

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS PEKUDEI

The Tabernacle and the Creation of the World

These are the accountings of the Tabernacle—the Tabernacle of the Testimony (Ex. 38:21). Take a look at the Midrash *Tanchuma* (Pekudei 2) which says something quite fascinating: Rabbi Yaakov bar Isi asks why does it say, “O Hashem, I love the dwelling of Your House and the place where Your glory rests”, to teach us that the Tabernacle and Temple correspond to the Creation of the World. How so? On the first day of creation, it says, “In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth” (Gen. 1:1). How did He create the Heavens? Elsewhere it says, “He draped over the Heavens like a curtain” (Ps. 104:2), and regarding the Tabernacle it says to make curtains. On the second day of creation, He created a separation between the waters, and in the Tabernacle there was a *paroches* which also created a partition between the Holy and the Holy of Holies. On the third day, He gathered up the waters, and in the Tabernacle there was a *keiyor* which was a vessel to contain water. On the fourth day of creation, He created the great luminaries—the sun and the moon—and in the Tabernacle there was also light emanating from the Golden Menorah. On the fifth day, He created the insects and birds—winged creatures, and in the Tabernacle as well there was an image of cherubim (winged bird-like angels) on the *keppores*. On the sixth day, He created man in His image to serve before him, and in the Tabernacle, the Kohen Gadol, serves before Him. On the seventh day, He completed the Creation of the World and then He gave a special blessing, and in the Tabernacle too when all the work was done, Moshe Rabbenu gave the nation a special blessing. When Hashem finished creating the world, He sanctified it, and when the Tabernacle was finished being built, it too was consecrated. This amazing Midrash concludes by noting that the Tabernacle corresponds to Creation of the World because in the same way that the Heavens and Earth serve as witnesses to the Jews’ keeping the commandments (see *Avodah Zarah* 2b), so does the Tabernacle attest to the very same idea—as it says, the “Tabernacle of Testimony”. Indeed, the Gemara (*Brachos* 55a) says that Betzalel—master of the construction of the Tabernacle—knew how to combine the letters with which the Heavens and Earth were created, as it says, “And a Godly spirit filled him [Betzalel] with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, the same three words used to describe Hashem creating the world. Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner writes in *Nefesh HaChaim* (1:4) that the Tabernacle and Temples subsumed all the possible powers in Creation and all Systems of Holiness. Each edifice, room, and vessel of the Tabernacle and Temples reflected the various Holy Worlds and Systems of Holiness of Hashem’s Chariot. All of this knowledge was divinely imparted to Betzalel as he toiled in building the Tabernacle. He explains that this is what the Midrash means when it says that the Tabernacle corresponds to the Creation of the World; the Tabernacle served as a microcosm for the entirety of creation. Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner takes this a step further and explains that every Jewish person is also a miniature Tabernacle, which is a miniature World. Every person has within himself the all the potential powers in

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS PEKUDEI

creation brought together in one entity. Rabbi Moshe Isserles (in *Toras HaOlah* 1:5) explains that in light of all this, it makes a lot of sense that the forbidden labors on Shabbos mirror the 39 labors used in preparing the Tabernacle and its paraphernalia. The underlying idea of Shabbos is to mimic Hashem's way of creating for six days and resting on the seventh day. The closest thing we have in the world to the type of creation which Hashem did for those six days is the construction of the Tabernacle. Therefore, the construction of the Tabernacle serves as the paradigm from which we draw a precedent to know which labors are forbidden on Shabbos. See also *Shelah* (*Torah Ohr, Vayakbel-Pekudei* 2–3).

Following Instructions

As Hashem commanded Moshe... (Ex. 39:7). The *Baal HaTurim* points out that the phrase “as Hashem commanded Moshe” appears 18 times in Parshas Pekudei, and corresponds to the 18 blessings of the original *Shemonah Esrai*. The nineteenth time it says “As Hashem commanded” but omits the word “Moshe” in allusion to the nineteenth blessing of the *Shemonah Esrai* which calls for Divine punishment upon heretics and was instituted later. While the *Baal HaTurim* does not explain the connection, it seems to me that the connection is that heretics only believed in the Written Torah as it is, they denied the Oral Torah which was verbally transmitted to us through Moshe Rabbenu. Accordingly, the nineteenth time it says “As Hashem commanded” it leaves out the word “Moshe” to hint to these heretics who did not believe in “Moshe” but only believed in what they acknowledged came from Hashem. The Midrash Tanchuma (*Vayera*) says that the rabbis originally instituted 18 blessings in the *Shemonah Esrai* to correspond to the 18 times that it says “as Hashem commanded Moshe” in Parshas Pekudai. The connection between the idea of prayer and preparing the Tabernacle is obvious: Both are elements of serving/worshipping Hashem, and in the absence of animal sacrifices, the Rabbis instituted prayer.

The Midrash then says that alternatively the 18 blessings in the *Shemonah Esrai* correspond to the eighteenth places in the Torah where all three forefathers are listed together. The Midrash then notes that a nineteenth time, there is a list in which Avraham and Yitzchak are mentioned, but Yaakov is not. According to this Midrash, it seems there is no precedent for the 19th blessing which was later added to *Shemonah Esrai*. Perhaps the Midrash follows the opinion of the Yerushalmi that even nowadays there are only 18 blessings in the *Shemonah Esrai*, because *Es Tzemah David* and *V'L'Yershalayim* are considered one blessing. Einaim Limishpat writes that the nineteenth place in which Yaakov's name is not listed alludes to the nineteenth blessing in *Shemonah Esrai*. While Avraham and Yitzchak were forefathers of the Jewish People, they also fathered other nations which were excluded from the Jewish People. Yaakov, on the other hand, did not father any children who were not part of the Jewish People; all twelve of his sons became progenitors of Jewish Tribes. None of them are to be excluded from the

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS PEKUDEI

Jewish People. When we talk about a heretic, the idea behind a heretic is that he once associated with the Jewish People, but then took himself out from being included in the Jewish People by following heresy. The list of forefathers which omits Yaakov is a list which hints to a heretic because just as Avraham and Yitzchak had sons who are excluded from the Jewish People, so does the heretic exclude himself from the Jewish People. If Yaakov Avinu was in the list, there would be no room for such exclusion.

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:8) says that the eighteen commands which Moshe Rabbeinu followed mirror the 18 vertebrae in the spine, the 18 blessings in *Shemonah Esrai*, the 18 times that Hashem's name appears in *Kriyas Shema*, and the 18 times that His name appears in Ps. 25 (see also *Brachos* 28b).

92 Verses

At that end of every Parashah, most *chumashim* print a short note which says how many verses appear in that Parashah and offers mnemonic to that number by using a word or phrase from the Bible. However, when it comes to Parshas Pekudai, all it says is that there are 92 verses, but does not offer a scriptural mnemonic to that number. Why is this so? Perhaps we can explain this based on an idea from the *Shem mi-Shmuel* (Year 1913): The Parashah opens with the phrase *These are the accountings of the Tabernacle—the Tabernacle of the Testimony* (Ex. 38:21). In this verse, two instances of the word “Tabernacle” (*Mishkan*) are juxtaposed to each other. Rashi explains that this alludes to the two future Holy Temples which were taken a collateral (*mashkon*) paying back the sins of the Jewish People. The *Shem mi-Shmuel* asks why this idea had to be alluded to specifically in the beginning of Parashat Pekudai, and not anywhere else in the *parshiyos* which deal with the construction of the Tabernacle? He explains that the Talmud (*Taanis* 8b) teaches that blessing can only rest upon something which is hidden from the eye, but one something is no longer hidden from the eye, then blessing eludes it. Accordingly, in order for Hashem to be able to destroy the Tabernacle/Temples, His blessing would have to have been removed from it—and the way to do that is by counting it and bringing it into the realm of the finite. Accordingly, the “accounting” of the Tabernacle served as the prerequisite from bringing about the future destruction of the Temples as retribution for the Jews' sins. Based on this, we can explain that there is ample reason for leaving the amount of verse in Pekudai as a number, instead of using a scriptural mnemonic. By keeping the amount of verses as a number, we are stresses that the Tabernacle/Temples is finite and can be expressed as a number, such that it loses the divine blessing afforded to things in the abstract, and its destruction can then be used as a means of punished the Jewish People for their sins (instead of punishing the Jews themselves directly). The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Schneersohn (*Iggros Kodesh*, vol. 2, page 227) creatively suggested that perhaps it is simply a mistake, and there really should be a scriptural mnemonic hinting to the 92 verses in Parshas

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PARSHAS PEKUDEI

Pekudai. He suggests consulting with older prints of the *Chumash* to check if perhaps they originally read “‘There is none’ as a *siman*”. The phrase “there is none” (בלי כל = 92) equals the amount of verses in Parshas Pekudai, but an overly naïve typesetter may have seen the phrase and taken it to literally mean that there is no scriptural mnemonic for Parashas Pekudai, according for its omission in later *chumashim*. Interestingly, in the Malbim’s Chumash, the note at the end of Parashas Pekudei reads: “‘I will go out’ as a *siman*”, as the word “I will go out” (אצא = 92) also equals the amount of verses in Parashas Pekudai.