it and apply it to daily life. The position of the Torah in the *aron* reminds us that we must relate to it not merely as a symbol, but rather as our guide. It is to be not simply stored as a testament and memorial, but regularly and frequently consulted and studied, so it instructs us how to live each and every day of our lives.

Thursday

In the beginning of Parashat Pekudei, the Torah tells that Betzalel – the chief artisan assigned to oversee the construction of the *Mishkan* – “did all that the Lord commanded Moshe” (38:22).

The Alter of Kelm (*Or Rashaz*) suggests explaining the intent of this verse in light of the Gemara’s comment in Masekhet Berakhot (55a) lauding Betzalel’s exceptional brilliance: “Betzalel knew how to combine the letters with which heaven and earth were created.” Betzalel was endowed with special wisdom, insight and intuition, which made him the most suitable choice to serve as the chief artisan for the construction of the *Mishkan*. The Alter explained that in other contexts, we might expect an individual of such intellectual greatness to insist upon following his own ideas and intuition. He is likely to assume that he knows better than everyone else, including his superiors. But when it comes to the service of God, we are to humbly submit to God’s authority, and fulfill his will as communicated to us through tradition. And thus the Torah emphasizes that Betzalel “did all that the Lord commanded Moshe” – following precisely the instructions conveyed to him by Moshe. He did not regard his intuition as more compelling or more authoritative than the directives he received. Even though he possessed the knowledge “to combine the letters with which heaven and earth were created,” and thus certainly had the knowledge to construct a sanctuary for God, nevertheless, he approached his task with humility and submission, and strictly adhered to each and every instruction he was given.

At times we might think that we can determine through intuition and instinct how to “build the *Mishkan*,” how to bring God into our lives and serve Him. Sometimes our feelings and emotions, or our subjective, individual perception, lead us to think we can decide on our own what God wants us to do and what He does not want us to do. On numerous occasions throughout Parashat Pekudei, the Torah emphasizes that Betzalel and his fellow artisans constructed the *Mishkan* and its furnishings “as the Lord commanded Moshe,” strictly following the directives they received. We cannot bring the divine presence into our lives without submitting to God’s authority and following His commands. Our lifelong effort to “build the *Mishkan*,” to live in the service of the Almighty, must be undertaken “as the Lord commanded Moshe,” and not on the basis of our intuitive, subjective sense of what He wants.

Friday

The opening verse of Parashat Pekudei introduces the accounting of the precious metals donated toward the construction of the *Mishkan*, and it refers to the *Mishkan* in this context as “*ha-Mishkan*, *Mishkan ha-eidut*” (“the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of testimony”).

Rashi, based on the *Midrash Tanchuma*, sees in the repetition of the word “*Mishkan*” an allusion to the destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem. He writes that the Torah here makes a veiled reference to the *Beit Ha-mikdash* “*she-nitmashkein bi-shnei churbanin*” – “which was ‘mortgaged’ through two destructions.” The word “*Mishkan*” can be understood as related to the word “*mashkon*” – “collateral.” Thus, the two instances of this word here allude to the two occasions when the *Beit Ha-mikdash* was “mortgaged,” taken by God as “collateral” for the “debt” owed by *Benei Yisrael* on account of their misdeeds.

Many different approaches have been taken to explain how the destruction of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* can be seen as a “collateral” payment for our “debt” to God. Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in *Oznayim La-Torah*, explains by way of an analogy to a person who attained immense wealth and then came upon hard times. In need of cash, he has the option to either sell or mortgage assets. Confident that the tide will yet again turn in his favor, he decides to mortgage assets so he can then easily reclaim them later, after he builds his fortune anew. Rav Sorotzkin applies this mindset to spiritual “wealth,” as well. When we find ourselves in a state of spiritual decline, we are to remain confident in our ability to regain our “wealth.” Our past successes should be seen as a goal towards which to strive, no matter how far we have fallen from that level of achievement. This, Rav Sorotzkin suggests, is the idea underlying the Midrash’s description of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* as a “*mashkon*.” Our past glory was not “sold,” and permanently lost, but rather “mortgaged” – testifying to God’s confidence in our ability to reclaim our greatness. By describing the Temple’s destruction as a “mortgage,” as opposed to a permanent sale, the Midrash teaches us that God fully believes in our capacity to rebuild our past spiritual fortune, to grow and improve and be once again worthy of having His presence in our midst.

We should never regard our failures as permanent. If we have succeeded in the past, then we can succeed yet again in the future, regardless of our present state. Our lost spiritual “fortunes” are not to be seen as having been permanently “sold,” but rather as having been temporarily “mortgaged,” and ready for us to reclaim them through our hard work to grow and improve.