

# The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Parashat Hashavua  
Yeshivat Har Etzion

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**This parasha series is dedicated  
Le-zekher Nishmat HaRabanit Chana bat HaRav Yehuda Zelig zt"l.**

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Dedicated le-zekher nishmot Amelia Ray and Morris Ray upon the occasion of their first  
yahrtzeit, by their family and friends.

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This shiur is dedicated by Alexa Neville in memory of Rabbi Itzhak Elyakum Lerner ben  
Mordechai on the occasion of his passing.

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## **PARASHAT PEKUDEI**

### **The Unifying Theme of Parashat Pekudei By Rav Elchanan Samet**

#### **I. SOMETHING IS OUT OF PLACE**

The organization of Parashat Pedukei is, at first glance, quite puzzling. The parasha opens in a festive mood (38:21): "These are the accounts of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the testimony, as they were counted by Moshe..." The first twelve verses enumerate the types and amounts of materials donated for the construction of the Mishkan, and tell us what was done with each of them. It is a sort of "income and expense account for the whole operation" (Cassuto).

It is clear from both the style of these opening verses, as well as the contents of the subsequent verses, that the construction of the Mishkan is complete and we have now reached the stage of summary with a view to its inauguration. Indeed, later on in the parasha we read of the establishment of the Mishkan by Moshe and the resting of the Shekhina inside it. However, in between these two sections, there appears a section which seems strangely out of place. Chapter 39 (up to verse 31) brings us back to a description of the making of the garments for the kohanim. Only after this description are we told (39:32) "And all the work of the Mishkan of the Ohel

Mo'ed was completed..." Then there is the stage of bringing all the parts of the Mishkan to Moshe (33-43), including (verse 41) "the holy garments for Aharon the Kohen and the garments of his sons, to serve as kohanim." It would seem therefore that until the garments of the kohanim had been prepared, the work of the Mishkan was not yet complete.

A review of the subjects discussed in the first half of parashat Pekudei, then, gives rise to the following question: what place does the "accounting of the Mishkan" - the income and expense account of the construction - have here, before the work of the Mishkan is complete? The proper place for this summary would seem to be after 39:32, when all the work of the Ohel Mo'ed is finished.

The first answer that occurs to us is that this summary of the contributions pertains only to gold and silver and brass, and therefore it is located after the description of the construction of the vessels made of those metals - the Mishkan and its vessels whose construction is discussed in parashat Vayakhel. But this is inaccurate: at the end of these concluding verses we read (39:1), "And from the blue and purple and scarlet thread they made uniforms to serve in the sanctuary, and they made the holy garments that were for Aharon..." Interestingly, the Torah does not detail the quantities of blue and purple and scarlet thread (as it did with the quantities of gold, silver and brass). This may be because "these materials are not usually weighed in the way that metals are" (Amos Chakham, Da'at Mikra commentary). Thus, it would seem that the summary of the contributions brought and what was done with them includes also a summary of the textiles from which the priestly garments were made.

The verse quoted above (39:1) adds further weight to our question. This verse serves two purposes: on one hand, it serves as a conclusion to the "accounting of the Mishkan" (as explained above), while on the other hand, it introduces the description of the creation of the priestly clothes that will follow. Thus, the description of the creation of the priestly clothes is intentionally squeezed in-between the verses summarizing the accounting of the Mishkan.

We may seek the answer on two different tracks:

- i. The opening verses of our parasha - the "accounting of the Mishkan" - are in place, indicating the completion of the work for the Mishkan. However, the description of the making of the priestly garments is not in its proper chronological place.
- ii. The description of the work of the Mishkan starts in parashat Vayakhel and continues uninterrupted into parashat Pekudei up to the conclusion of the creation of the priestly garments (39:32), while the verses of the

"accounting of the Mishkan" are inserted into the middle of this continuum and are not in their proper chronological place.

The key to this discussion is obviously to be found in 39:1 - the verse that is the meeting place between the two subjects: the accounting of the Mishkan and the creation of the priestly garments. Both Rav Saadia Gaon and Ibn Ezra, in their respective interpretations of this verse, indicate a preference for the first option - the description of the priestly garments is out of chronological place. But they do not indicate WHY this is so. This will be the subject of our investigation.

## II. "AS GOD HAD COMMANDED MOSHE"

Let us turn our attention away from the problem of the order at the beginning of our parasha and address the question of the literary distinction between parashat Vayakhel and parashat Pekudei. Are these essentially one parasha which is split during a leap year, or are they two distinct literary units? Let us try to examine this question not from the point of view of the content of each of these two parashot, but rather from the point of view of their style. Is there a stylistic characteristic of one parasha that does not exist in the other (e.g. "leading words")?

At the heart of parashat Pekudei stand two central "actions" (from the point of view of the number of verses devoted to them):

A) the creation of the priestly garments (39:1-31) - 31 verses, divided traditionally in the Torah text into seven parashot;

B) a description of the establishment of the Mishkan and its vessels by Moshe (40:17-33) - 17 verses divided into eight short parashot in the Torah text.

What is immediately striking is the appearance of the phrase "AS GOD HAD COMMANDED MOSHE" at the conclusion of each of the seven units of section A and seven of the eight units of section B (with the exception of the final unit, which appropriately concludes, "and Moshe completed all the work"). Thus, this leading phrase appears in precisely the same wording fourteen times in our parasha (in two groups of seven). It also appears with slight adjustments five other times (38:22, 39:32, 33:42, 33:43, 40:16), referring to the work in its entirety.

Parashat Vayakhel, with its detailed description of the construction of the Mishkan and its vessels, does not contain this leading phrase - "as God had commanded Moshe" - even once! This represents the most outstanding difference between the two parashot, justifying the literary distinction between them. But this distinction begs explanation. When Betzalel created the ark (37:1), did he not do so "as God had commanded Moshe"? He certainly did - as we may conclude from a

verse-by-verse comparison between God's command to Moshe concerning the creation of the ark in parashat Teruma and its fulfillment by Betzalel in parashat Vayakhel. Why, then, does the Torah consistently avoid any mention of this in parashat Vayakhel, while in parashat Pekudei it becomes the central motif?

### III. WHEN IS EACH VESSEL CONSIDERED COMPLETED?

We may easily answer this question by means of a comparison with the construction of the Mishkan in parashat Vayakhel. The question facing us is a simple one: when is the construction of each vessel of the Mishkan completed?

Let us look, for example, at the table (shulchan). Its command is given in parashat Teruma (25:22-30), while the description of its creation is to be found in parashat Vayakhel (37:10-16). The correspondence between the action and the command is almost complete (except for a few minor details). But one entire verse appearing in Teruma is missing from the parallel section of Vayakhel - "And you shall place show-bread upon the table before Me always" (25:30). This is not just the PURPOSE of the table; it is PART OF THE CREATION OF THE TABLE ITSELF. A table without show-bread upon it is not a "shulchan" at all, and therefore the instruction with regard to the show-bread appears already in the command to make the table.

In truth, one additional element of the command to construct the table only later in Teruma (26:35): "And you shall place the table outside the veil, and the menora facing the table on the southern side of the Mishkan, and you shall place the table on the northern side." This obviously could not have been written in the parasha of the table, prior to the command regarding the building of the Mishkan and the veil dividing its sections. Therefore this command comes later to fill in the missing information.

Now we must ask: After Betzalel and his team had made the table, as described in parashat Vayakhel, was their work "as God had commanded Moshe"? It would seem that God's command to Moshe had not yet been fulfilled in its entirety, and what Betzalel had done was just a preparation for the fulfillment of the command to build the Mishkan. When was his work completed? Only when Moshe actually set up the Mishkan:

"And he placed the table in the Ohel Mo'ed on the northern side of the Mishkan, outside the veil, and he set the bread in order upon it before God AS GOD HAD COMMANDED MOSHE." (40:22)

The same applies to the Ark which, without the testimony inside it, cannot be the "aron," and also to the menorah which, without the preparation of its lights, cannot be the menorah. Indeed, this applies not only to the vessels but also to the components of the Mishkan itself: until all the parts are joined to one another and are set up properly, their work "as God commanded Moshe" is not yet complete.

From the above we may derive the answer to why the word "ve-asita" ("and you shall make") is repeated so many times in the command to build the Mishkan in the parashot of Teruma and Tetzaveh: this command, in the singular, is addressed to Moshe, but the person who actually did the work was not Moshe but rather Betzalel. Why, then, ask many of the commentators, does God tell Moshe over and over "and you shall make..."? The work is recognized as being done by the person who COMPLETES it; it is indeed Moshe who "makes" the Mishkan and its vessels by bringing them to completion, and therefore the addressing of the commands to him is justified.

#### IV. THE PRIESTLY GARMENTS

Now we must ask another question: in what way were the priestly garments different from the other vessels of the Mishkan, such that with regard to the former we are told "as God commanded Moshe" already at the end of the first stage of their creation by Betzalel and his team? Why are we not told this only when Moshe dresses Aharon and his sons in them?

We are forced to distinguish between the "completion of the work" of the priestly garments and the "completion of the work" of the Mishkan and its vessels. A table that lacks show-bread is not simply missing some necessary human work; it is a deficiency in the object itself - the table is not complete until it achieves the purpose of its creation. But the priestly garments, as part of the objects included in the Mishkan, are ready for use immediately upon the completion of their creation by the artisans, and Moshe has nothing further to do for them. Their being worn by Aharon and his sons is not connected with the definition of the OBJECT called "priestly garments," but is rather a HUMAN OBLIGATION - it is an obligation that falls upon the kohanim who, unless they in fact wear these garments, are not fit for service. It is not the priestly garments that are dependent on their being worn, but rather the kohanim who depend upon the garments:

"A kohen... who is not in proper attire - his service is disqualified, and he is deserving of death by the hand of Heaven, like a non-kohen who performs the service. It is not merely that when they wear their uniform their priesthood is active and when they do not wear their uniform their priesthood is inactive;

rather, [without the garments] they are actually considered like strangers (non-kohanim), and it is written, "The stranger who comes near will die." (Rambam Hil. Klei Ha-mikdash 10:4)

It is by virtue of this unique quality of the priestly garments that the phrase "as God had commanded Moshe" applies immediately upon their creation (by Betzalel and the artisans), before they have been used. This phrase is used concerning the rest of the Mishkan only when it is actually erected (by Moshe himself).

## V. THE THEME OF PEKUDEI

We can now define with absolute accuracy the subject of parashat Pekudei, which is indeed distinct from that of parashat Vayakhel: while Vayakhel deals with a description of the TECHNICAL WORK involved in the preparation of the Mishkan, parashat Pekudei describes how it is brought to COMPLETION. Therefore it is only in parashat Pekudei that the work of the Mishkan is truly finished "as God commanded Moshe." In order to emphasize that this is the subject of parashat Pekudei, this leading phrase is repeated a total of nineteen times throughout the parasha.

In the creation of the priestly clothes, because nothing is lacking in them after their technical creation, the description of their creation and the indication that they have achieved completion come together: "as God had commanded Moshe." Therefore the description of the creation of the clothes belongs, THEMATICALLY, to parashat Pekudei, which deals with the completion of all parts of the Mishkan. This connection is also easily recognizable from a STYLISTIC point of view in the description of the creation of the priestly clothes through the repetition of the leading phrase "as God had commanded Moshe" seven times.

From a chronological point of view, the description of the creation of the priestly clothes belongs to parashat Vayakhel in which, as we have said, the technical construction of the Mishkan is discussed. On the other hand, parashat Pekudei opens at a point in time when these technical activities appear to have been concluded, and it is already possible to move on to a summary of the "accounting of the Mishkan" - a summary of the contributions that were brought and a detailed listing of what was done with them. This festive introduction to parashat Pekudei is meant to create a barrier between the descriptions of the construction work that precede it and the description of the completion of the work of the Mishkan and its achieving the status of a "finished job" that follows.

Where, then, should the creation of the priestly clothes fit in? Juxtaposing their creation with the conclusion of parashat Vayakhel (which contains a description of the construction of the accessories of the Mishkan courtyard) would blur their uniqueness and their connection with the "completion of the work of the Mishkan." The thematic and stylistic considerations take precedence here over the chronological consideration, and this section appears in parashat Pekudei, following the list of the "accounting of the Mishkan."

The literary solution for mentioning something late even though it in fact occurred earlier lies in the link between the end of the "accounting" and the beginning of the creation of the priestly clothes in 39:1. This linkage turns the entire description of their creation into a listing of the use made of the textile contributions, and now a listing of these holy garments - made from the textile contributions - appears. The tense of the description of the creation of the priestly clothes is therefore the PAST PERFECT in relation to the tense of the listing of the "accounting of the Mishkan." However, the style of the description of their creation is not the least bit different from the style of the description of the work in parashat Vayakhel, with the exception of the concluding phrase emphasizing the uniqueness of the priestly garments - "as God had commanded Moshe."

(Translated by Kaeren Fish)