

Dimensions in Chumash

Parshas Vayakhel Pekudei

From Instruction to Construction – Building Relationships

The Parsha of Vayakhel is often characterized somewhat loosely as a repetition of Parshas Terumah, with the former parsha detailing their instructions and the latter describing their construction. However, a closer inspection of our parsha will reveal that it is not a simple repetition at all. There are numerous differences between the two parshiyos – both in terms of content as well as language – which indicate that these are in fact two significantly different accounts of the Mishkan. Let us consider some examples.

Differences Between the Two Parshiyos: From the General...

The most obvious difference between the two parshiyos is the order of the Mishkan (i.e. the beams and the coverings which made up the body of the Mishkan) and the vessels contained therein:

- **Parshas Terumah** first instructs to make the vessels and then discusses the Mishkan.
- **Parshas Vayakhel** describes the actual construction in reverse – first the Mishkan and then the vessels.

Indeed, this very matter was the subject of an exchange between Moshe and Betzalel, as recorded in the Gemara:¹

When the Holy one, Blessed is He, said to Moshe “Go and tell Betzalel to make for Me the Mishkan and its vessels,” Moshe went and reversed the order, saying, “Make the vessels and the Mishkan.”

Said [Betzalel]: “Moshe our teacher, it is the way of the world that a person [first] builds a house and then brings its vessels inside, yet you are telling me to make [first] the vessels and [then] the Mishkan. The

¹ Berachos 55a.

vessels that I am making, where will I put them? Perhaps the Holy One, Blessed is He, [actually] said to you to make the Mishkan [first] and [then] the vessels?

Said [Moshe] to him: "Perhaps you were in Hashem's shade² and [thus] heard what He said."³

This exchange is most intriguing. In fact, it is actually completely baffling.

1. How can Betzalel question a direct command from Moshe based on the way he would expect a house to be built? Indeed, for that matter, what relevance could he possibly think the "way of the world" in building a house would have on this situation? The Mishkan is clearly not a normal house!
2. If Betzalel's reasoning based on "the way of the world" was indeed sound, why did Moshe respond by saying that he must have overheard Hashem's instructions, thereby knowing the true order? His basis for questioning Moshe was based on reason!
3. The most difficult question is, of course, *why* would Moshe have reversed the order as given to him by Hashem? Having clearly been instructed that the Mishkan should come first, what could have prompted him to change the order?

Now, we have noted that the order of vessels and then Mishkan does seem to have a precedent in Parshas Terumah. It would seem therefore, that in reversing the order, Moshe was looking to give primacy to that parsha. The question remains as to why he would do so, what difference the order makes, and why the Torah itself reversed it between the two parshiyos of Terumah and Vayakhel.

... To the Particular

Aside from the general question regarding the order in which things were made, we note that the two parshiyos also differ in the way they refer to various parts of the Mishkan and its vessels. For example:

Twenty Beams: The north and south side of the Mishkan comprised twenty beams of cedar wood standing side by side.

² בצל א-ל, and exposition on the name בצלאל.

³ I.e. that Hashem did in fact tell Moshe to instruct Betzalel to make the Mishkan first.

- Parshas Terumah refers to these beams as “עֲשָׂרִים קָרָשׁ”⁴
- Parshas Vayakhel refers to them as “עֲשָׂרִים קָרָשִׁים”⁵

Now, in principle, both forms are correct, for even the singular form can be used to denote the plural. However, the question remains, why change between the two?

The Two Keruvim: As the Torah describes, two Keruvim were to be formed on the cover of the Aron. How does the verse refer to them?

- Parshas Terumah refers to them as “שְׁנַיִם כְּרֻבִים”⁶
- Parshas Vayakhel refers to them as “שְׁנֵי כְרָבִים”⁷

In this instance, it would actually appear that the word “שני” is the more appropriate, since it denotes *two of something*,⁸ as opposed to “שנים” which simply denotes the number two. Either way, here too, we ask: Why did the Torah change its way of referring to these things between the two parshiyos?

Action and Motivation

One of the great Torah luminaries of the nineteenth century, R' Yehoshua Heller⁹ offers a fascinating approach which explains all the above questions. He prefaces by noting that every action consists of the action itself plus the motivation which leads to it. In pure terms of mitzvos, these two ideas will express themselves as the love for Hashem (motivation) and the performance of the mitzvah (action). If we should ask: Which of these two comes first? The answer would seem to be quite straightforward – the motivation begets the action! However, the matter is not quite so simple, for it depends on the level of the person.

- For someone on a higher level, love for Hashem does indeed lead to performance of His mitzvos.

⁴ Shemos 26:18.

⁵ Ibid. 36:23.

⁶ Ibid. 25:18.

⁷ Ibid. 37:7.

⁸ In this case, Keruvim.

⁹ Ohel Yehoshua, drush 1.

- For a person on a lower level, there may not be a natural love for mitzvos that motivates their performance. For such a person, the flow will actually be reversed: It will be the performance of mitzvos which will then breed an appreciation for their worth.¹⁰

Interestingly, we find a “template” for both of these levels in the first two paragraphs of the Shema:

- The first paragraph mentions love for Hashem before the performance of mitzvos – “ וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ... וְקָשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ... וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל – You shall love Hashem, your God... you shall bind [these words] on your arms (tefillin) and write them on your doorposts (mezuzah).”¹¹
- The second paragraph mentions performance of mitzvos before love of Hashem – “ אִם שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמְעוּ אֵל מִצְוֹתַי... לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיכֶם – If you will surely heed my mitzvos... to love Hashem.”¹²

It turns out that these two paragraphs, which we recite daily one after the other, actually reflect two different levels of relationship with Hashem and His mitzvos.

Unity

Another concept that relates to the spiritual level of the Jewish people is that of unity versus plurality. This is true in two respects:

- Interpersonal Unity: The higher the level of the Jewish people, the more unified they will be among themselves, as their elevated goals will nullify any mundane or petty differences that might otherwise have separated them.
- Personal Unity: This will exist within the people themselves, since their inner motivation is in accord with their performance of mitzvos. At a lower level, by contrast, the disparity between their inner inclination and their outward positive deeds will lead to a plurality within them.

¹⁰ See Mesilas Yesharim Chap. 7.

¹¹ Devarim 6:5-9.

¹² Ibid. 11:13.

How interesting to note that this difference, too, can be seen within the two paragraphs of the Shema: The first paragraph which, as we have seen, reflects the higher spiritual level, is written in the *singular*, while the second paragraph, which reflects the lower level, is written in the *plural*!

The Mishkan, the Human Body and Taryag Mitzvos

As we have noted, the Mishkan and its vessels are dealt with in dealt both in Parshas Terumah as well as in Parshas Vayakhel. However, these two depictions are not the same, for in between, in Parshas Ki Tisa, we have the episode with the *Egel* (Golden Calf). This sin was to have major repercussions for the Jewish people's relationship with Hashem – beginning with the construction of the Mishkan itself.

To understand how this is so, Rav Heller refers to the well-known idea that the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos parallel the six hundred and thirteen parts of the human body, with each mitzvah representing a certain limb. Even without knowing the relationship between each mitzvah and each body part, we can safely posit that the inner parts of the body correspond to the “inner” mitzvos, that is, the mitzvos which relate to feelings, such as love of Hashem.

To this equation, Rav Heller adds the component parts of the Mishkan, which he tallies in detail and shows how there, too, there were six hundred and thirteen parts! Continuing the logic of relating inner components to inner mitzvos, we may conclude that the inner parts of the Mishkan, i.e. its vessels, correspond to the inner mitzvos of thought and feeling, while the outer parts – the beams and coverings of the Mishkan – correspond to more external and practical mitzvos.

The Mishkan and the Jewish People

Putting all of this together, we can now answer our opening question regarding the shift in order regarding the Mishkan and its vessels. The Mishkan is the center of avodah for the Jewish people. As such, it needs to reflect their level of avodah. Yet this level itself underwent a fundamental change as a result of the *Egel*. Prior to the *Egel*, the people were on the higher level, naturally attuned to doing Hashem's will. Subsequent to the *Egel*, their natural inclination was no longer to perform Hashem's will, and thus needed to be elevated by their positive actions. Therefore:

- In **Parshas Terumah**, which preceded the *Egel*, the direction of avodah for the Jewish people was from the inside (motivation) to the outside (action), and hence the inner vessels were instructed to be made before the outer body of the Mishkan.
- In **Parshas Vayakhel**, which followed the fall of the *Egel*, the direction of avodah was now *reversed*, with the outer action coming first and leading to the development of inner feeling and motivation. As such in this parsha, the Mishkan was commanded to be constructed first, and only after that were the vessels made.

Additionally, we mentioned that the higher spiritual level is associated with the concept of unity, both personal and interpersonal. This is the theme that pervades the Mishkan as described in Parshas Terumah, hence, the generic singular “קֶרֶשׁ” is used, even when describing a number of beams – “עֲשָׂרִים קֶרֶשׁ”. Likewise, the two Keruvim are referred to as “שְׁנַיִם כְּרֻבִים”, for the word “שְׁנַיִם” indicates two things that work together as a pair. In contrast, the parsha of Vayakhel already sees the plurality of the post-*Egel* era and hence, this becomes the mode with which to refer to those very same entities – “עֲשָׂרִים קֶרֶשִׁים” and “שְׁנַיִ כְּרֻבִים”.

Moshe’s Attempted Reversal

We can now understand why, when Moshe was told by Hashem to instruct Betzalel to make the Mishkan and then its vessels, he reversed the order. The current order reflected the drop in the people’s spiritual level due to the *Egel*. For his part, Moshe protested them being consigned to this post-*Egel* state, attempting to *keep them compatible with the higher state* that they had originally enjoyed. In this regard, Moshe’s actions were no different than when he protested against Hashem telling him that the people would be led via an angel and not directly by Hashem, as discussed in Parshas Ki Tisa.¹³

In this instance, however, the higher level of avodah was no longer meaningfully within reach of the people. This is what Betzalel communicated to Moshe by raising the question from “the way of the world” in building a house. Betzalel did not mean to question Moshe’s order based on this idea alone – as that would clearly be insufficient grounds to do so. Rather, in this way, he was delicately indicating to Moshe that the people had fundamentally shifted towards an affinity

¹³ Shemos 33:2-3 and 12-17.

with “the way of the world” as a result of having made the *Egel*. As such, the order of making the Mishkan first and then its vessels – to which Betzalel was privy through *ruach hakodesh* – was sadly but unavoidably necessary.

Moreover, it is possible that had the Mishkan been built in accordance with the higher “inside-out” level, Betzalel would not have been involved at all! For us, it is a given that Betzalel was to oversee the construction of the Mishkan; however, throughout the entire Parsha of Terumah, there is no mention of this. Indeed, the simple meaning of Hashem’s command to Moshe throughout that parsha, “וַעֲשֵׂהְתָּ” – you shall make,” indicates that Moshe himself was the one who was to make the Mishkan. Betzalel is first mentioned toward the end of Moshe’s stay on Har Sinai,¹⁴ at which point the people had already made the *Egel*, for this too was a response to the *Egel*. If the way in which the Mishkan is to be made is less than optimum, Moshe can no longer be the one who is making it.

A completely new perspective on the parshiyos of Terumah and Vayakhel – and on the Mishkan itself!

חזק חזק ונתחזק

¹⁴ Ibid. 31:2.