

# TAKING A BACK SEAT TO THE MISHKAN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

*Six days you shall work, and on the seventh day it shall be holy for you...Moshe said to the entire congregation of the Bnei Yisrael...take from yourselves a donation for Hashem... all wise of heart of you should come and make all that Hashem commanded: the mishkan...*

Meshech Chochmah: The Torah juxtaposes Shabbos and the construction of the *mishkan* in two nearby *parshios*. In our *parshah*, Shabbos takes pride of place, followed by the *mishkan*. Earlier,<sup>[2]</sup> however, order was reversed, with Shabbos following on the heels of the *mishkan*.

Constructing the *mishkan* does not fit neatly into one of the other known categories of mitzvos that come into conflict with the laws of Shabbos. On the one hand, the *avodah* itself trumps the restrictions of Shabbos. Parts of the *avodah* that require the performance of one of the 39 types of forbidden labor go ahead on Shabbos just as they do during the week.

Building the *mishkan*, however, is not at all comparable to the *avodah*. The *mishkan* is the place where the *avodah* takes place, but the sundry procedures in putting it together are preparatory to the *avodah*, but they are not the *avodah* itself.

On the other hand, it is well established that procedures that prepare for the *avodah*, but are not part of the *avodah* per se, do not override the strictures of Shabbos. We might be tempted to see *mishkan* construction, then, as a set of preparatory activities that facilitate the *avodah*, but do not rise to the level of *avodah* that can set aside the prohibitions of Shabbos.

We would be incorrect in making that argument. While preparatory activities for other parts of the *avodah* cannot be performed at the price of violation of a Torah precept, we could argue that the *mishkan* project is exceptional. There is no escaping the presence of Shabbos in the operation of the *avodah*; the *avodah* goes on as usual. Because the *mishkan* regularly displays business-as-usual on Shabbos, we could easily reason that its very construction also continues unabated on Shabbos.

Let us develop the thought. Why is it that Shabbos seems to lose out in asserting itself against the *avodah*? The answer might well be that the *mishkan* itself complements and enlarges upon the essential themes of Shabbos! Shabbos reminds us that the world came into existence only because Hashem created it ex nihilo. By its very nature, the *mishkan* unequivocally states that Hashem's Will sustains the world, and His providence directs the course of all events. Because His *Shechinah* resides in the *mishkan*, we respond to that Presence with unceasing service of Hashem, and with the

symbolic references to enlightenment, to sustenance, to connection with Him. It should not be surprising that some preparatory activities to the *avodah*, e.g. the cutting of the barley for the *omer* offering the next morning, do in fact push aside considerations of Shabbos.<sup>[3]</sup> The *avodah* doesn't so much ignore the restrictions of Shabbos as it makes their case in a different way.

Why, then, do we not treat construction of the *mishkan* the same way? Why does our *parshah* tell us, according to the way Chazal understand it, that the *mishkan*-construction project ground to a halt on Shabbos?

The *mishkan* speaks the same language as Shabbos only when the *Shechinah* takes up residence within it, and the homage we pay it then teaches the lessons we mentioned above. The *Shechinah* does not make that move, as it were, until the *mishkan* is completed. Before that time, building the *mishkan* is on a lesser plane in relation to Shabbos than preparatory activities of the *mishkan* after the *mishkan*'s inauguration!

It was only after the sin of the Golden Calf, however, that the *Shechinah* would be localized in a small area in the *mishkan*. Prior to that tragic event, the Presence of the Divine was felt all over. "Every place that you mention my Name, I will come to you and bless you."<sup>[4]</sup> No *mishkan* was needed to proclaim the reality of G-d through His Presence. Hashem was equally accessible all over. The *mishkan*'s function was different than what it was after the sin. It was to act simply as a place to serve the *Shechinah* that was manifest throughout the community. At that point in time, the process of building the *mishkan* was as much an "*avodah*" – and not just a necessary precursor – than what we would call *mishkan* later.

In Ki Sisa, prior to the *chet ha-egel*, the Torah places the building of the *mishkan* before Shabbos, because it, too, – and not the actual *avodah* – overrode the laws of forbidden labor on Shabbos. Only after the *chet*, when the *Shechinah* restricted itself to a much smaller area, was a completed, functioning *mishkan* necessary to house the *Shechinah*, and for that Presence to supplement the truth that Shabbos declares. Therefore, in our *parshah*, Shabbos is listed first.

<sup>[1]</sup> Based on Meshech Chochmah, Shemos 35:2

<sup>[2]</sup> Shemos 31:2

<sup>[3]</sup> Rambam, Temidin U-musafim 7:6

<sup>[4]</sup> Shemos 20:21

Taking a Back Seat to the Mishkan<sup>[1]</sup>

*Six days you shall work, and on the seventh day it shall be holy for you...Moshe said to the entire congregation of the Bnei Yisrael...take from yourselves a donation for Hashem... all wise of heart of you should come and make all that Hashem commanded: the mishkan...*

Meshech Chochmah: The Torah juxtaposes Shabbos and the construction of the *mishkan* in two nearby *parshios*. In our *parshah*, Shabbos takes pride of place, followed by the *mishkan*. Earlier,<sup>[2]</sup> however, order was reversed, with Shabbos following on the heels of the *mishkan*.

Constructing the *mishkan* does not fit neatly into one of the other known categories of mitzvos that come into conflict with the laws of Shabbos. On the one hand, the *avodah* itself trumps the restrictions of Shabbos. Parts of the *avodah* that require the performance of one of the 39 types of forbidden labor go ahead on Shabbos just as they do during the week.

Building the *mishkan*, however, is not at all comparable to the *avodah*. The *mishkan* is the place where the *avodah* takes place, but the sundry procedures in putting it together are preparatory to the *avodah*, but they are not the *avodah* itself.

On the other hand, it is well established that procedures that prepare for the *avodah*, but are not part of the *avodah* per se, do not override the strictures of Shabbos. We might be tempted to see *mishkan* construction, then, as a set of preparatory activities that facilitate the *avodah*, but do not rise to the level of *avodah* that can set aside the prohibitions of Shabbos.

We would be incorrect in making that argument. While preparatory activities for other parts of the *avodah* cannot be performed at the price of violation of a Torah precept, we could argue that the *mishkan* project is exceptional. There is no escaping the presence of Shabbos in the operation of the *avodah*; the *avodah* goes on as usual. Because the *mishkan* regularly displays business-as-usual on Shabbos, we could easily reason that its very construction also continues unabated on Shabbos.

Let us develop the thought. Why is it that Shabbos seems to lose out in asserting itself against the *avodah*? The answer might well be that the *mishkan* itself complements and enlarges upon the essential themes of Shabbos! Shabbos reminds us that the world came into existence only because Hashem created it ex nihilo. By its very nature, the *mishkan* unequivocally states that Hashem's Will sustains the world, and His providence directs the course of all events. Because His *Shechinah* resides in the *mishkan*, we respond to that Presence with unceasing service of Hashem, and with the symbolic references to enlightenment, to sustenance, to connection with Him. It should not be surprising that some preparatory activities to the *avodah*, e.g. the cutting of the barley for the *omer* offering the next morning, do in fact push aside considerations of Shabbos.<sup>[3]</sup> The *avodah* doesn't so much ignore the restrictions of Shabbos as it makes their case in a different way.

Why, then, do we not treat construction of the *mishkan* the same way? Why does our *parshah* tell us, according to the way Chazal understand it, that the *mishkan*-construction project ground to a halt on Shabbos?

The *mishkan* speaks the same language as Shabbos only when the *Shechinah* takes up residence within it, and the homage we pay it then teaches the lessons we mentioned above. The *Shechinah* does not make that move, as it were, until the *mishkan* is completed. Before that time, building the *mishkan* is on a lesser plane in relation to Shabbos than preparatory activities of the *mishkan* after

the *mishkan's* inauguration!

It was only after the sin of the Golden Calf, however, that the *Shechinah* would be localized in a small area in the *mishkan*. Prior to that tragic event, the Presence of the Divine was felt all over. "Every place that you mention my Name, I will come to you and bless you."<sup>[4]</sup> No *mishkan* was needed to proclaim the reality of G-d through His Presence. Hashem was equally accessible all over. The *mishkan's* function was different than what it was after the sin. It was to act simply as a place to serve the *Shechinah* that was manifest throughout the community. At that point in time, the process of building the *mishkan* was as much an "*avodah*" – and not just a necessary precursor – than what we would call *mishkan* later.

In Ki Sisa, prior to the *chet ha-egel*, the Torah places the building of the *mishkan* before Shabbos, because it, too, – and not the actual *avodah* – overrode the laws of forbidden labor on Shabbos. Only after the *chet*, when the *Shechinah* restricted itself to a much smaller area, was a completed, functioning *mishkan* necessary to house the *Shechinah*, and for that Presence to supplement the truth that Shabbos declares. Therefore, in our *parshah*, Shabbos is listed first.

<sup>[1]</sup> Based on Meshech Chochmah, Shemos 35:2

<sup>[2]</sup> Shemos 31:2

<sup>[3]</sup> Rambam, Temidin U-musafim 7:6

<sup>[4]</sup> Shemos 20:21

---