

**PARASHAT VAYAKHEL**

**The Contributors to the Mishkan  
and the Builders of the Mishkan**

**By Rav Elchanan Samet**

**I. THE PARASHA'S INTRODUCTORY SECTION**

In parashat Teruma, God commanded Moshe to build the Mishkan and specified all the details thereof, while parashat Vayakhel records the actual fulfillment of this command. Each parasha is preceded by an introductory section. Parashat Teruma opens with God telling Moshe to inform the people of the need to contribute materials for the building of the Mishkan (25:2), followed by a list of the materials. Parashat Vayakhel opens with Moshe actually giving these instructions to the nation (35:5), reiterating exactly the same list of materials. The introductory section of parashat Teruma concludes with God's command to build a sanctuary (25:9), and in our parasha Moshe likewise charges the nation to construct the Mishkan (35:10-11)."

However, we find a striking discrepancy between the introductory sections to these two parallel parashot. The introduction in parashat Teruma is nine verses long (25:1-9), whereas in our parasha we read a full forty-two verses before the text begins to describe the actual construction work (35:1-35; 36:1-7). What is the reason this lengthy introduction in our parasha? In order to answer this question, we shall have to review the topics mentioned in it. We may divide the introduction into seven parts, each with its own subject matter:

a) Following the opening verse, we find the command concerning Shabbat (35:2-3). In parashat Tetzaveh, however, the mitzva of Shabbat CONCLUDED God's command to

construct the Mishkan, as the seventh appendix to this command (31:12-17). The prohibition against performing labor on Shabbat appears in both places for the same reason: it teaches that construction work for the Mishkan does not cancel the Shabbat laws. When commanding Moshe about the future building of the Mishkan, the prohibition of Shabbat labor was properly formulated in the appendix. But when Moshe commands the nations to actually commence building the Mishkan, and sets their work schedule, he must mention this at the very start.

b) Because of the break created by the mitzva of Shabbat, there is a new opening to the command concerning the Mishkan (35:4), followed by the command to take a contribution and a list of materials (35:5-9). This section is similar both in length and in language to the corresponding unit at the beginning of Teruma (25:2-7).

c) Corresponding to the mitzva to build the Mishkan in parashat Teruma (25:8-9), we find in our parasha a much longer command (35:10-19), listing all parts of the work. In the command to Moshe there is no need for a list of the parts of the Mishkan, for Moshe saw the Mishkan in all its details in the vision shown to him by God upon Har Sinai. Thus the words, "like all that I have shown you" include every detail of the work to be performed. But the nation did not see this vision, and the list is meant to compensate for that.

d) With the conclusion of the three parts of Moshe's command (Shabbat, the contribution of materials, and the construction of the Mishkan), we are told (35:20): "And the whole congregation of Bnei Yisrael WENT OUT from before Moshe." They exited only to return immediately (35:21): "And THEY CAME, all those whose hearts moved them," bearing with them their gifts (as described in 35:21-29). Obviously, this unit has no parallel in Teruma.

e) Again Moshe speaks to Bnei Yisrael: he names Betzalel and Oholiav as those selected by God to lead the "wisehearted" artisans who will engage in the construction work (35:30-36:1). In parashat Tetzaveh, the command to Moshe regarding Betzalel and Oholiav is located in the sixth appendix to the command concerning the building of the Mishkan (31:1-11). There, the names of those engaged in task was an afterthought to the command regarding the construction. Here, however, when the

actual work is about to begin, the appointment of the "work managers" is crucial at the very start.

f) The first action undertaken by Betzalel, Oholiav and their wisehearted assistants is to take from Moshe the accumulated contributions and to inform him that "the nation has brought too much for the work." As a result, Moshe orders that a call be sounded throughout the camp to cease bringing contributions.

g) Now, with all the preparations completed, the work itself can commence (36:8): "And all the wisehearted people who carried out the work made the Mishkan..." This verse does introduce a breakdown of the work performed, but the opening words quoted here serve as a link between the introduction and the detailed description of the construction work for the following reasons:

1. The formulation here is in the plural, while the continuation of the construction throughout parashat Vayakhel and Pekudei is described in the singular. The transition takes place at the end of this very verse: "...with artistic work HE made them."
2. The workmen are mentioned here, while they are omitted in the continuation of the description of the construction work (with the exception "And Betzalel made the Ark" [37:1], apparently owing to the importance of this article). The combination of term "wisehearted" (hakham-lev), the verb "to do" (a-s-h) and the noun "work" is repeated several times in the introduction and forms one of its most outstanding linguistic components.
3. The first action mentioned is "the Mishkan," which, although it refers specifically to the tent, also takes on the more general meaning of the Mishkan as a whole.

For all of the above reasons, this verse seems to conclude the introduction to the construction of the Mishkan.

## II. STRUCTURE OF THE INTRODUCTION - TWO POSSIBILITIES

Now that we have analyzed the components of the introduction, let us turn our attention to its structure. It seems to be composed of two halves of unequal length: Moshe's first command and the description of the response to it, and then his second command with the description of the response to that.

First round:

COMMAND (35:1-19) - Shabbat, bringing of the contribution, construction of Mishkan

RESPONSE (35:20-29) - Bringing of contributions

Total number of verses: 29

Second round:

COMMAND (35:30-36:1) - Appointment of Betzalel and Oholiav

RESPONSE (36:2-8) - Bringing the contributions and cessation thereof; commencement of work

Total number of verses: 14

But we may also describe the structure of the introduction another way. The introduction discusses two topics:

1. the CONTRIBUTION of materials to the Mishkan by all those who were generous of heart;
2. the PERFORMANCE of the work of the Mishkan by all those who were wise of heart.

These two topics are discussed both in the first round of "command-response" and in the second. In the first round, Moshe gives commands concerning both these elements, but the people respond only to the first - for until all the contributions had been collected, and until Betzalel had been appointed, there was no possibility of starting the work.

In the second round of "command-response," Moshe's entire instruction is devoted to preparations for BUILDING. But the beginning of the actions of the wisehearted actually pertains to the CONTRIBUTIONS: they take them up from before Moshe and call a halt to their collection.

The preparations of "contribution" and "performance" are therefore the two supporting pillars of the introductory section. But because these two aspects are intertwined and interdependent, they are mixed up in the introduction just as they are in reality. Let us examine the structure of the introduction on the basis of a division of its subjects:

unit a: action (35:1-3) - Shabbat (this of course concerns CESSATION of action)

unit b: contribution (35:4-9) - The command to take a contribution

unit c: action (35:10-19) - The command regarding the work for the Mishkan

unit d: contribution (35:20-29) - The actual bringing of the contribution

unit e: action (35:30-36:1) - The command appBetzalel

unit f: contribution (36:2-7) - Taking up the contribution and halting it

Total number of "action" verses: 21

Total number of "contribution" verses: 22

Thus it arises that according to a "subject division" of the introduction, we find that its two equal parts are represented by two subjects discussed alternately.

### III. THE LEADING WORDS OF THE "CONTRIBUTION" UNITS

While reading the introduction and absorbing its style, we sense that there are certain words and phrases that are repeated over and over. These are the "leading words" of the introduction. It is a general rule, in parashot such as this, that the leading words are repeated seven times, or a multiple of seven. These words direct the reader to a discernment of the subjects under discussion - both differentiating between them and connecting them. Let us look at the leading words in the "contribution" units.

1. The word "contribution" (teruma) itself appears SEVEN times throughout the introduction, in the three units we would expect:

Unit b: command - 2 appearances

Unit d: bringing - 3 appearances

Unit f: taking up and halting - 2 appearances.

2. FOURTEEN materials are mentioned in Moshe's command of what should be brought. Correspondingly, the verb "lehavi" (to bring, in the "hifil" construction) appears in various conjugations FOURTEEN times, each time relating to the contribution. Here, too, the leading word appears only in the units relating to the contributions:

Appearance #1: Moshe's command, unit b

Appearance #2-#10: description of the bringing, unit d

Appearances #11-#14: taking up of the contribution and halting the bringing, unit f.

The absence of these two "leading words" in the "performance" units demonstrates that our distinction between the two parts of the introduction was correct, and that this distinction is also expressed on the linguistic level.

#### IV. THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CONTRIBUTION AND CONSTRUCTION

Thus far we have concerned ourselves with a distinction between the two subjects discussed in the introduction. Now let us ask what it is that connects them. In the remainder of this essay, we shall examine three such connections.

First of all, the contribution of materials is an obvious precondition for the artisans' work. Unit d draws this connection three times (35:21, 24, 29). Furthermore, unit f actually blurs the linguistic distinction between contribution and work (36:6-7):

"Let neither man nor woman DO ANY MORE WORK for the contribution to the sanctuary. And the nation ceased to bring. And the WORK was more than sufficient for them for all the WORK to do it."

Bringing the contribution is here called "doing the work;" moreover, the term "li-terumat ha-kodesh" most probably refers here to the construction, not contribution. The boundaries between the concepts are deliberately blurred.

Let us now look for some common thread linking the PEOPLE who bring the contribution to those who engage in the work. The answer to this lies in a "leading word" that is repeated FOURTEEN times throughout the introduction: "heart" (lev). This word appears seven times in the first round of "command-response" (35:1-29) and seven more times in the second round (35:30-36:8). The distinction between the "heart" of those who bring the contribution and the "heart" of those who engage in the work finds expression in the auxiliary word preceding the word "heart:" in the first round it is generally based on the root "n-d-v" (generous, willing) or "n-s-a" (lifted, moved), while in the second round it is generally based on the root "ch-kh-m" (wise).

There are two seeming exceptions to the above generalization. Regarding the women's contribution of spun thread, we read (35:25), "Every WISE-HEARTED woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun..." The explanation for this is that these women's contribution was not made by bringing raw materials. The raw material had already been brought previously (35:23): "And every man who had with him blue thread and purple and scarlet, and goats' hair... brought..." But these raw materials needed to be spun, and thereafter the spun thread needed to be brought. This was the contribution of the wise-hearted women. Thus we find that among the "bringers" of the contributions who were "generous of heart" and "whose hearts moved them" there

was a group of women who brought the WORK of their hands that had been performed with the WISDOM of their hearts.

The second seeming exception goes in the opposite direction (36:2): "And Moshe called... and every wise-hearted person to whom God had given wisdom in his heart and all those whose hearts moved them to come to the work, to perform it." This phrase, "whose hearts moved them," belongs to the bringers of the contributions (e.g. 35:21, 26). The explanation for this is that the "wisdom of heart" is indeed a trait that is needed for the performance of the work, but the very READINESS "to come to the work" and to devote the necessary time and thought to it is a result of being "moved by one's heart" - it is generosity of heart and spirit.

Our conclusion here is that both the bringers of the contribution and those who engage in the labor are "givers" or "volunteers." All give of their HEARTS to build the Mishkan. The first group give of their possessions, and their bringing is a one-time event performed in a burst of generosity and elevation of spirit. But those who engage in the work also have a heart that moves them; their contribution is in time and talent. This type of contribution requires conscientiousness and strict discipline - the exact opposite of the one-time burst of enthusiasm that characterizes those who bring the contribution.

On the other hand, the contribution of the "wise of heart" involves no monetary loss to them. Among the bringers of the contributions there are also some whose contribution involves no monetary loss, but rather "only" a contribution of time and wisdom - these are the women. The strong emphasis on the leading word "heart" in both groups of givers brings us to the dual heading of this section: the Holy One desires the HEART. In the words of David to Shlomo (Divrei Ha-Yamim I 28:9-10), "For God searches ALL HEARTS... to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong and do it."

V. "WHAT IS YOURS WE HAVE GIVEN YOU"

The last common ground between the two groups regards what we are told over and over with regard to the wise-hearted people but not told even once with regard to the "generous of heart." Both what is repeated and what is omitted come to teach us the same thing.

From where do the wise-hearted, who offer their talents for the work of the Mishkan, get their talent?

"See, God has called upon Betzalel... and has filled him with the spirit of the Lord, with wisdom and understanding and knowledge and in all types of work, and to contrive works of art... And he has put it in his heart to teach, he and Oholiav... He has filled them with wisdom of heart to do..." (35:30-35)

"... and every wise-hearted person to whom God had given wisdom and understanding ... every wise-hearted man to whom God had given wisdom in his heart..." (36:1-2)

All the wisdom of heart, all the artistic ability, all the organizational and administrative skills and the gift of being able to teach others - all is a gift from God to man. This gift is returned to its Owner when "he comes to the work to do it." While it is clear that a person's wisdom of heart is a God-given gift, it is not so clear that this is true of his earthly possessions. A person may think that these belong to a person "by law" - he has earned them and therefore they are his.

But what verb is used throughout the introduction with regard to the contribution? As we have already seen, the text refers fourteen times to the BRINGING of contributions (lehavi), but never to the GIVING of contributions (latet). The root "n-t-n" (to give) appears only in connection with what God gives to man, as evidenced by the verses quoted above. A person cannot give anything to God - since the whole world and all that it contains belongs to Him; however, he may "bring" from that which God has granted him - a contribution for the making of the Mishkan, in order that God may dwell amongst us. This is what David refers to in his blessing of God (Divrei Ha-Yamim I 29:10-19):

"Yours, God, is the greatness and the might... Riches and honor are before You... but who am I, and what is my nation, that we should have the power to offer thus, for everything is from You, and from what is Yours we have given to You... Hashem our God, all this bounty that we have prepared in order to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours... I, in the uprightness of my heart have given all of this, and now I have seen Your people who are present here, joyfully offering to You."

(Translated by Kaeren Fish)

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