

Parashat Vayakel, 5784, 2024:

*Shabbat First!*

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו כל בני ישראל, בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

Our *parasha* begins with *Moshe Rabbeinu* gathering the entire Jewish people before him: “Moshe called the whole community of the children of Israel to assemble, and he said to them: ‘These are the things that Hashem commanded to make.’” (*Sefer Shemot* 35:1, all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach* with my emendations) At this point, we would expect some sort of listing of “the things that Hashem commanded to make,” instead, we are met with two verses that discuss several aspects of Shabbat:

Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have sanctity, a day of complete rest to Hashem; whoever performs work thereon [on this day] shall be put to death. You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwelling places on the Shabbat day. (35:2-3)

These *pasukim* are followed by 32 verses that discuss the acquisition of the necessary materials to construct the Mishkan and its vessels, and the people’s largesse in providing these needs. Why did Moshe discuss Shabbat in the midst of focusing on “the things that Hashem commanded to make?” In his *Commentary on the Torah* on our verse, Rashi (1040-1105), based on the *Mechilta*, suggests the following well-known answer: Six days: “He [Moshe] prefaced [the discussion of the details of] the work of the Mishkan with the warning to keep Shabbat, denoting that it [that is, the work of the Mishkan] does not supersede Shabbat.” In short, Shabbat’s mention prior to the Mishkan depicts its singular import and its precedence over the construction of the Mishkan.

This order is reversed in Parashat Ki Tisa, where 11 Mishkan focused *pasukim* (31:1-11) are stated before Shabbat, and only afterwards do we find:

Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: “And you, speak to the children of Israel and say: ‘Only (*ach*) keep My Shabbatot! For it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I, Hashem, make you holy. Therefore, keep Shabbat, for it is a sacred thing for you. Those who desecrate it shall be put to death, for whoever performs work on it, that soul will be cut off from the midst of its people. Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day is a Shabbat of complete rest, holy to Hashem; whoever performs work on the Shabbat day shall be put to death.’” (31:12-14)

Our exegetical challenge is now quite clear: Why is the Mishkan mentioned before Shabbat in Parashat Ki Tisa while the opposite order obtains in Parashat Vayakel? In his Torah commentary, *Keli Yakar*, Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz *zatzal* (1550 –1619) strengthens this question:

It is [almost] always the case in every instance where one *mitzvah* precedes another *mitzvah* that the first one is of the essence and sets aside the second one. So, too, do we find in the verse: “You shall observe My Shabbatot and revere My Mikdash. I am Hashem,” (*Sefer Vayikra* 19:30) wherein Shabbat is given precedence over the Mikdash.” (*Sefer Shemot* 35:2, this, and the following translations, with my emendations, my own)

Based on this idea, Parashat Ki Tisa appears to be an outlier. Rav Luntschitz begins his analysis by noting that Parashat Ki Tisa and Parashat Vayakel have two different speakers. The first features Hashem’s words to Moshe, whereas the second contains Moshe’s address to the Jewish people. Rav Luntschitz suggests that this difference helps us understand why the Mishkan is mentioned first in Ki Tisa and Shabbat is first in Vayakel. In his view, the entire purpose of the Mishkan was to give voice to the new-found glory of the Jewish people after “the Holy One blessed be He forgave the people for the sin of the *Egel HaZahav* and allowed His *Schechinah* to rest upon them once again.” This was particularly apropos since, “the Holy One blessed be He is extremely sensitive to the honor of the Jewish people; therefore, [in Parashat Ki Tisa,] He gave precedence of place to the Mishkan [before He mentioned Shabbat].”

In contrast, Rav Luntschitz opines that it was proper for *Moshe Rabbeinu* to mention Shabbat before the Mishkan in Parashat Vayakel since, “the core of Shabbat is the glory of Hashem, may He be blessed...” He builds on these concepts and arrives at the following incisive conclusion:

Moshe thought that in order to grant the requisite respect to Hashem, may He be blessed, it was fitting to give precedence to Shabbat as it teaches us about the glory of Hashem, may He be blessed, and only afterwards present the Mishkan which informs us about the honor of the Jewish people. In addition, based on this order, it is immediately understood that Shabbat sets aside all labor concerning the Mishkan, since which one is set aside for the other—clearly, the smaller matter [Mishkan] before the greater one [Shabbat].

Just as *Moshe Rabbeinu* honored Hashem by giving precedence to Shabbat prior to the Mishkan, so, too, may our observance of Shabbat give *kavod* to the Almighty and bring glory to His name.

*V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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