

Dvar torah for Pekudei- Judy Shapiro

Shabbat shalom!

Every week we read a haftarah that our sages have designated to accompany that week's torah portion. I always enjoy seeing how the two readings relate to each other. Both the Hertz and the Stone chumash helpfully give a line or two at the beginning of each haftarah, to let us know how it complements the torah portion. For instance, this week the Stone chumash notes, "the completion of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness was paralleled by the completion of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, which is the subject of the haftarah." So I thought I would "compare and contrast" the two narratives that we read today, both of which pertain to the completion of the building of our national shrines: first the mishkan in the wilderness, which was as fancy as we could manage under the circumstances, and then the Temple in Jerusalem, much more elaborate than the mishkan, and much more permanent in nature. Actually, although we think of the mishkan or tabernacle as portable, and therefore temporary, the 15th century commentator Sforno points out that the Tabernacle, actually was **more** holy than the Temple, because it was built totally by righteous people such as Bezalel and Itamar; it was constructed at the bidding of Moshe himself; and it housed the tablets of the ten commandments, which symbolize God's communion with Israel. In contrast, the Temples, both first and second versions, were built largely by non-Jewish paid labor and in the case of the second Temple, at the instigation of a foreign king. Sforno notes that the Temples both became worn with time, needing repairs, and were vulnerable to capture by enemies of Israel, and ultimately, destruction. In contrast, the Tabernacle, as we know from the Indiana Jones movie, was never captured or destroyed. It was "impervious to time and enemies".

What themes run through both the torah portion and the haftarah, regarding the building and dedication of our nation's most holy places? In the torah's description of the completion of the mishkan, we get a full accounting of all the precious metals that people had donated to the building campaign. We are all

familiar with the story, that the people were so “wise-hearted” and so generous, so anxious to contribute to this national project, that there was a surplus and Moshe actually had to put a limit on the giving. We are treated to an accountant’s version of the inventory: exactly how much of each metal and cloth had been used when the mishkan was finished. Several commentators have noted how transparency and accountability were the motivation for this accounting. It seems odd that this was necessary: certainly, if anyone should be above reproach, it should be Moshe as a leader, you could say, the Chair of the Building Committee, since he had the ear of God Himself. But even so, Moshe knows that people will resent him if they suspect he has personally benefited from all those gifts, especially since there was extra floating around, so he accounts for every shekel, to attempt to remain above suspicion or rumor. As we will see with Korach later on, Moshe’s high standing does not protect him from petty suspicion and resentment. It is as if he can predict where human nature will lead his people, so he takes every precaution to avoid even the appearance of personal gain from the mishkan’s treasury.

Not only does Moshe predict that in the future, human nature will create jealousy, but he has already experienced it: in the aftermath of the Golden Calf episode, we are told, “Whenever Moshe would go out to the Tent, the entire people would stand up and remain standing,and they would gaze after Moshe”. Midrash Tanhuma interprets this by saying, they were looking after Moshe with “big eyes”, to malign him behind his back, noting how strong and noble he looked. One would say to the other, “of course he looks like that: he is in charge of the tabernacle, with all those talents of silver and gold. Of course he is rich!”. Moshe heard the rumblings, and so he vowed to account for every bit of gold and silver, to prove to the people that he hadn’t profited himself.

OK, so that’s how Moshe dealt with the normal risks that would face anyone in charge of so much public treasure. What about King Solomon? First of all, he brings his father King David’s materials to the Temple, once it is ready to be

dedicated, but he doesn't use them. He stores all this unused precious material in the Temple treasury rooms. Why? Rashi says it's because Solomon feels David should have spent more money to feed the people during a three-year famine that had occurred during David's reign, instead of skimping on the national food budget to save up more for the Temple. Abarbanel differs, explaining that Solomon realized that God's decision to forbid David from building the Temple must be absolute and total. David had stockpiled materials and money ahead of time, with which he hoped to make some contribution to the building of the Temple, but God had decreed that David should have nothing to do with it. Imagine David's disappointment, to be forbidden from sharing in the glory that was to be the Temple. God had commanded that only Solomon's efforts and resources were to go into the building of the Temple, so Solomon gathered up all of David's silver and gold vessels and stored them away before the dedication ceremony began.

The haftarah continues: The Kohanim then take the entire mishkan or tabernacle, which has been guarded and kept all these hundreds of years, in smaller towns like Gilgal, Shiloh and Gibeon, and they bring the ancient mishkan up to the newly built Temple in Jerusalem. The mishkan still contains the tablets of the 10 commandments, along with the other holy vessels that were placed in the mishkan in the desert. The Kohanim place the entire mishkan in the very center of the Holy of Holies, to be the centerpiece of the Temple itself. And then a very suspenseful moment comes. Solomon has built this tremendous Temple. It houses the most holy of our people's things, the tablets where God himself wrote down what He wants us to do, how God wants us to behave as His people. We make a big deal today about our sifrei torah, but think how we would feel about our aron kodesh if it contained the actual tablets that Moshe had carried down from Mt. Sinai!

When Moshe dedicated the mishkan in the desert to God, the cloud of glory engulfed it and the people could all see that God approved of their endeavors. Similarly, for Solomon, this is the decisive moment: will God accept his Temple?

Will God approve of all his efforts to create a dwelling place for Him? Let's compare the reaction of God to each of these building efforts: In the parsha, when Moshe finishes installing all the vessels into the newly-completed mishkan, the torah relates: (Ex. 40: 34-35): (read the Hebrew) "The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and the glory of Hashem filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting for the cloud rested on it, and the glory of Hashem filled the Tabernacle". Now for Solomon as he dedicates the newly-completed Temple, we see very similar wording from the book of Kings (8:10-11): (read the Hebrew) "And as the Kohanim left the sanctuary, the cloud filled the Temple of Hashem. The Kohanim could not stand and minister because of the cloud, for the glory of Hashem filled the Temple of Hashem". Interestingly, Moshe lets the glorious-cloud-filled mishkan speak for itself: the book of Exodus ends abruptly at this point; no more need be said. In contrast, Solomon feels he needs to address the nation, even though the Temple is filled with this same dramatic and Holy cloud. It is as if he isn't quite sure God is pleased with his work. Solomon speaks to the people, blesses God, and in an eloquent and very long speech, he pleads with God to accept all the service that will be offered in this Temple, to preserve the royal Davidic dynasty (which is a sort of self-serving request), to bring peace to the land, and to protect Israel from its enemies. Solomon gives a poetic list of "if we sin against you by such and such, and we pray and supplicate to you **in this Temple**, may You hear from heaven and forgive our sins". Essentially, Solomon is bargaining with God, to give us all a break for whatever sins we may do in the future, because we will come **to this temple** to atone, and **this temple** is God's house. We could sit at home in Shiloh or Gibeon and do teshuva, but here in **this Temple**, God has to listen and have mercy on us, because this is the house that Solomon built for God, according to God's instructions. Solomon seems less certain of God's approval of this House than Moshe was of the mishkan: it seems that the more elaborate the structure, the more distant it is from God, and the more interpretation is needed to convince everyone, including God, that this is what was intended. Even the cloud of glory, filling the Temple as it filled the mishkan, doesn't provide Solomon with total security of God's favor.

So it's no wonder that the place has such fundamental importance to our history as a nation. Our prayers were supposed to be heard more clearly and with more compelling reason in that house than in any other place. Small wonder that the destruction 360 years later, and then the rebuilding and the destruction again, was such a huge crisis for us as a people. I would say that, in our national psyche, the temple and its destruction is as big as the exodus from Egypt, something we are constantly invoking in our davening. We never forget the destruction of the Temples, the resulting exiles, and the national spiritual upheaval that resulted.

The dedication of the mishkan that is described in today's parsha, with all the pomp and circumstance as every item is inaugurated and sanctified according to God's exact words, filled with its cloud of glory, protects the Jewish people for the next 39 years of their journey through the wilderness. And then hundreds of years later this same mishkan, already an antique, is placed into the very center of the new Temple that is dedicated by King Solomon, and it is maintained throughout the first temple period in this place of honor. After the first temple is destroyed, we lose track of the mishkan: it's not mentioned again in our rabbinic literature. But from its humble origins in the wilderness, to its place of honor in the first temple, the mishkan provides a common thread between these two narratives: The literal place, preserved from one era until the next, the exact same object, provides the central focus of our peoplehood and our success as a holy community, a Kehillah Kedosha.

I will leave any analogies to our Darchei Noam building process to your own imaginations!

Shabbat shalom.