

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parshat Tetzaveh

After giving the instructions for the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) in last week's Parsha, the Torah now instructs the sanctification of Aaron and his sons (the kohanim), the people responsible for the service in the Mishkan. The first step in the process is to make special priestly garments for them, as Rashi (28:3) explains that they entered the priesthood by wearing these unique garments. The next step involves Aaron and his sons bringing special sacrifices for seven days, also known as the Consecration, both to sanctify themselves (see 29:1 and 29:33) and to sanctify the Altar itself (29:36-37).

Towards the end of the Book of Exodus, the Torah (Chapter 39) describes how they carried out the command to make the priestly garments, just as it says that they carried out the command to make the Mishkan and its vessels. However, the Torah does not describe how they carried out the command to inaugurate Aaron and his sons with the special seven-day service until Leviticus Chapters 8-10. Why is this not described in the Book of Exodus like the Book describes how they carried out the command to make the priestly garments? It must be that because the Book of Leviticus has specific content, the Consecration of Aaron and his sons through the sacrifices belongs there. On the flipside, the instructions to make Aaron and his sons holy through these sacrifices, as well as the making of the priestly garments, must be linked to the overall theme of the Book of Exodus since this is where they appear. How do we explain that the fulfillment of the two commands in our Parsha are placed in two separate Books?

Nachmanides, in his Introduction to Leviticus, describes how the Book primarily discusses the laws involving the Kohanim and the Temple. Hence, the Book is called "Torat Kohanim," the laws of Kohanim. To this end, the process of actually bringing the sacrifices in order to jump-start the service in the Temple is not described until Leviticus, the place where sacrifices and their related laws are discussed at length.

In his Introduction to Exodus, Nachmanides describes how this Book deals with the exile of the Jewish people and their redemption from it. He says this redemption can only be complete once the Jewish people construct a Mishkan, a place fit for G-d to cause His Divine Presence to dwell amongst them. The book reaches its climax in its final passage (40:34-35), in which the Torah says the glory of G-d filled the Mishkan. Before G-d would rest His Presence and concentrate it in the Mishkan, He wanted the Jewish people to exert themselves to construct both the Mishkan and the priestly garments from scratch.



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The task of building a house for G-d would not be complete without creating the priestly garments so the kohanim will be able to serve in this Temple. In reaction to the noble efforts of both contributing the raw materials and of actually sweating it out to make the Temple and the garments, G-d caused His Presence to dwell in the Mishkan. Since the completion of the priestly garments is a necessary part of the redemption process, it must be mentioned in the Book of Exodus.

We still must discover why the instructions for the Consecration of the Temple through the seven-day service are mentioned in the Book of Exodus at all. Do they not belong together with the actual Consecration in Leviticus? Equally difficult is why the Torah describes the command to bring the two daily sacrifices (Korban Tamid) in our parsha (29:38), right after describing the seven days of Consecration. The Torah records the same command in Numbers Chapter 28, so why bother to mention it here altogether?

After the instructions for the seven days of Consecration and the two daily Tamid sacrifices, G-d says (29:45-46), "I shall rest My Presence among the Children of Israel, and I shall be their G-d. They shall know I am Hashem their G-d Who took them out of Egypt to rest My Presence among them." Ibn Ezra explains the whole purpose of G-d taking the Jewish people out of Egypt was so they could build a Mishkan and have Him rest His Presence in their midst. In truth, G-d mentioned this same goal in the beginning of Parshat Terumah (25:8) by saying, "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me so that I may dwell in their midst." However, that verse was said in the context of the command to contribute materials to build a Mishkan. Hence, that verse implies that once the Jewish people simply build the Mishkan structure, G-d will cause His Presence to dwell there. But our Parsha (29:45-46) teaches it is not enough to contribute to the building of the Temple. We need to have a special service in that Temple in order to inaugurate it, and we need to have ongoing daily sacrifices to maintain the Presence of G-d there.

In our times, we do not have a central Temple shared by all of the Jewish people but we do have synagogues and communal study halls. Our Parsha teaches us not to be satisfied with making material contributions to our community religious institutions. Rather, personal involvement and dedication to service and study is what will cause G-d to rest His Presence among us. In addition, when our service becomes constant and consistent like the Korban Tamid, it can achieve the goal of having the Divine Presence rest amongst us in the most profound way.

Shabbat Shalom
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