

## Thinking Torah

Rav Alex Israel – www.alexisrael.org

### *Vayakhel/Shemmini/Nasso*

# Three stories of the Dedication of the Mishkan

The Torah describes the dedication of the Mishkan in three different places, in three different books. Now, clearly when the same phenomenon is described multiple times, one can try to draw upon the common details and to iron over the differences between the parshiot. Our methodology shall be precisely the reverse. Our belief is that if the Torah took pains to describe this event three times, then it is describing it from a variety of angles. It is for us to accentuate the nuances of each parsha, drawing upon its unique emphasis in order to accurately assess its contribution to the wider picture.

## THREE PARSHIOT

Let us tabulate the 3 parshiot in order to compare the differences:

	<b>Shemot 40</b>	<b>Vayikra 8-9</b>	<b>Bamidbar 7</b>
The main actor	Moshe	Aharon/Kohanim	Princes of the Tribes
God's revelation	Cloud	Fire	Speech
Where?	Holy of Holies	Mizbeach	Above the Ark
What ceremony?	Construction of the Mishkan	Korbanot – 7 days followed by an eighth day of revelation	12 identical days of gifts and Korbanot to the Mishkan

This summary should put is in good shape to understand the speciality of each parsha.

## SHEMOT

The stated purpose of the Mishkan in Sefer Shemot, is the notion of Shekhina. From the root SH"KH"N, we realize that the purpose of our Mishkan is that God resides in the environs of Bnei Yisrael: God in our Midst.

The complicated construction plans of the Mishkan are given this explicit aim at their beginning (25:7) and at the end (29:42-26.) Indeed, it is this need for God's presence to reside amongst the nation that frames the revelation at the end of the Sefer:

"The CLOUD covered the tent of meeting, and GOD'S PRESENCE filled the Mishkan."

But there is also a further aspect, and this relates to a certain parallel with Har Sinai. When Moses wishes to ascend the mountain to receive the Luchot, the Torah states:

"And Moses ascended the mountain ... and GOD'S PRESENCE rested upon Mt. Sinai, and the CLOUD enveloped it for six days, AND HE CALLED TO MOSES on the seventh day from the cloud ... and Moses entered the cloud and ascended the mountain" (24:15-18)

These pesukim are mirrored in the closing verses of our Parsha:

"The CLOUD covered the tent of meeting, and GOD'S PRESENCE filled the Mishkan. And Moses could not enter the tent of meeting for the cloud rested upon it, and the presence of God filled the Mishkan... AND GOD CALLED TO HIM.." (40:34-5 and Vayikra 1:1)

With this parallel, we see God's presence at Sinai and his presence at the Mishkan described in most remarkable parity. It would seem that God's presence within the Mishkan is the same intensity of presence that appeared on Mount Sinai at Matan Torah.

This then is the culmination of the Sefer. This is what we need to know about the Mishkan dedication. In the first half of Sefer Shemot, God draws us to Him, by taking us away from enslavement, and drawing us to His service, bringing us under His wing. In the second half of the Sefer, we begin to draw God towards us by means of the construction of the Mishkan.

And as a project of national importance, and as a mirror to Mt. Sinai, Moses, the leader of the generation, and prophet extraordinaire is the central figure in Sefer Shemot's Mishkan dedication.

## VAYIKRA

Vayikra is a very different Sefer. It's theme is Kedusha. The role played by the Mishkan is primarily by means of the Korbanot. The Korbanot (KR"V) bring us close to God. But who can actually bring the Korban itself? Who can engage in the work? - Only the Kohanim.

It is the Korbanot aspect that is described in the seven Miluim – training – days of the Kohanim. They practice for the great Eighth Day on which: "God will appear to you."

Only following an entire week, a cycle, of Temple service, God reveals his presence to his nation. But in contrast to Sefer Shemot where God reveals his presence inside the Tent of Meeting, here the revelation is not in seclusion, in the Holy of Holies. It is outside, and open to all, and the

people react enthusiastically (9:24.) It is on the Altar, the place of the Korban. It is performed by the Kohanim, who are the servants of the Mishkan.

This ceremony is very different to Moses' dedication in Shemot 40. There, the process was one of inaugurating ALL the utensils of the Mishkan, anointing them, getting them ready for service.

Here, the focus of the Sanctuary is the Mizbeach, the Avoda, the ongoing service of the Mishkan, its daily routine. That is the central feature and characteristic of this dedication ceremony.

## BAMIDBAR

Bamidbar is a difficult Sefer to pin down as it contains a multiplicity of strands that must be correctly woven in order to discern its meaning.

One of the central themes of Sefer Bamidbar is journeying; the journey to Israel. The book narrates Israel's departure from Mount Sinai and its journey through the wilderness for an entire generation until reaching the border of the Promised Land. To this end, Bamidbar begins with the organisation and counting of the camp in preparation for the great march to the Promised Land. The text describes the marching process itself (Ch. 10-11) and it interests itself with the failures and setbacks of the mission. At the end of the day, the book is complete when the Israelites are ready to enter the Land of Canaan. (Interestingly, the end of Sefer Shemot hints to this. See the concluding pesukim.)

Another central feature of Bamidbar is its focus upon the Nesi'im who would seem to be the primary instrument of leadership. In Sefer Vayikra the leader is the priest, the Kohen. Tribal leadership simply does not feature. If the starting point of Sefer Vayikra is the Mikdash or Mishkan, then the functionary of this sacred institution is the Kohen.

But in Sefer Bamidbar, it is the camp in which the focus is placed. The Mishkan is spoken of as a structure which needs transportation, but does not take centre stage in the drama of the narrative described. Indeed in Bamidbar, Aaron functions orientated towards the nation (6:22-24, 17:11-24) more than towards the Mishkan. He figures as a national leader more than the elevated "Kohen Gadol."

Hence, the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan is re-narrated in Bamidbar as an event orchestrated by tribal leaders. The Nesiim are the main figures, and they bring objects that relate to mundane things. They donate transportation equipment to the Mishkan, wagons and oxen (see 7:3-6) to facilitate the portability of the Mishkan as the Israelites travel. They also bring objects like bowls and other "hardware" to the Mishkan. The Nesiim concern

themselves with the physical needs of the Mishkan as much as they bring Korbanot.

This is a new angle. For 12 days, a 12 day ceremony that is as yet unheard of in the Torah, the Mishkan experiences a dedication by the tribes themselves, via the medium of their tribal leaders.

And yet, the parsha of Bamidbar finishes with the closing line of God's voice emanating from the Kodosh Kodoshim, instructing and enlightening the nation. The nation finds the way of achieving Hashraat Shechina through its own Chanukat Hamizbeach (see Bamidbar 7:84.)

## THREE STORIES; THREE PERSPECTIVES

The dedication of the Mishkan is a landmark in the life of Bnei Yisrael. It is maybe not so strange then that the Torah takes the trouble to describe it from three different vantage points.

Maybe we can learn a lesson from this. Everyone can access the sacred. Everyone can have their relationship with the Mishkan. The Torah tells us that whether one's perspective is revelation, korbanot, or God in the midst of the common people, God wants us to know that He seeks our connection. He has created multiple avenues to His service. We just have to find one.

Shabbat Shalom