

PARASHAT TETZAVEH

Vessels of the Mishkan

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I. The Order of the Mishkan Details

The second half of Sefer Shemot deals almost exclusively with the Mishkan, its vessels and the various commandments pertaining to it. Six lists detailing the structure of the Mishkan and its vessels are included in the sefer. The order in which the vessels appear in these six lists can be categorized into two main "patterns:" a. The first list of vessels, as transmitted to Moshe by God (chapters 25-31). b. The other five lists (chapters 35-41).

The order of the vessels in the lists of the second pattern is clear: the list opens with the structure of the Mishkan and then goes on to describe the vessels according to their location therein - the closer the vessel is to the heart of the Mishkan (the Kodesh Kodashim), the nearer it is to the beginning of the list. The Aron and Keruvim, located in the Kodesh Kodashim itself, are the first vessels mentioned in these lists, followed by the menorah and the shulchan (table) found in the Kodesh (Sanctuary), etc.

In contrast to the obvious order of the second pattern lists, the order of the first list is quite interesting. At first it appears that this list, too, is "geographic" in nature - i.e., listed according to location - but a number of exceptions soon become apparent. This shiur will deal with two such examples. One is found at the beginning of the parsha - the command concerning the lighting of the menorah - and the other at the end - the mizbei'ach ketoret (altar for incense).

In order to understand the exceptional location of the command to light the menorah, let us review the order of the vessels as they appear in this list, from the beginning of parashat Teruma until the completion of the commands in parashat Ki Tisa.

1. aron
2. keruvim
3. menorah
4. shulchan
5. structure of the Mishkan

6. parokhet (curtain) and masakh (screen)
7. mizbach ha-nechoshet (brass altar)
8. Mishkan courtyard
9. MENORA - NER TAMID
10. Garments of the kohanim
11. Sanctification of kohanim and mizbei'ach
12. MIZBACH HA-KETORET (incense altar)
13. Half-shekel donation
14. KIYOR (basin)
15. anointing oil
16. ketoret
17. appointment of Betzalel and Oholiav
18. Shabbat

At first glance there are three main exceptions to the "innermost-outward" order: a. the command to light the menorah(9), which opens our parsha, appears after the Torah has already described the Mishkan courtyard and its mizbei'ach, even though the menorah belongs to the "inner" vessels - it stood in the Kodesh - and the command concerning the construction of the menorah was mentioned long before this. b. the command concerning the mizbach ha-ketoret, which closes our parsha, is mentioned only after the issues pertaining to the kohanim, even though this mizbei'ach stood in the Kodesh, adjacent to the menorah and the shulchan. c. the basin is mentioned at the end of the list instead of in its rightful place in the courtyard. This belongs to next week's parasha and will not be discussed today.

II. The Structure of the Mishkan

In order to understand why the lighting of the menorah is not mentioned together with the command concerning its construction, we need first to examine the general structure of the Mishkan. This edifice contains two chambers, the Kodesh, and the Kodesh ha-Kodashim. In fact, almost every home has at least two rooms: a sitting room or reception area - where guests enter and where meals are held, and a bedroom - whose door is generally kept closed and where only those to whom the bedroom belongs may enter.

The Mishkan is built according to a similar pattern. There is an outer chamber (Kodesh) where the kohanim may enter, arrange the shulchan before the Creator of the Universe and kindle the lights in His "home." At the same time there is an inner chamber where no-one may enter, a chamber concealed behind a closed door (the parokhet). This is the inner chamber of "He Who sits with the keruvim" (see Rashi's commentary on Melakhim II 11:2, drawing a parallel between the Kodesh Kodashim and a bedroom).

It would seem that the two chambers of the Mishkan are closely connected and interrelated, at least in terms of the vessels which they contain. The Kodesh Kodashim contains the aron and the keruvim; the Kodesh contains the shulchan and the menorah. The Torah's description of these two pairs of vessels suggests a connection between them. The description of the shulchan, made of accacia wood and covered with gold, is remarkably reminiscent of the aron, made of the same wood and also covered with gold. Surprisingly enough, the descriptions of the menorah and the keruvim are also very similar: Kaporet (covering)-Keruvim:

"And you shall make a kaporet of PURE GOLD two and a half cubits in length and one and a half cubits in width. And you shall make two golden keruvim, OF ONE SOLID PIECE, on the two sides of the covering. ONE KERUV ON THIS SIDE AND ONE KERUV ON THAT SIDE, from (of) the kaporet shall you make the keruvim on its two sides. And the keruvim shall STRETCH THEIR WINGS UPWARDS, spreading their wings over the kaporet and their faces towards one another; TOWARDS THE KAPORET SHALL BE THE FACES OF THE KERUVIM. And you shall put the kaporet upon the aron on top; in the ark shall you put the testimony which I shall give you. And I will meet with you there and I shall speak to you from above the kaporet, from between the two keruvim which are upon the ark of testimony, of all that I shall command you to (tell) Benei Yisrael."

Menora:

"And you shall make a menorah of PURE GOLD, FROM A SOLID PIECE (OF GOLD) SHALL YOU MAKE THE MENORA; its branches and the stem, its bowls, its bulbs and flowers SHALL BE OF ITSELF. And six branches shall emerge from its sides, THREE MENORA BRANCHES FROM ONE SIDE AND THREE MENORA BRANCHES FROM THE OTHER SIDE ... THEIR BULBS AND THEIR BRANCHES SHALL BE OF ITSELF, ALL OF ONE SOLID PIECE OF PURE GOLD, and you shall make its lights seven, and THEY SHALL LIGHT ITS LIGHTS, THAT THEY MAY GIVE LIGHT OVER AGAINST IT. And its tongs and its ashpans shall be of pure gold. Of a talent of pure gold shall he make it and all these vessels. And see that you make them by their pattern which you were shown on the mountain."

The menorah and the keruvim are the only vessels of the Mishkan made of pure gold, crafted out of a solid piece. But the Torah goes even further in drawing a parallel between them, since it describes each of them as having two sides which face the center. Concerning the menorah we read, "three branches of the menorah on one side and three branches of the menorah on the other side ... that they may give light over against it;" similarly regarding the keruvim and the kaporet we read, "One keruv on this side and one keruv on the other side ... the keruvim shall face the kaporet."

Not only do the two sides face the center; they also emerge from it. In the case of the menorah, "and six branches shall emerge from its sides ... their bulbs and their branches shall be of itself." Concerning the keruvim, "You shall make them from a solid piece on the two sides of the kaporet ... from the kaporet shall you make the keruvim on both sides."

Hence we are faced with a similar and corresponding pattern for the keruvim in the Kodesh Kodashim and the menorah in the Kodesh.

In attempting to define the difference between the two chambers, I believe our focus should be on man's stance before God; the encounter with the Divine. The Kodesh Kodashim represents God's turning to man: it is here that we find the two tablets of stone, God's message, as it were ("and in the aron shall you place the testimony which I shall give you"), and Moshe hears God speaking from between the keruvim ("and I shall meet with you there and I shall speak to you from above the kaporet, from between the two keruvim which are upon the ark of testimony" [Shemot 25:22]). This is the innermost and most private room of God's house; man may not enter it, for it is there that God is revealed (whether in a permanent fashion - the tablets, or momentarily - speaking from between the keruvim). In contrast, in the Kodesh man serves his Maker - he kindles the lights, arranges the table and offers up incense. Here man turns to God and serves Him.

III. Moshe and Aharon - Revelation and Service

This difference is bound up with another one. We find that the two chambers are associated respectively with Moshe and Aharon. In describing the functions of the vessels of the inner chamber described above, the personal aspect of God's words to Moshe is apparent: "The testimony which I shall give YOU;" "and I shall meet with YOU there and I shall speak with YOU from above the kaporet." Would God's communication continue to emanate from between the keruvim for all generations? The plain sense of the pesukim would suggest that this is not to be the case. Moshe is permitted to enter the inner chamber, where God's revelation is open and apparent - both through the eternal tablets and through His periodic communications - but after Moshe's death no-one else will be permitted to enter. Moshe gives the nation the tablets of testimony and receives God's word - "Everything which I command you for Bnei Yisrael." This status is bound up with the hidden, inner chamber - the Kodesh Kodashim.

The Kodesh, in contrast, emphasizes Aharon. This chamber represents the divine service performed by man through his chosen representatives, the kohanim. At the time of the dedication of the Mishkan, Moshe performed the service and fulfilled all the functions of the kohanim, but even then, according to one opinion, it was Aharon

and not Moshe who kindled the lights of the menorah. The menorah represents the pinnacle of man's approach to God in service and it is specifically reserved for Aharon - the prime representative of this type of encounter.

Just as the keruvim represent the pinnacle of God's turning to man, so the menorah correspondingly represents the epitome of man's stand before God, but again as a human servant of the Divine, without meriting revelation at any given time. Moshe is not a suitable candidate for kindling the menorah because his relationship with God is based on direct speech - "Mouth to mouth I shall speak to him, in clear vision and not in mysteries." In contrast, not only is Aharon responsible for lighting the menorah, but part of his preparation and training for the priestly service is in fact emphasized through this kindling. (The central significance of the menorah during the Second Temple period is a subject worthy of its own study - at that time the aron and keruvim were no longer in the Temple, and the menorah took their place. This situation also mirrored the spiritual difference between the First and Second Temples - revelation of the Shekhina as expressed through the aron and keruvim vs. man's divine service as expressed through the menorah.) For this reason, in the first list the lighting of the menorah is delayed in order to open the unit pertaining to the kehuna. Immediately following this command we read about the priestly garments, the sanctification of the kohanim, and their main sacrificial duties.

IV. For God or For Man

The second exception to the "inner-outer" order of the vessels - the mizbach ha-ketoret - presents even greater difficulty. Prior to this command we read what appears to be a concluding section for the construction of the Mishkan: "And I shall sanctify the Ohel Mo'ed and the mizbei'ach, and Aharon and his sons shall I sanctify to minister to Me. And I shall dwell amongst Bnei Yisrael and I shall be unto them a God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God Who has taken them out of the land of Egypt to dwell amongst them, I am the Lord their God" (29:44-46). And now, to our great surprise, following this conclusion, the Torah commands us to build the mizbach ha-ketoret. Not only does the command not appear in its proper place within the construction commands (adjacent to the commands concerning the menorah and the shulchan, which also stand in the Kodesh), but it appears after the conclusion of the entire description of the Mishkan!

In the same unit where the mizbach ha-ketoret appears we also read of the kiyor (basin), which we also would have expected to find earlier, adjacent to the discussion of the mizbei'ach ha-ola (the mizbei'ach for sacrifices), with the vessels found in the courtyard. The kiyor, too, is described after the conclusion.

The mizbach ha-ketoret and the kiyor are described together as a single unit. The problem of location is common to both, and it may well be that a similar solution could apply to both as well. As opposed to the basic Mishkan vessels, the kiyor does not play a part in the definition of the Mishkan as "God's house." It doesn't "serve" God; it serves His guests (the kohanim). Its purpose is to allow the kohanim to perform their service. In other words, it is "merely" a means to facilitate the service itself, making possible the sacrifices, the kindling of the menorah, the lechem ha-panim (showbread) etc. Therefore, the kiyor is not mentioned together with the other Mishkan vessels but rather appears after the closing verses which conclude the basic definition of the Mishkan - since it is not one of those vessels which forms this basic definition.

A similar line of thought may be adopted with regard to the mizbach ha-ketoret. We learn from the Yom Kippur service that the cloud of ketoret facilitates a vision of the Shekhina - "For in the cloud I shall appear above the kaporet" - like a sort of veil which serves to dull the dazzling revelation. Perhaps, this is indeed the function of the mizbei'ach ketoret throughout the year: it is meant to allow the Shekhina to dwell in the Mishkan by "screening" the revelation therein! According to this understanding it is quite clear why the mizbei'ach ketoret is not mentioned together with the other vessels: it too, like the kiyor, "merely" facilitates the revelation of the Shekhina in the Mishkan, removing the "side effects" of the revelation to mortal eyes.

Throughout Tanakh, in fact, we find that prior to or concurrently with every Divine revelation there is a cover which facilitates man's encounter with God. In Sefer Yechezkel, God descends in a cloud, and before the Shekhina takes to the streets of Jerusalem in order to leave the city, the angel is commanded to spread "coals of fire" in the city - a sort of smoke screen, "Go in between the wheels, under the keruv, and fill your hands with coals of fire from between the keruvim, and scatter them on the city" (Yechezkel 10:2).

While the kiyor facilitates the priestly service, the mizbei'ach ketoret facilitates the presence of the Shekhina. But each is just a means to allow the mishkan to function as God's house, and therefore both appear at the end, after the closing verses which conclude the command concerning the construction of the Mishkan and its vessels.

Further study:

1. In the description of chanukat ha-mishkan in Bamidbar (ch. 7-8) we find the completion of the mishkan followed by sacrifices (of the princes) and only then the lighting of the menorah by Aharon together with a repetition of its structure (ch. 8). All the other vessels were mentioned without detail in a single verse (7:1). Why is the

menora, more than any other vessel, connected to the person of Aharon rather than the structure of the Mishkan?

2. On the chanukat ha-mishkan of Vayikra (ch. 8-10), there is no special mention of the menora, despite the lengthy description of Aharon's actions during these eight days. However, the ketoret here plays a special role - for Nadav and Avihu though, not for Aharon himself. It seems that bringing the ketoret is parallel here to kindling the menora in Bamidbar. Explain.

3. What is the difference between burning coals in Yechezkel (as quoted in the shiur) and burning incenses in the mishkan?

4. Read 30:6-10. What is the special significance of the prohibition to offer anything else other than the proper incense in the mizbach ha-ketoret? Why is the command to purify the mizbach ha-mentioned here, unlike the mizbach ha-nechoshet, which receives this command only in parashat Acharei?