



Vayakhel-Pekudei

The Ultimate Key to a Fulfilling Jewish Way of Life

At the outset, when you look at the book of Shemot, it seems to be a bit of a mishmash. It's split into three different parts. The first tells us about the oppression of the Jews and our Exodus from Egypt. The second part tells us of what Hashem revealed to us at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Torah.

And then the last part of the book, which concludes with the parshiyot of Vayakhel and Pekudei, are all about the Mishkan - the sanctuary in the wilderness, the home for Hashem that we built. So in what way are these three parts connected?

First, we're told about the tragic oppression of our people, which led to our freedom. Hashem's message to us here is that חֵפֶז, which is physical freedom, is not sufficient. We need to translate that into חֲרוּת, which is freedom with responsibility. That is why our exodus is followed by Hashem giving us the Torah at Mount Sinai - allowing us to engage in responsible living.

But then, as well, leading your life through the technical performance of the mitzvot, that too is insufficient. We need to go one step further. And that's what the Mishkan is about. The details of the Mishkan are not merely to build a home for Hashem, but far beyond that. As Hashem himself put it:

“וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם”
“Make for me a sanctuary, that I will dwell in them”

Not in *it*, in *them*.

The whole purpose of Hashem's home is so that we can internalise his presence into our very own hearts. Rabbi Eliezer Askari, a great 16th century scholar, wrote the poem יָדִיד נִפְּשׁ - a song well known to us. We sing it every Friday evening and on other occasions. He wrote another wonderful poem called בְּלִבֵּי, and in it he wrote these words:

“בְּלִבֵּי מִשְׁכְּנוֹ אֶבְנֶה לְהִדָּר כְּבוֹדוֹ”
“In my heart, I will build a sanctuary for the glory of Hashem's honor.”

In this way we take the presence of Hashem with ourselves always. That must be the true Mishkan, the real sanctuary in our lives.

So from the Book of Shemot, we learn a highly relevant lesson for our lives. First of all, Hashem gives us freedom not just to have a relaxed existence, but to utilise the opportunities of freedom for responsible living.

Having the Torah simply to carry out the mitzvot in a technical way is insufficient. We need to have רוּחַ. We need to have spirituality. We need to feel the very presence of Hashem in our lives always, and to carry that Mishkan within our hearts at all times. In this way, we are given this extraordinary gift to live an exceptionally uplifting existence.

Shabbat Shalom.