

## "Thinking Torah"

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# Parashat Teruma

## Introduction. Structure of the Mishkan

A few years ago, I visited the Israel Supreme Court, a rather magnificent building which has been highly acclaimed by architects worldwide. The tour-guide lead us around the building drawing our attention to all the architectural detail. She explained to us that the vision of the planners was that the very stone and plaster, the curved lines and picture windows would all somehow transmit the message of the Jewish notion of "Justice" to all who entered its doors. In the tour it was absolutely fascinating to see how the architects had succeeded in incorporating these ideas visually and structurally. The attention to detail was impressive. Through the building itself they had ensured that the Supreme Court building itself would be an intrinsically Jewish courthouse.

This architectural concept lies at the heart of our parasha. We are introduced to the world of the Mishkan - the Tabernacle - with a baffling array of detail. Dimensions and construction materials; woods, gold, silver, tchelet and argaman wool, to name but few. We - the attentive readers of the Torah - are aware that, like the Supreme Court, all these materials and forms chosen have a singular aim. They are directed at conveying, in colour and in smell, in texture and in form, the special message of the Mishkan.

What is the idea of the Mishkan? The word "Mishkan" itself is rooted in the verb SH"KH"N – indicating a residence. Whose residence? The verse explicitly gives the aim of the Tabernacle as:

"You shall make me a sanctuary, that I may reside (VeSHaKHaNti) in their midst" (25:7)

The purpose of the sanctuary is so that God may reside amongst the B'nei Yisrael. The architecture of the Mishkan is supposed to enhance the God-Israel connection.

### THE ORDER OF THE PARASHA - THE STRUCTURE OF THE MISHKAN.

#### **The very ordering of topics within the parasha reflects quite exactly, the floorplan of the Mishkan.**

The placing of each item and detail in the Biblical text mirrors the map of the Mishkan itself. Here is a rough listing of the structure of Parashat Teruma and ... by extension the structure of the Mishkan.

#### *INTRODUCTION:*

25:1-9 The call to donate materials. Purpose of the Mishkan

#### *RITUAL OBJECTS OF THE "HOLY OF HOLIES"*

25:10-22 The Ark

#### *RITUAL OBJECTS OF THE "HOLY"*

25:23-25:29 The Table of the shewbread.

25:31-40 The Menorah

#### *STRUCTURAL DETAILS OF THE "TENT" - "HOLY" & THE H. OF HOLIES*

26:1-14 The cloth coverings of the Mishkan

26:15-30 The wood structure of the Mishkan

26:31-37 The parochet - curtain between the Holy and H.of Holies

#### *RITUAL OBJECTS OF THE COURTYARD*

27:1-8 The sacrificial altar

#### *STRUCTURAL DETAILS OF THE COURTYARD*

27:9-19 The boundary of the outer courtyard (the posts and cloth "walls")

As is evident from the outline above, that the ordering of the details in these chapters is systematic. **The description of the Mishkan works from inside outwards.** It begins by describing the inner area known as the Holy of Holies and it moves outwards to detail the outer chamber and courtyard. For each "area" or "zone" of the Mishkan, first the "kelim" - vessels or ritual articles - are described, followed by the construction details of the environment in which they reside. I think that the ordering; the description of the kelim BEFORE that of the structure; gives over the notion that the kelim, rather than the impressive structure, are the focus of the Mishkan. Put a different way; it is the service of the mishkan that is the essence and not the tabernacle itself.

Maybe one short word of introduction would be in place here.

The Mishkan or tabernacle contains three basic areas or zones: the courtyard, the Kodesh (Holy), and the Kodesh Kodashim (Holy of Holies). The division of these three zones represents a progression from the profane to the sacred in incremental ascending scales of holiness.

The outer area is the courtyard which is unroofed. It is here that the main sacrificial altar (mizbeach) stands and all Israelites who are in a state of ritual purity can gain admission.

Within the courtyard is a covered structure - an area with restricted entry - which contains two sections. First is the "holy" to which a regular Israelites could not enter, only kohanim and leviim. Within this area was an inner chamber - the Kodesh Kodashim. Only the High Priest would enter this chamber, on the holiest day of the year - Yom Kippur .

The materials used also reflect the incremental levels of holiness. In the Kodesh and the Kodesh Kodashim, the ritual objects are made from gold, the boards are plated with gold and the coverings are an ornate weave of intricate, decorative fabric. But in the outer courtyard, the altar is constructed from copper, and surrounded by plain wood posts in copper sockets, supporting simple white twisted linen divisions. The washing laver in the courtyard is also copper.