

Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash
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"The "Tent of Meeting" and the "Tent of Service

and the Double Role of the Kohanim

By Rav Elchanan Samet

A. A THREE-PART COMMAND

The preparation of the Mishkan is complete. Bnei Yisrael have brought their handiwork to Moshe, and when he sees that everything has been prepared as God commanded, he blesses them (39:32-43). Now God commands Moshe to erect the Mishkan:

(40:1-2) "And God spoke to Moshe, saying: On the day of the first month, on the first of the month, you shall erect the Mishkan, a Tent of Meeting."

This Divine command has three parts:

- i. From verse 3 to verse 8, Moshe is commanded to erect the Mishkan and to arrange all the various vessels in it, putting each in its proper place and bringing it to completion by performing the specific service appropriate to it.
- ii. From verse 9 to verse 11, Moshe is commanded concerning the anointment of all of the above with the special anointing oil.
- iii. From verse 12 to verse 15, the Divine command concludes with instructions as to a series of activities that will make Aharon and his sons into Kohanim for God.

This traditional reading portion (40:1-16) concludes, in verse 16, with the words: "And Moshe did according to all that God had commanded him; so he did."

Then we find eight masoretic "parashot" describing Moshe's actions in fulfilling this command. The conclusion of each of the first seven is identical: "As God had commanded Moshe," while the eighth concludes with the words (33), "And Moshe completed the work." What work is being referred to? These portions describe the establishment of the Mishkan and its arrangement by Moshe as he was commanded in the first section of God's command, in verses 1-8. But we have been told nothing of the anointment of the Mishkan and its vessels,

nor of the sanctification of the Kohanim! How then can the work be described as "completed?"

Is a description of these other parts of the command to be found elsewhere in the Torah? Certainly – in [Vayikra 8](#) we find a description of the various actions performed during the seven days of inauguration – the period during which Aharon and his sons were prepared to become Kohanim. The command concerning the actions to be performed during those seven days appears in [Shemot 29](#). And, interestingly enough, in [Vayikra 8:1-11](#) we are told of an action that has no corresponding command in [Shemot 29](#):

([Vayikra 8:1](#)) "And Moshe took the anointing oil and anointed the Mishkan and all that was in it, and sanctified them.

(11) And he sprinkled of it upon the altar seven times and he anointed the altar and all its vessels, and the basin and its stand, to sanctify them."

The correspondence between these verses and the latter two parts of God's command to Moshe in our parasha ([Shemot 40:9-11](#)) is clear. Chapter 8 in Vayikra also describes the sanctification of Aharon and his sons, in keeping with the command in [Shemot 29](#), and these acts of sanctification also include the fulfillment of the third part of God's command to Moshe, in [Shemot 40:12-15](#).

We may therefore ask: Why is the fulfillment of God's command not described in its entirety within Sefer Shemot?

B. THE MISHKAN THAT MOSHE ERECTED

The establishment of the Mishkan described in our parasha is not merely the technical placement of the Tent and its vessels in their proper places. Rather, it includes also the inauguration of each vessel in its proper service. Moshe puts the Table in its proper place (23) "and he set upon it and arranged the bread before God, as God had commanded Moshe;" he places the menorah where it belongs (25) "and lighted the lamps before God, as God had commanded Moshe;" he situates the golden altar (27) "and burnt sweet incense upon it, as God had commanded Moshe;" he also puts the sacrificial altar in its appointed location (29) "and offered upon it the burnt offering and the meal offering, as God had commanded Moshe."

These actions on the part of Moshe in establishing the Mishkan do not constitute "service;" they may be defined as bringing each of the vessels to completion by bringing it to the stage of actually serving its intended function. It is for this reason that all the stipulations and restrictions involved in the definition of "service" do not apply to his actions here. We need not assume

that Moshe necessarily lit the lights of the menorah in the evening (as commanded in Shemot 27, "from evening until morning"), nor that he offered the incense upon the incense altar and the burnt offering upon the sacrificial altar exactly at the times stipulated for these two services. Rather, he performed all of these actions immediately upon placing each vessel in its appointed spot – as the literal reading of the text would suggest.

This being the case, even anointment is not a precondition for Moshe's actions concerning these four vessels, for the anointment is meant to sanctify the vessels for their PERMANENT SERVICE. Moshe performs his actions not within the framework of fixed, routine service, but rather within the framework of the completion of their construction – and completion of their construction and preparation precedes their anointment and sanctification.

C. MISHKAN OF THE FOUR "PERMANENT FIXTURES"

What is the nature and function of this Mishkan, established by Moshe in perfect compliance with the command as to its construction in parashat Teruma?

This Mishkan has no Kohanim: nowhere in all of parashat Teruma is there any mention of Aharon and his sons. In truth, a Mishkan such as this has no need of Kohanim. For the establishment of the four "permanent fixtures" associated with the vessels of the Mishkan – the permanent show-bread, the eternal light, the continual incense and the daily burnt sacrifice – Moshe alone is sufficient. Indeed, when we read parashat Teruma – the parasha concerning the establishment of the Mishkan and its vessels – we do not imagine for a moment that this Mishkan is lacking in anything, and that it requires Kohanim to serve within it.

What, then, is the function of this Mishkan, containing the ark of the testimony, the table with its permanent show-bread, the menorah with its eternal flame, and the regular incense and burnt offerings? Its function is defined at the beginning of the command as to its construction, at the end of the parasha concerning the Ark:

(25:22) "And I shall meet with you there and I shall speak to you from above the Covering, from between the two keruvim that are upon the ark of testimony – all that I shall command you to [tell] Bnei Yisrael."

It is for the purposes of this meeting (continuing the encounter upon Mt. Sinai) that the Mishkan is established. The vessels are prepared for the same purpose: to serve the most important and esteemed Guest Who, each time that He comes to speak with Moshe (and via him with the entire nation), will find a sanctuary prepared and ready for this meeting, containing a symbolic chair, a set table, a kindled light and a "meal."

The subject of Sefer Shemot – the "Book of Exile and Redemption," as Ramban defines it in his introduction to this Sefer – is the redemption of Israel from Egypt and the forging of

the covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. The construction of the Mishkan and its establishment represent the climax of the Sefer.

The Mishkan eternalizes the covenant made at Mt. Sinai and testifies to it; hence its name – "mishkan ha-edut," sanctuary of testimony. It is the framework for the continuation and completion of that covenant through God's meeting with Moshe and conveying commands to Bnei Yisrael; hence its name – "Ohel Mo'ed," tent of meeting.

The human side of this covenant, with regard to this Mishkan discussed in Sefer Shemot, is the human effort involved in the actual CREATION of the Mishkan, in the generous contributions towards it and the enthusiastic professional workmanship. But from the moment that its construction is complete, the Mishkan is ready AS IT STANDS for God to meet with Moshe, and for the Shekhireside within it. It contains the Testimony, it has a set table and kindled lights, and incense and burnt sacrifices are offered upon its altars.

Therefore, the moment that the great human effort involved in the construction is completed (as described at length in parashot Vayak'hel and Pekudei, concluding at 39:33-43), this purpose of the Mishkan is attained, with the cloud covering the Ohel Mo'ed and with God's glory filling the Mishkan. The human effort from below is met with approval from Above.

Even before the Mishkan and its vessels are anointed for their permanent service, and even prior to the sanctification of the Kohanim for their service, God had already placed His glory in the Mishkan. The Mishkan was ready for God to meet with Moshe in order that the Torah could continue to be transmitted, as described at the conclusion of Sefer Shemot.

This order is hinted at in the concluding verses of the larger framework of the command concerning the building of the Mishkan. First, God proclaims (29:43), "I shall meet there with Bnei Yisrael, and it shall be sanctified with My glory," as described at the end of our Sefer: "And the glory of God filled the Mishkan." ONLY AFTERWARDS are we told (29:44), "And I shall sanctify the Ohel Mo'ed and the altar, and I shall sanctify Aharon and his sons to minister to Me" – an event that will be described only in Sefer Vayikra. If we read the parashot concerning the Mishkan in their entirety, from parashat Teruma up until the end of the Sefer, then although we become aware of the existence of the Kohanim in the Mishkan and the existence of the permanent service that they will perform, we do not think about any additional great function of the Mishkan, namely: to serve as a House of God, ready for the offerings of all of Israel, the permanent and exclusive place for Israel's Divine service in bringing public and individual sacrifices, both voluntary and mandatory.

This function of the Mishkan is one of the major themes of Sefer Vayikra from its very beginning, reaching completion in Sefer Bamidbar.

D. DEDICATION OF THE MISHKAN OF MEETING VS. DEDICATION OF THE MISHKAN OF SERVICE

On what day was the Mishkan established? This is mentioned explicitly both in God's command to Moshe in our parasha,

(40:2) "On the day of the first month, on the first of the month, you shall erect the Mishkan, the Ohel Mo'ed,"

and in the subsequent description of Moshe's fulfillment of the command:

(16) "And it was, in the first month, in the second year, on the first of the month, the Mishkan was established.

(17) And Moshe established the Mishkan, and fastened its sockets...."

Immediately following the description of Moshe's final actions in establishing the Mishkan - (33) "And Moshe completed the work" - we are told:

(34) "And the cloud covered the Ohel Mo'ed, and God's glory filled the Mishkan."

Hence, on the first day of the month of Nisan the Mishkan was established by Moshe, and on that same day God's glory rested in it. The juxtaposition of these two events on the very same day arises not only from our parasha, but is also mentioned explicitly elsewhere:

([Bamidbar 9:15](#)) "AND ON THE DAY THAT THE MISHKAN WAS ESTABLISHED, THE CLOUD COVERED THE MISHKAN, the Tent of Meeting, and in the evening there was upon the Mishkan the appearance of fire, until the morning."

When, then, did the seven days of inauguration begin – those seven days described in [Vayikra 8](#), during which the Mishkan and its vessels were anointed and the Kohanim sanctified for their service? It seems that the seven days were counted from that same day, after the Mishkan was covered with the cloud, lasting the first seven days of the month of Nisan. We therefore deduce that the eighth day, which followed the seven inaugural days, was the 8th of Nisan. Concerning this day we are told ([Vayikra 9:4](#)), "For today God will appear to you," and that the glory of God did indeed appear to the whole nation, as we read (*ibid.*, verse 24):

"And a fire came out from before God and consumed upon the altar the burnt sacrifice and the fats, and the entire nation saw, and they shouted out, and they fell upon their faces."

What, then, is the difference between the first of Nisan and the eighth of that month? On the first of Nisan the Mishkan was sanctified with the cloud covering it and the glory of God filling it, and from that day onwards God's communications to Moshe were from the Ohel Mo'ed, from between the two Keruvim. But the Mishkan was not yet being used for the service of the Kohanim, who were to offer the sacrifices of Israel. On the first of Nisan the Mishkan became a Mishkan of revelation – a Mishkan connected to Moshe alone, in which he would from now onwards receive God's word "from Above downwards." On the eighth of Nisan the Mishkan became also the Mishkan of Divine service, connected with Aharon the Kohen – the representative of the nation, who would bring sacrifices, "from below upwards."

On both of these dates there was a revelation of the Shekhina that was related to the Mishkan, but the two revelations were very different from one another, not only chronologically but also in some fundamental details. These details arise from the fact that the two revelations of Shekhina were each meant to inaugurate a different activity in the Mishkan. Or, putting it differently: first the Mishkan of revelation was inaugurated, and only afterwards the Mishkan of service.

- Place of revelation: On the first of Nisan (40:34), "The cloud covered the OHEL MO'ED and the glory of God filled the MISHKAN" – the place of God's meeting with Moshe, whereas on the eighth of Nisan (9:24), "A fire came out from before God AND CONSUMED UPON THE ALTAR the burnt sacrifice and the fats..." The revelation of Shekhina here is related to the altar that stands in the courtyard of the Mishkan; the focus is on the sacrificial service.

- The visible expression: On the first of Nisan it is the cloud that rests upon the Mishkan, like the cloud that covered Mt. Sinai at the time of the Revelation there; it is an expression of revelation whose purpose is speech. On the eighth of Nisan the Shekhina is revealed in the fire that consumes the sacrifices upon the altar, thereby expressing God's desire to accept the offerings of Israel.

- Degree of involvement on the part of the nation: The fact that the glory of God fills the Mishkan on the first of Nisan does not concern the whole nation directly; only Moshe is directly involved (40:25): "And Moshe could not come to the Ohel Mo'ed, for the cloud rested upon it." Therefore no reaction on the part of the nation is recorded on the first of Nisan. But the revelation of God's glory before the eyes of the whole nation (standing "facing the Ohel Mo'ed") on the eighth of Nisan, with the fire coming out from before God (from the Kodesh Kodashim) to the altar in the courtyard and consuming its offerings is indeed an event for the whole nation, and accordingly we are told (9:24), "And all the

nation saw, and they shouted out, and fell upon their faces."

This order – the precedence of inauguration of the Mishkan of meeting before the inauguration of the Mishkan of service, with seven days between them – is deliberate and of great significance: Israel's service of God in the Mishkan comes AFTER God's revelation to Moshe and the nation in the Mishkan AND AS A RESULT OF IT. Both the actual revelation to Moshe and its detailed content precede, both chronologically and essentially, Israel's sacrificial service. The Mishkan, as representative and continuation of the covenant forged at Mt. Sinai, reflects an identical order in the stages of that covenant. It was a Divine initiative, finding expression in God's addressing Israel and revealing Himself to them, followed by an enthusiastic response on the part of the nation to this initiative, expressing willingness to enter the covenant and to do whatever God would command them.

We may formulate the above idea as follows: the priesthood of Aharon, Israel's representative in the Mishkan, arises from the prophecy of Moshe, God's emissary, who receives God's word in the Mishkan. For this reason, during those seven days duvhiAharon and his sons were sanctified and readied for their function as Kohanim to God, Moshe served as a "kohen," and it was only by virtue of this that the priesthood could pass to Aharon and his sons on the eighth day. Clearly, the seven inaugural days should not be seen only as a period of training and apprenticeship for Aharon and his sons; rather, they represent an essential bridge between the inauguration of the Mishkan of meeting, in which Moshe is the sole "kohen" (he establishes it and completes it through the fulfillment of the four "permanent fixtures"), and the inauguration of the Mishkan of service, in which Aharon and his sons serve as Kohanim. During these seven days, the priesthood passes from Moshe to Aharon – from the agent of God to the agent of the nation of Israel.

E. CONTROVERSY OVER THE PERIOD OF THE SEVEN DAYS

The prevalent view among Chazal (e.g. Sifri on Bamidbar, Nasso 44; [Shabbat 87b](#)) and the medieval commentators (e.g. Rashi in his commentary on chapters 8-10 of Vayikra; [Ramban on Shemot 40:2](#)) differs from the above. Their generally accepted view is that the seven inaugural days PRECEDED the entry of the Shekhina into the Mishkan, such that the eighth day – when God's glory was visible to the entire nation in the form of the fire consuming the sacrifices – coincided with the day that the Shekhina came to rest in the Mishkan as described at the end of Sefer Shemot. Thus the seven inaugural days would have begun on the 23rd of Adar, and the eighth day would have been Rosh Chodesh Nisan.

The most fundamental challenge to this view is the following. The command concerning the establishment of the Mishkan mentions a specific date (40:2): "On the day of the first month, on the first of the month, you shall erect the Mishkan, the Ohel Mo'ed," but during the seven inaugural days – which, according to this view, preceded that day – the Mishkan is described as already standing, with Moshe serving in it and offering various sacrifices on the altar! The solution proposed by this view is that the Mishkan was indeed already established by the 23rd of

Adar, but it was dismantled daily on each of the seven inaugural days, and only on the eighth day was it erected with a view to remaining in this state, and that it is THIS occasion that is referred to in [Shemot 40:2](#). The problem is that the text offers no hint of this daily dismantling in the detailed description of the actions performed on those seven inaugural days – neither in the command in [Shemot 29](#) nor in the description of its fulfillment in [Vayikra 8](#).

Not only is there no mention of the Mishkan being erected and dismantled daily, but some verses in [Vayikra 8](#) seem to contradict such a possibility. Moshe tells Aharon and his sons, on the first of the seven days:

([Vayikra 8:33](#)) "And you shall not leave the entrance of the Ohel Mo'ed for seven days, until the days of your inauguration are completed..."

(35) And you shall remain at the entrance of the Ohel Mo'ed DAY AND NIGHT, for seven days."

How could this command be fulfilled if the Ohel Mo'ed was dismantled – even if only for a short time - each day? Sitting "day and night" for seven days means a continuous action that is not halted. These questions are addressed both by Chazal and by the medieval commentaries, but no satisfactory solution is proposed that accords with the literal text.

What is the reason for such a view, so far removed from the literal text? It would seem that Chazal and these commentators wished to fit the event described in [Vayikra 9](#) – the revelation of God's glory to the entire nation – with the important date mentioned explicitly in Shemot: Rosh Chodesh Nisan.

If this were the only opinion to be found in the Midrash and among the commentators, it would be quite surprising. But the Sifri (Beha'alotekha, 68; this beraita appears in a slightly different version in Sukka 25a-b) quotes the view of Rabbi Akiva as follows:

"And there were people who were impure through contact with the dead' ([Bamidbar 9:6](#)) – who were these people? They were those who carried the coffin of Yosef – according to Rabbi Yishma'el.

Rabbi Akiva said: They were Mishael and Eltzafan, who became impure because of Nadav and Avihu... their seventh day [of the process of purification] fell on the day before Pesach."

Rabbi Akiva's view, then, is that Mishael and Elitzafan, who became impure through contact with the corpses of Nadav and Avihu on the eighth day of inauguration ([Vayikra 10:1-5](#)), BECAME IMPURE ON THE eighth OF NISAN, and therefore "they could not perform the Pesach sacrifice ON THAT DAY" –

on the fourteenth of Nisan, which was the seventh day of the process of their purification.

Among the medieval commentators this view is adopted by the Ibn Ezra (Long Commentary, [Shemot 40:2](#)).

This shiur will be continued next week.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish)

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