

PARASHAT HASHAVUA

PARASHAT TEZAVEH

THE LANGUAGE OF CONSTRUCTION IN THE BIBLE –
THE APPROACH OF MEIR BEN-URI Z"l^{1 2}

By Rav Yoel Bin-Nun

Why does the Torah elaborate at such length regarding the detailed descriptions of the vessels of the *Mishkan* and then repeat all of those descriptions a second time (in *Parashiyot Vayakhel-Pekudei*)? Regarding no other *mitzva* in the Torah do we find such a lengthy account!

The Content is the Plan

In my youth, I received an amazing answer to this question from a close friend of my father, both of blessed memory. My father's friend, Meir Ben-Uri, adopted that name in part because of Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur of the tribe of Yehuda. Meir Ben-Uri (a student of the artist Hermann Struck) was himself an outstanding architect and artist who lived in Kiryat Shmuel near Haifa, where he established a museum of Jewish art.

Ben-Chur taught me that the *parashiyot* dealing with the *Mishkan*, the vessels, and the holy garments are the pattern that Moshe saw on Mount Sinai. The verses were written on the architectural plans of the vessels – along their length, breadth, and height. The number of words in the verses was determined by the pattern of the vessels themselves. This was the customary practice in the ancient world in temple inscriptions.

The ark was two and a half cubits in length, a cubit and a half in breadth, and a cubit and a half in height. The two verses that describe the vessel contain twenty-five words (words connected by a *makaf* are counted as a single word). The table was only two cubits long and only one cubit wide, and the two verses that describe the vessel until the word *saviv* contain twenty words. Each word has a scale. Meir Ben-Uri found that every word in these verses represents half a cubit, the smallest measure among the vessels.

Moshe Rabbeinu did not see a plan on the mountain separate from the content; rather, the content was the plan. The verses themselves, the very words, were written along the length, the breadth, and the height of the architectural plans of the vessels. This was the case with the vessels, the rings, the curtains, and all the details of the *Mishkan*. My father called this approach "the language of construction in the Bible," because the Torah describes the construction together with a construction plan, in the verses themselves. Meir himself called this "architecture from Mount Sinai."

When I saw all of this, I was overcome by profound

amazement and a deep understanding of the excessive length of the *parashiyot* dealing with the *Mishkan*. I never saw anything like this in any other explanation or in any other attempt to reconstruct the vessels of the *Mishkan*. Yet it is precisely this amazing approach that is almost unknown!

The great difficulty with Meir Ben-Huri's approach lies, of course, in the *menora*, which has no length or breadth. He toiled for many years until he found the code, the scale of each word, according to which he could describe the shape of the *menora* in the *Mishkan* based on the verses themselves. This and his deciphering of the plan of the breastplate were the high points of his exceptional work. According to this approach, it is clear and simple why the Torah goes on at such great length in these *parashiyot* and why the Torah repeats these *parashiyot* at the end of the book of *Shemot*, with all their details. The verses and the words are the plan "which are being shown you on the mount" (*Shemot* 25:40).

The Menora Corresponding to the *Kaporet* and the *Keruvim* –
The Holy Corresponding to the Holy of Holies

The revelation of the word of God from above the *kaporet*
and the lighting of the lamps before God in the *menora*.

From among all of the vessels of the *Mishkan*, only two were made of pure beaten gold – the *kaporet* with the *keruvim* in the Holy of Holies and the *menora* in the Holy.

In the Holy of Holies stood the ark of *shitim* wood, which was covered with gold. In it were the tablets of the testimony, and upon it were the *kaporet* and the *keruvim* of beaten gold. In the Holy stood the table with the showbread, and opposite it stood the *menora* of beaten gold.

Thus, the *kaporet* and the *menora* were the main vessels in the *Mishkan*. The *kaporet* and the *keruvim* represent the revelation of the *Shekhina*, the heavenly fire, God's word to man – and to be precise, God's words to Moshe. It was from there that commands to all of the people of Israel were issued: "And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the *kaporet*, from between the two *keruvim* which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel" (*Shemot* 25:22). Corresponding to the beaten gold in the Holy of Holies, there is beaten gold in the Holy – namely, in the *menora*. In the *menora*, Aharon lights lamps before God. Thus the *menora* represents that light that man initiates, the human light that ascends in the Holy before God. The Holy of Holies is meant not for man's service of God, but for the appearance of the word of God to man, whereas the Holy, in contrast, expresses man's service of and standing before God.

The Torah makes a profound distinction between the Holy of Holies and the Holy, and this distinction is represented by the *parochet*. In the Holy of Holies there is no human service, and the exception of Yom Kippur only testifies to the rule as a whole. In terms that are familiar to us, the Holy of Holies is Torah from God, whereas the Holy is our prayer as humans to God.

In the Second Temple, there was no ark and no resting of the *Shekhina*. The Holy of Holies was empty; only the foundation stone (*even ha-shetiya*) was found therein. At that point, the *menora* became the main vessel in the Temple – beaten gold in the Holy. Anyone who saw the Second Temple immediately understood that the *menora* was the main vessel in

¹ Based on *Shirat Ha-Torah on Parashiyot Teruma-Tetzaveh*. For the *haftara* for *Parashat Zakhor*, see my article, "Masa Agag – Chet Shaul be-Amalek, on my website.

² See on my website, in the *Mikra'ot* section, the chapters dealing with "Adrikhalut Mei-Har Sinai."

it. The pagan world was filled with statues, whereas the Jews had their *menora*. Already in the vision of Zekharya, the *menora* appears as the main vision of the illumination of the Second Temple, based on prophecy. In my commentary to the visions of Zekharya,³ I show that all the visions of Zekharya are arranged in the form a *menora*, with three visions on the one side and three visions on the other side.

A story is related in the Midrash about a Hellenized Jew named Yosi Meshita, who lived during the period that Antiochus desecrated the Temple.⁴ The enemies told him to enter the Temple and desecrate it for them, and in reward for doing so he could take out one thing to be his. He went in to the Temple and removed the *menora*. (If a Jew were told today to enter a synagogue and remove one thing, he would take a Torah scroll.) The foreigners saw the *menora* in the hands of Yosi Meshita, and they took it from him. They said to him: "It is not right for an ordinary person to use a *menora* like this; go in a second time, and whatever you take out will be yours." He refused to reenter and was taken out for execution. In the end he both desecrated the Temple and was executed. One thing can be learned from Yosi Meshita – the most important element in the Second Temple was the *menora*! When he trusted the enemies that they would let him keep one item, he took out the *menora*.

This was understood throughout the world during the Second Temple period. Proof of this is found in Titus' Arch in Rome, on which the Roman artists used horses to symbolize Rome's rule over the world; opposite them, the defeated Jews carry the *menora* as the symbol of the destruction of the Second Temple.⁵ Ever since, the *menora* has become the most prominent Jewish icon in synagogues in *Eretz Yisrael*, in Jewish homes from the days of the Mishnah and the Talmud and until today, and of course, the symbol of the State of Israel. The Roman Empire has been destroyed (along with its heirs), the horses returned to the Creator of the universe as described in Zekharya's vision (1:8-17; 6:1-8) – and the *menora* from Titus' Arch returned to Jerusalem.

The Framework of *Parashat Tetzaveh*

The continual lamp and the continual bread (*Vayikra* 24:1-9) as the overall framework.

In the transition from the *Mishkan* to the priestly garments, we find the commandment to take "pure olive oil beaten for the light" "to cause a lamp to burn continually" by "Aharon and his sons" (*Shemot* 27:20-21). The lighting of a lamp to burn continually is the first command at the beginning of the section dealing with the priesthood, even before the details concerning the priestly garments.

After the priestly garments, we find the command to consecrate the priests when they enter the priestly service, which is followed by the command to offer the daily burnt-offering. Thus, *Parashat Tetzaveh* has a framework of holy service. It opens with the lighting of the continual lamp in the *menora* and it ends with the daily burnt-offerings on the altar.

This framework, however, appears to be deficient, for in the Holy there was the table and the *menora*, and the service with them was twofold – the showbread as continual bread and the lighting of the continual lamp. In the courtyard stood the altar, on which were brought the daily offerings, and there was also the incense altar on which was burnt the continual incense. The

incense altar also appears as part of the framework at the end of the *parasha* (30:1-10). However, the preparation of the showbread is missing from this *parasha*. Indeed, it does not appear in any of the *parashiyot of Shemot*, even though its natural place is together with the lighting of the continual lamp.

It is easy to see this when we read the parallel passage at the end of the book of *Vayikra* (24:1-9), following the sections dealing with Shabbat and the Festivals. There, the Torah returns to the command to light a continual lamp and juxtaposes it to the command: "And you shall take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes thereof," together with the command to set the bread "in order every Sabbath day before the Lord continually."

Moreover, it is clear that the command regarding the continual bread was given to Moshe along with the command regarding the continual lamp, for in *Parashat Pekudei*, at the end of the book of *Shemot*, when the *Mishkan* was being erected, it is explicitly stated that Moshe set the bread "as the Lord commanded Moshe" (40:23).

It seems that the Torah left the section dealing with the continual bread to the end of the sections dealing with Shabbat and the Festivals in the book of *Vayikra* in order to create thereby a larger framework. This structure includes most of the book of *Vayikra* in the framework of the service in the *Mishkan*, which begins with the priestly service in *Parashat Tetzaveh*. The framework of *Parashat Tetzaveh*, from the lighting of the continual lamp to the daily offering to the continual incense, is completed with the return to the lighting of the continual lamp together with the continual bread at the end of *Vayikra*.

Parashat Teruma is the story of the Ark, the vessels, and the *Mishkan*. *Parashat Tetzaveh* is the story of the service, the story of the priests, to which are connected most of the *parashiyot* in *Vayikra*.

The Selection of Aharon and His sons

The attempt to remove competition and politics from the priesthood

The appointment of Aharon and his sons to serve as priests in the *Mishkan* entails choosing a small group of priests from birth, in an effort to reduce the competition, politics, fights over prestige, and the tensions, and intrigues of a ruling elite – at least while standing before God. Having to choose the best from among the firstborn sounds like a wonderful idea, but in the encounter with real life people and their egos, it could be terrible.

When the priesthood will become transformed from a small family into a whole tribe, we will encounter the far-reaching commandments that exclude the tribe of Levi as a whole from receiving a portion in *Eretz Yisrael* (*Bamidbar* 3:18), with the clear aim of reducing the economic and political power of the priesthood. This allows for a clean priesthood of God's servants, who bear "the judgement of the children of Israel" (*Shemot* 28:30) upon their hearts continually.

This is an ideal that is exceedingly difficult to achieve, almost like the prophecy of Moshe. The failures that will come in the sin of the golden calf and in the deaths of Nadav and Avihu attest to this. Therefore, the Torah establishes that the inheritance of the children of Levi is exclusively the service of God.⁶

This was contrary to the law governing the priests in Egypt (*Bereishit* 47:22) and contrary to all the interests of priests

³ See "Yom Yissud Heikhal Hashem," on my website.

⁴ *Bereishit Rabba* 65:18.

⁵ See the picture of Titus' Arch, with the story told by R. Mordechai Breuer, on my website.

⁶ See Rambam, end of *Hilkhot Shemita Ve-Yovel*.

of all kinds, in all religions, in all of history. Even our priests of the Second Temple period amassed great estates and entered deeply into politics – the Hellenistic priests vs. the Hasmonean house. This was a major reason for the failure of the Second Temple. (Without drawing a comparison, both the Christian Church and the Islamic Waqf have extensive assets, are immersed in politics, and are plagued by intrigues.)

Something of this idea of reducing competition is evident in the welcome halakhic ruling that at public Torah readings, a Kohen always receives the first *aliya*. First a Kohen, then a Levi, and only afterwards an ordinary Jew – even if he is a great rabbi, a particularly righteous man, or some other distinguished personage. This ruling greatly reduced the competition to read first from the Torah and the fights over prestige sometimes fought even between Torah scholars. This is borne out by the ancient disputes in places where the Gaon or the leading Torah authority would read first.⁷ The controversies that still erupt in synagogues over the third and sixth *aliyot*, to the point that in many places synagogues and communities split in the wake of this issue, attest to the critical importance of the ruling that a Kohen reads first, even if he is counted among the younger members of the community, among the less educated, or among those with less-dignified professions. He also recites the priestly blessing, even if those receiving his blessing are ten times his superiors in Torah, in wisdom, in character, in piety, and in every other way. They receive his blessing, and are called up for the third and sixth *aliyot*, while the Kohen is always called up first.

The Efod and the Breastplate Parallel the Ark of Testimony with the Kaporet and the Keruvim

With regard to the priestly garments as with the holy vessels, the Torah begins with the most important, the most hallowed, the innermost garment. It is the way of the world first to erect the walls of a structure, then to cover them with curtains or a roof, and finally to make vessels and put them inside the structure. The Torah, however, begins with the Ark, goes out to the table and the *menora*, moves on to the curtains of the *Mishkan* as if they can float in the air, then the tent over the curtains, and only afterwards does it come to the boards that support the tent and allow it to cover the entire structure. Only at the end do we hear about the altar and the courtyard and the outer entrance.

The same is true regarding the priestly garments: "A breastplate, and an *efod*, and a robe, and a tunic of checker work, a miter, and a girdle" (*Shemot* 28:4). The verse begins with the most important and most sanctified garments, which are donned last, and ends with the plainest garments, which are donned first. Nobody puts on an *efod* first. The *efod* is the most important and most sanctified garment, and it parallels, together with the breastplate in it, the ark, the *kaporet* and the *keruvim*, in the Holy of Holies.

The Efod and the Breastplate, Like Aharon, are Connected to the Tribes of Israel and to their Leadership

The High Priest represents the people of Israel, according to its tribes, and on his two magnificent garments (his suit) are inscribed the name of the children of Israel "for a memorial before the Lord continually" (*Shemot* 28:29) – on the shoulder-pieces of the *efod*, six names on one onyx stone and six names on the other, and a second time in the breastplate over his heart, where there were twelve stones for the names of the children of Israel, in four rows.

We find a parallel to this idea at the revelation at Mount Sinai at the end of *Parashat Mishpatim*, when Moshe erects "twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel" (*Shemot* 24:4), and he builds an altar for the covenant. Similarly, in the Ten Commandments we find twelve prohibitions, arranged six against six.⁸

We also find that the showbread is arranged on the table in two sets, twelve loaves, six against six. And once again we find in the covenant of Arvat Moav twelve curses (in *Devarim* 17) – with six tribes on Mount Gerizim for the blessings, and six tribes opposite them on Mount Eival for the curses.

We are familiar with this sophisticated arrangement based on the number 12 from the annual calendar – the six months following Nisan and the six months following Tishrei represent reality in time, from all sides.

Just as the Torah began with and expanded upon the description of the Ark, the *kaporet* and the *keruvim*, but made only brief mention of the tablets of testimony that were placed in the Ark, so the Torah expands upon the crafting of the *efod* and the crafting of the breastplate, down to the details of the pairs of gold rings, whose function was to firmly connect the *efod* to the breastplate, "so that the breastplate be not loosed from the *efod*" (*Shemot* 28:28), just as the staves may not be removed from the rings of the Ark (*Shemot* 25:15). But the Torah makes only brief mention, to the point of mere allusion, to the content to be given to the breastplate of judgment: "And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Tumim..." The Torah offers no explanation of the Urim and the Tumim, other than that they are "the judgment of Israel" on the heart of Aharon, "before the Lord continually" (*Shemot* 28:30).

Chazal (*Yoma* 73b) tell us that the letters of the names of the tribes would light up (*urim*) and create whole (*tumim*) words, but the reading of these illuminated letters, which together form words and short sentences, is possible only for Aharon the priest, who is illuminated by the holy spirit. We see, then, that corresponding to the prophecy of Moshe by way of the word of God "from above the *kaporet*, from between the two *keruvim* which are upon the ark of the testimony" (*Shemot* 25:22), by way of which the Torah was given from the Tent of Meeting and illuminated the letters and explanations of the Torah – corresponding to this, the holy spirit's illumination of Aharon allowed him to understand "the judgment of the children of Israel" by way of the Urim and the Tumim.

Indeed, we find that the leaders of Israel made inquiries by way of the Urim and Tumim. We see this already with Yehoshua, about whom it is stated: "And he shall stand before Elazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord" (*Bamidbar* 27:21), and we find it again with Shaul and David. The prophecy of Moshe was needed for the giving of the Torah from God; the illumination of the holy spirit through Aharon with "the judgment of the children of Israel," by way of the Urim and the Tumim, was needed to pose questions concerning leadership before God.

All that we have left is the Torah received through the prophecy of Moshe. We do not have the Urim and the Tumim; we stopped hearing about them already in the days of the First Temple, and they were certainly no longer found in the days of the Second Temple or later. However, just as Moshe's prophecy works for all generations and illuminates the Torah in the hearts of those who truly study it, so too "the judgment of the children of

⁷ See *Tur* and *Shulchan Arukh*, *Orach Chayyim* 135:4-5, and *Mishna Berura*, nos. 9-11.

⁸ See *Mikra'ot Le-Parashat Yitro* (2017), pp. 202-217.

Israel" with the illumination of the holy spirit on those who are fit for it in every generation leaves its mark on the leadership of the people of Israel across the generations, even if we are not aware of it and we do not understand exactly how this works. The illumination of the holy spirit of Aharon the priest comes through the people of Israel, through the illumination of the name of the tribes of Israel, and its goal is "the judgment of the children of Israel" before God.

According to this comparison of the breastplate and the efod to the Ark of the Covenant, we come to an interesting conclusion: Regarding both of them it is stated that some inner content should be placed within them. In the case of the Ark, this is "the testimony which I shall give you" (*Shemot* 25:16, 21), and in the case of the breastplate, it is the Urim and the Tumim of "the judgment of the children of Israel."

In all likelihood, there was a special ark for the Urim and Tumim. The breastplate and the efod with the Urim and the Tumim were not left lying around, nor were they hung on a hanger. They had an ark, the ark that went out to war with the children of Israel. In my opinion, this is the plain meaning of many verses in the books of the Prophets. For example, in Shaul's battle with the Pelishtim at Michmash, when Yonatan and his armor-bearer disappeared and climbed up the rocky crag to storm and attack the Pelishti garrison and Shaul's watchmen in Giv'at Binyamin saw the trembling in the Pelishti camp, it is stated: "Then said Shaul to the people that were with him, 'Number now, and see who is gone from us.' And when they had numbered, behold, Yonatan and his armor-bearer were not there. And Shaul said to Achiya, 'Bring here the ark of God.' For the ark of God was there at that time with the children of Israel. And it came to pass, while Shaul talked to the priest, that the tumult that was in the camp of the Philistines went on and increased; and Shaul said to the priest, 'Withdraw your hand'" (I *Shemuel* 14:17-19). It is understandable that in a time of war there was a heightened need to inquire about the leadership of Israel by way of the Urim and the Tumim, and so the priest was there, in order to wear the efod and thus allow for inquiries to be made.

Similarly, it is written in connection with the war over the body of the concubine of Giv'a: "And the children of Israel asked of the Lord, for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days..." (*Shofetim* 20:27-28). This also becomes clear from what is written about David, who inquired of God by way of the efod brought to him by Evyatar (who fled from the slaughter in Nov the city of priests; I *Shemuel* 23:1-7); at the beginning of the reign of Shelomo, Shelomo tells Evyatar (I *Melakhim* 2:26): "Because you bore the ark of the Lord God before David my father..."

The *Tzitz* and *Tzitzit*, both with a thread of blue

The *tzitz* is connected to each and every member of Israel by way of the *tzitzit*. For the *tzitz* and *tzitzit* parallel each other with regard to their names – the *tzitz* is a flower, whereas *tzitzit* is a flowering. The word *tzitzit* is written in the Torah with only the first *yod* – *tzadi*, *yod*, *tzadi*, *taf* (*Bamidbar* 15:38-39) – so that the word *tzitz* is found in it. Both are connected to a thread of blue on the white: "And you shall put on it a thread of blue, and it shall be upon the miter" (*Shemot* 28:37), and so too regarding the *tzitzit*: "And that they put with the fringe of each corner a thread of blue" (*Bamidbar* 15:38). This thread of blue, as we are taught by *Chazal*, alludes to heaven and to God's Throne of Glory, to the supernal unity, for heaven appears to all as blue, "and the like of the very heaven for clearness" (*Shemot* 24:10). This is a uniform light with no distinctions or hues, no imperfections or shadows, no forces or divisions, but rather full and perfect unity. Therefore, the thread of blue reminds and warns every member of Israel about his role as part of the kingdom of priests, and the *tzitz* on the head

of the High Priest, tied with a thread of blue, atones for "the iniquity committed in the holy things" of the children of Israel "in all their holy gifts" (*Shemot* 28:38).

This parallel between the *tzitz* and *tzitzit* completes the connection between the High Priest and each and every member of Israel, who constitute a kingdom of priests.

The Daily Offering and the Resting of the *Shekhina* – The Closing of *Tetzaveh* and the Closing of *Teruma*

The service of the daily burnt-offering completes the framework of *Parashat Tetzaveh* (as stated above) – the continual lamp at the beginning and the daily burnt-offering at the end. A continual lamp is lit inside the Holy; the daily burnt-offering is offered on the outer altar. Immediately afterwards the Torah closes the beginning of *Parashat Teruma* and connects the two *parashiyot* dealing with the *Mishkan*. The section dealing with the vessels and the Tent, and the section dealing with the priests and their service, and the structure of the *Mishkan* are found in *Parashat Teruma*; the service of the priests, the priestly garments, and the consecration of the priests are found in *Parashat Tetzaveh*.

As always, the end is like the beginning: "And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and [the Tent] shall be sanctified with My glory" and "at the door of the tent of meeting, where I will meet with you, to speak there with you" (*Shemot* 29:42-43). This is the definition of the Tent of Meeting, and it completely parallels what was stated at the beginning of *Parashat Teruma*, regarding the Ark with the *kaporet* and the *keruvim*: "And in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the *kaporet*, from between the two *keruvim* which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel" (*Shemot* 25:21-22).

At the beginning of *Parashat Teruma*: "And let them make Me a sanctuary, **that I may dwell among them**" (*Shemot* 25:8); and at the end of *Parashat Tetzaveh*: "**And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Lord their God**" (*Shemot* 29:45-46).

This, then, is the explicit closing to the beginning of *Parashat Teruma*, after the closing to the beginning of *Parashat Tetzaveh*: *Parashat Tetzaveh* – the continual lamp corresponding to the daily offering; and the two *parashiyot* together – "that I may dwell among them" - "And I will dwell among the children of Israel... that I may dwell among them."

This is the only place where the goal of the exodus from Egypt is defined as the resting of the *Shekhina* in Israel.

If we read the *parashiyot* in the book of *Shemot* in the order in which they are written, the way that the Ramban read them,⁹ the goal of the forty days and forty nights at Mount Sinai is the goal of the exodus from Egypt, resting the *Shekhina* upon Israel – "I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them." And if we ask: Surely the goal of the exodus from Egypt (as it was formulated at the time of the burning of the bush; *Shemot* 3:8) was to bring the people of Israel to the land of their forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov – the answer is that the mobile *Mishkan*, which could be disassembled and reassembled, is the manner by way of which the *Shekhina* could rest upon Israel in all of their journeys

⁹ See *Mikra'ot Le-Parashat Mishpatim* (2018), pp. 558-262, 566-570.

until they reached the Promised Land, where the resting of the *Shekhina* upon Israel (from Mount Sinai and the *Mishkan*) could become connected to the land of the forefathers.

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