

PARSHAS PEKUDEI - WHY SEVEN?

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Why Seven?¹

It was in the first month of the second year on the first of the month that the Mishkan was erected.

From the look of things, Moshe's role in the setting up of the Mishkan was quickly accomplished. At least it seems that way when you look at the pesukim, which speak only of putting all the pieces together a single time, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. Our pasuk contains no hint of the multiple repetitions that accompanied the readying of the Levi'im for their tasks, and the consecration of the mizbe'ach. There[2], all ceremonies were repeated until they had been performed for seven days.

Chazal[3], however, understood that the repetitions were all synchronous. They tell us that the assembling of the parts of the Mishkan was also done and undone multiple times. Our pasuk simply reports the final occasion; it was preceded by seven more. For an entire week, Moshe had the Mishkan put together and anointed - and then taken down again. Here, on the final day, it remained standing, having been permanently inaugurated.

While Chazal do not tell us the purpose of this, we might guess that the Torah wished to allude to multiple constructions and destructions of the Mishkan in the fuller historical sense. Indeed, when we count up the different instantiations to date of the Mishkan, we find exactly seven, all limited by time. Only the eighth is destined to last without interruption. Thus, Bnei Yisrael 1) built a Mishkan in the wilderness before entering the Land. After entering, they 2) brought it to Gilgal, 3) Shiloh, 4) Nov, and 5) Givon. These were followed by 6) Shlomo's Beis HaMikdosh, and 7) the Second Beis HaMikdosh. Each would be undone or destroyed - but would be followed by a third Beis HaMikdosh that would not. "It will happen in the end of days: The mountain of the Temple of Hashem will be firmly established as the head of the mountains...They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift sword against nation and they will no longer study warfare[4]."

Moshe's Abrupt Exit⁵

Moshe erected the Mishkan...and Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Hashem filled the Mishkan[6].

Moshe's exit from before the Divine Presence seems appropriate enough. His re-entrance to the

Mishkan later, when called upon by Hashem, is also in order. Taken together, however, the sequence is jarring. As far as what is reported in the text, nothing happens in between these two events, other than closing Chumash Shemos and beginning Chumash Vayikra. Moshe leaves only long enough to come right back!

In fact, Moshe's actions place a frame around two distinct stages in the development of the Jewish people. Hashem Himself had spelled out His goal in the redemption from Egypt: "I will take you to Me as a people^[7]." Nothing pointed to the accomplishment of that goal more than His resting His Presence upon the Mishkan. It demonstrated that the Torah had found a home among the Jewish people. The handiwork of flesh and blood, infused with a spirit of dedication to Him and meticulous attention to His commands, had accomplished what is rationally unexpected - it created a place suitable to contain the Presence of G-d.

All of this happened on Moshe's watch, under his direction and tutelage. Completing the most important construction project ever undertaken by Man was a feather in his cap. Precisely when it all comes together, Moshe exits. By doing so, he minimizes his own importance relative to the Mishkan. As crucial as he was in erecting it, ultimately the Mishkan was not about him, but about the Jewish People. There could be no Divine Presence among human beings without a Torah, and there could be no practice of the Torah without a Torah Nation. Moshe exits - leaving the people as a whole front and center.

The Torah does not even tell us about the events of the inauguration of the Mishkan. That would have to wait until the middle of Chumash Vayikra. Instead, the Torah immediately begins a new Chumash with a new focus and a new mission. Hosting the Shechinah places demands upon individuals and upon the community. Vayikra begins with Moshe being called out of his brief "retirement" to instruct the people in the avodah of korbanos. Their deep symbolism would teach the people how to translate the immediate presence of the Divine into actions that would permeate every situation and moment of their lives. They would cherish the Torah that enabled the indwelling of the Shechinah not because they believed in it, but because they would come to know its uplifting effect upon them by experience.

Between the two roles, Moshe has to leave and reenter, underscoring for us the great but different importance of the two stages: inviting Hashem in to dwell, as it were, among us; and responding in an ever-progressing journey towards Him, to keep ourselves worthy of His Presence.

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1. Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Shemos 40:17
 2. Shemos 29:30, 37
 3. Sifrei, Bamidbar 7:1
 4. Yeshayahu 2:2,4
 5. Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Shemos 40:18

6. Shemos 40:18, 35

7. Shemos 6:7
