

D'Var Torah Pekudei

The Torah portion Pekudei is the final parsha of the Book of Shemot (Exodus), and in Hebrew means accounting. It is the last in a series of 5 parshiot (torah sections) describing the Mishkan-the portable sanctuary built by our ancestors by divine command to serve as “ a dwelling place for G-D in this physical world”.

Pekudei contains three elements: a) an audit of the gold, silver and copper used in the Mishkan's construction, b) the making of the priestly garments and c) the erection and consecration of the Mishkan.

Before I continue however, I want to pose a question that I also hope to answer before I complete this sermon. In the beginning of Bereshit (Genesis), the Torah devotes 31 verses to describe how G-D created the entire world. In striking contrast, the Torah portions of this and the last 4 weeks devote 371 verses to describe how the Jews created the tabernacle in the desert. This seems profoundly strange and begs the question, “Why?” More on this later.

Bezalel from the tribe of Jehudah and Oholiav from the tribe of Dan were the divinely chosen architects of the Mishkan and priestly garments. In chapter 39, Verse 43 we are told, “ And Moses saw all of the work, and behold they had done it; as the Lord commanded, even so they had done it. And Moses blessed them.”

Moshe expressed his thanks by invoking a blessing upon them. The time had been short, the task great and arduous; but the laborers were fired up by holy enthusiasm and zeal and had joyfully completed the work they had undertaken. Moses does not pronounce his blessing at the beginning of this enterprise. Beginnings are easy. It is completions that are as hard as they are rare. Tradition tells us that Moses composed Psalm 90, title ‘A Prayer for Moses’ for just this occasion. Note its concluding words, “Establish thou the work of our hands; yea, the work of our hands establish it”.

This is the perfect segway into speaking about this week's Haftorah portion as well, as it has a double link if you will to this week's parsha. The first link is the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem and the first part of Solomon's prayer of Consecration, while the 2nd link is also to a Psalm that was composed to

commemorate this event. In this instance I direct your attention to Psalm 24 which states not only once, but twice and back to back, "Raise up your heads oh gates, and be uplifted, you everlasting entrances, so that the King of Glory May Enter. Who is this King of Glory? HaShem Tsvaot, He is the King of Glory, Selah! Tradition tells us that when Solomon sought to bring the Ark into the temple, the gates remained shut despite all of his pleas, until he prayed that G-D open the gates in the merit of David HaMelech, who had made all of the preparations to build the temple. As a matter of fact this entire Psalm is part of our daily liturgy upon returning the Torah to the ark.

In last week's parsha Vayachel, we read that the copper basin was not only made from one of the most common of metals, but was also the last item made; however it was one of the most precious items and the first one used as the Kohanim were required to wash before performing their priestly duties. *Furthermore, just as the most and least prestigious tribes were represented in the construction, so were the hands and feet were washed simultaneously.*

This is the central message of Judaism. When we honor, love and respect our fellow man, we by extension honor, love and respect our G-D.

As I have said many times, each of us has a spark of the divine within us. The purpose of that spark is to light the way for the soul inside of us to find its way out.

Judaism is about creating time by utilizing space. Time is holy and allows us a progression of continuum with which to connect to the Divine by using the physical world and its contents (space) in the performance of sanctifying time.

Were this not so, why would HaShem spend 371 verses detailing the construction of the tabernacle and its contents, while only 31 verses were used to detail the construction of the universe?

The universe spans billions of miles and is an awesomely complex structure. After millennia of research and study, we have not even scratched the surface of understanding all of its intricacies. The Mishkan on the other hand, was about

150 feet long and 75 feet wide and was a portable tent. Impressive in its beauty and majesty, but certainly to rival to all of creation.

I therefore ask the question again, why would G-D be so expansive about the creation of a humble albeit splendid tent in the wilderness and yet so terse about the creation of the cosmos with all of its infinite majesty and grandeur?

The answer is simple and moving. For an infinite G-D to create a home for a finite man is not a big deal. But for a finite man to create a home for an infinite G-D—that is a revolutionary idea. As Rabbi Yosef Jacobson tells us, “It constitutes the essential revolution of Judaism that from the fragmented pieces of our hearts we can construct a home for the Divine; that the ordinary stuff of human life can be carved into a dwelling place for the Almighty; that G-D craves to dwell in the space we designate for Him in the barren desert of human consciousness.”

Creation of the universe is G-D’s miracle-creation of a structure to house the Divine in a desert is man’s miracle. This is the essence of the tabernacle story, which by now you know occupies almost half the book of Shemot but seems so remote from our modern frame of reference—that a human being through the vessels of thought, speech and action can create a home for G-D in his or her daily life. G-D tells us, “Build me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among you”. The moral of this story is that this sanctuary is both within and around us. May each of you be blessed to acknowledge this fact and welcome HIS presence into your lives.

Shabbat Shalom