

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parshat Vayakhel - Pekudei

The Torah Portions of Terumah and Tetzaveh detailed the instructions that Hashem gave Moshe to build the Mishkan, its vessels, and the priestly garments. The later Portions of Vayakhel and Pekudei now relate that Moshe actually commanded the Jewish people to follow G-d's instructions in these matters. But before Moshe gives all of the detailed instructions, he first warns them to keep Shabbat. Similarly, after Hashem told Moshe all of the things to do in order to set up the Mishkan, He reminded him to tell the Jewish people to keep Shabbat (31:12-18). Why do the Jews need to be told about keeping Shabbat in these two places, given that this mitzvah has already been communicated to them as one of the Ten Commandments?

Rashi (31:13 and 35:2) answers that the juxtaposition of Shabbat and the Mishkan teaches us that building the Mishkan does not override Shabbat observance. Therefore, it is not coincidental that the 39 prohibited categories of work on Shabbat are all derived from the work involved in building the Mishkan. For example, the Talmud teaches us that the prohibition of writing two letters on Shabbat comes from the fact that when they built the Mishkan, they labeled the beams with symbols so they would know how to place each beam in order. The prohibition of slaughtering animals on Shabbat derives from the fact they slaughtered animals in order to use their skins to serve as roof coverings of the Mishkan.

Although we may not violate Shabbat to build the Mishkan, once it has been constructed, we are actually required to slaughter animals and bring sacrifices every Shabbat in the Mishkan. The Torah itself tells us to bring the Korban Tamid and the Korban Mussaf every Shabbat. Why is it that the construction of the Mishkan does not override Shabbat, whereas the service within the Mishkan does override Shabbat? Moreover, the Talmud (Moed Katan 9a) says that even the sacrifices of the princes, which were brought for twelve days at the beginning of the dedication of the Mishkan, were brought on Shabbat.

Shabbat, as opposed to the Festivals which are linked to the months as established by the appearance of the new moon, always falls on the seventh day of the week. The sanctity of Shabbat comes from G-d Himself Who has declared it to be a holy day. However, the sanctity (kedusha) of the Festivals comes about through the Jewish Supreme Court proclaiming the beginning of the month which then determines the exact day the Festivals will occur. So while we say a similar kiddush

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to proclaim the holiness of the day both on Shabbat and on Yom Tov, the source of the kedusha differs between the two. The sanctity of Shabbat emanates from G-d Himself, Who has designated Shabbat as a special day from the beginning of creation. But the holiness of Yom Tov comes through the channel of human beings testifying in court, and the court making a proclamation to start a new month, thereby triggering certain days to be holy.

Like the holiness of the Festivals, the holiness of the Mishkan came about through human efforts. "They should make for Me a Temple, and I will dwell in their midst (25:8)" implies the Presence of G-d will not come until the Jewish people have made the efforts to create a place for that Presence to reside. G-d does not make this kedusha automatic, and the vessels and materials of the Temple only receive holy status once they have been formed by craftsman and designated for service. The actual service done within the Mishkan overrides Shabbat, as the Torah says that the service itself not only does not interfere Shabbat, but actually enhances Shabbat which is a day focused on relating to the G-d and serving Him. But when it comes to the building of the Mishkan, where no service (avodah) has started yet, there is a clash between Shabbat observance and building a house for future service of G-d. The Torah seems to be saying that the closeness to G-d that a Jew attains through Shabbat observance overrides any work to prepare a house for future service. The Jews had to spend the Shabbat relating to G-d directly, as opposed to sweating and working to set the stage for Him to come and dwell through the Mishkan.

In a practical sense, the Torah here teaches us a profound lesson in terms of our relationship with G-d. The Jews had to take off a day of work and not build anything for the Mishkan on Shabbat, so they would go several Shabbatot without a Mishkan. We can have a profound relationship with G-d even if we do not have a Mishkan. In the last 2000 years since the destruction of our last Temple, Jews have found ways to relate to G-d despite the absence of a Temple. G-d always wants our service, even if it does not come in the idyllic Temple framework.

Shabbat Shalom!

