

TIMELESS TORAH

PARSHAT PEKUDEI - Completion & Realisation: The Last Stage of Exodus

The Reckoning of a Nation

Parshat Pekudei completes both the account of the construction of the Mishkan and also the whole of Sefer Shemot. According to the Ramban (Introduction to Sefer Shemot), this finale actually signifies the end of the Exile. With the Exodus from Egypt, the Jewish people were released from slavery, but their true emancipation came when they finished building the Mishkan and merited to have the Presence of Hashem resting among them. In this way, Sefer Shemot echoes the narrative of Sefer Bereishit on a national level; what happened to the family of Avraham Avinu in Sefer Bereishit happens to the Jewish people in Sefer Shemot, and the redemption was therefore complete when they finally returned to the level of their ancestors.

This parshah, therefore, sees a key transitional moment in the story of the Jewish people - from exiled refugees to a free nation. In a sense, this transition is reflected in the opening phrase of the parshah, '*Eileh pekudei haMishkan* — These are the reckonings of the Mishkan' (38:21). The root *pakad* occurs many times throughout *Tanach*, but it is never, as Rav S R Hirsch (d.1881) points out, used in the context of an enumeration of a total amount of material. Rather, this root normally connotes conscious focus and attention. For example, we find, '*Hashem pakad et Sarah* — Hashem **remembered** Sarah', or '*Pekudei ha'eidah*', which means those whom the idea of *eidah* comprises, i.e., the members of the Jewish community. As such, the Seforno (d.1549) and Rav Hirsch both explain that the enumeration of the parts of the Mishkan mentioned in

Parshat Pekudei is more than just a list of materials. Rather, it is a defining statement that each and every item used in the Mishkan was significant and important in its own right.

With this parshah, therefore, the people were enjoined to take this message forward themselves, within their own lives. They knew that everything they had created for the Mishkan was meaningful and had a particular *tafkid*, a unique role to play. As they entered this final stage of their redemption from Egypt, they were required to ask themselves if they were fulfilling their own roles in life. This moment of transition from exile to becoming a free and holy nation was the time to carry out a process of self-reflection to see if there were any adjustments that ought to be made.

Hooking Onto Holiness

One of the first items listed in Moshe's accounting at the start of the parsha was the 1,775 silver coins that were used to make the hooks for the pillars of the Mishkan. In truth, there was far more silver than this, and they were used for other parts of the Mishkan, so why were these coins mentioned separately? The Midrash says that Moshe actually misplaced this amount and was not able to balance the books until Hashem 'opened his eyes' and showed him the hooks that had been made with this exact amount of silver. The Kotzker Rebbe (d.1859) offers a profound didactic interpretation of this Midrash. He explains that not all parts of the Mishkan shared the same level of spirituality; their level differed according to their function.



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Additionally, it was clear to Moshe that the donations that were given with the purest intent would be used for the holiest of the vessels and those that were given with less pure intent would be used for vessels with a lesser status. When Moshe saw the 1,775 silver coins, therefore, he was confused, because he saw that this silver had not been donated with intent pure enough to be used in the Mishkan at all. Addressing his surprise, Hashem opened his eyes and showed him that this silver had been used to make the hooks on the pillars. With this, Moshe understood that although these donations themselves were not necessarily worthy of being used for a holy purpose, they gained holiness by becoming attached to the rest of the donations, which were given with the requisite pure intent.

The message here is that we sometimes find ourselves in a crisis of identity. We are not sure what our role is in life; we see other people doing and achieving far more than we are, and we cannot work out how to find our own purpose and meaning. When this happens, we should reflect on the silver hooks in the Mishkan. These hooks were donated by people who perhaps did not feel that they had a role to play in the construction of the Mishkan, but they created a role for themselves by being connected to the right ideas. Even if we are not yet there, we can always attach ourselves to greatness by wanting to be part of it.

Beginning Is Believing

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, tells us that although the Mishkan was finally constructed on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the process was not at all simple.

Indeed, Moshe himself was overwhelmed at the idea that he was to singlehandedly erect the massive beams that comprised the structure. Nevertheless, Hashem's instruction to him was unequivocal: '*Takim et haMishkan* — **You** should set up the Mishkan' (40:1). Indeed, Moshe exerted his maximum effort, and the Mishkan miraculously erected itself: '*Hukam haMishkan* — The Mishkan **was set up**' (40:17). A third verse (40:18) then tells us that '*vayakem Moshe et haMishkan*— Moshe set up the Mishkan'.

For the Kli Yakar (d.1619), these verses contain a crucial message whenever we are inspired to embark on a worthy project. So often, we refrain from starting because we are afraid that we will not finish it. We might feel that we are too small to complete what we have in mind, and we might even be discouraged by our friends from attempting it. But Moshe was taught here that success is not dependent on human activity but rather on the Divine assistance that accompanies our efforts. The key thing is to make a start and trust in Hashem's help to see it through. Rabbi Meir Shapiro (d.1993), founder of the Daf Yomi programme, once felt this keenly in conversation with an old childhood friend. He reminded his friend that when they were children, he would dream of creating a programme that would unite Jews world-wide in their Torah learning, but his friend would laugh at his ambitions. Rav Shapiro related that he almost desisted from his plans as a result, but from his ultimate perseverance we must learn never to laugh at the dreams of a child. From those dreams, magnificent structures may eventually see the light of day.

Next Week: Vayikra: The Potential & Pitfalls of Humanity