

Parashah: Pekudei
Read On: March 29, 2025 | 29 Adar 5785
Torah: Exodus 38:21–40:38; 12:1–20
Triennial: Exodus 39:22–40:38; 12:1–20
Haftarah: Ezekiel 45:16–46:18

And Moses Blessed Them

Bex Stern-Rosenblatt

Dvar Parashah

At the end of Shemot, it seems as if we have finally made up for our mistake with the Golden Calf. It seems as if all is forgiven and we are ready to live happily ever after, with God dwelling in our midst. After all, we now understand that we call down God by creating space for him, by opening our hearts to follow his guidelines. We no longer think we call down God by creating gods, by worshiping the work of our hands. We turn our gold into a house for God rather than into a god.

But the second mistake we made with the Golden Calf was our desperate fear of life without Moses. We ask Aaron to make us gods to go before us because we **do not know** what has happened to Moses. We ask Aaron to step up and take the place of Moses as a leader and make us gods to take the place of God. Now, following the building of the *mishkan*, we understand that God is God and we don't need gods. But we don't understand life without Moses. We cannot comprehend interacting with the world or interacting with God without Moses as an intermediary. We think of ourselves as sheep without a shepherd. We do not understand how to interact with law, with Torah, with God, without Moses as our leader. We are still stuck in that same place of fear that led us to request the building of the Golden Calf.

Once we finish constructing all the parts of the *mishkan*, we **bring the pieces** to Moses so that **he can build** it. We may have donated the raw materials and transformed them into the building blocks of a house for God, but we cannot imagine building it ourselves. At this point, Moses too cannot imagine that we ourselves can build it. The final chapter of Exodus concludes magnificently with the sevenfold repetition of the close relationship between God and Moses - we read as Moses completes each successive action "as the **Lord had charged Moses.**" Just as God creates the world out of chaos in seven days, Moses creates the *mishkan* out of our raw materials in seven acts. He is totally necessary here. He is the human acting in the image of God, for the sake of God. We are scarcely better than the chaos from which the world was created.

And yet, the rest of the Torah will create the infrastructure for us to allow Moses to step aside. By the time we reach the end of Deuteronomy, we will finally be ready to interact with law, Torah, and God without Moses himself as our interface. The sin of the Golden Calf, the desperate need for “Moses, the man, who brought us out of Egypt,” will be replaced by our recognition of Torah as the path to God.

We begin to build this infrastructure in the next parashah and continue for the rest of the Torah - from the enshrining of the *kohanim* to the attempts at various different leadership hierarchies in the Book of Numbers, we create ourselves as a people who can survive from generation to generation, a people not dependent on any single charismatic individual.

In this week’s parashah, when we finish building the *mishkan*, Moses blesses us, just as God blessed the human at the end of Creation. But we have no record of the words with which he blesses us. We have no idea what he says, because, at this point, the content of the blessing is not important. (**Midrash Tanhumah** suggests that the blessing is the final line of **Psalm 91**, asking God to establish the work of our hands.) For us, at this point, the important thing is that it is Moses, Moses himself, who is blessing us. Our leader has returned to us and forgiven us. By the time we get to the end of **Deuteronomy**, Moses will bless us again. There, we get the beautiful content of the blessing, the detailed instructions on how to live, how to manage. And after that blessing, Moses leaves us. Moses dies. We finally, finally, can let him go. At the very end of the Torah, we recover from the misconception that produced the Golden Calf. We do not need Moses the man. We need the Torah that he shares with us.

The Nautical Gemstone of Asher

Jonathan Lipnick

Exploring the Parashah



**In this video series, we will explore an often neglected aspect of the parashah: geography. Each week we will focus on a physical location mentioned in the parashah and examine its historical significance. Of course not every parashah contains a narrative situated in a place; for these weeks we will select a word from the parashah that relates to the material culture of ancient Israel.*

The Tabernacle and the Garden

Ilana Kurshan

White Fire: Poetry on the Parashah

Over the Tabernacle a cloud of God rested by day, and fire would appear in it by night, in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys. (Exodus 40:38)

God made a home for us. It was called Eden
A place where humans dwelt. But we can make
A home for God: The Tabernacle, built
Of Israelite donations for God's sake.

The home God made for us: A leafy garden
With branches flowering on every tree
The Tabernacle's tree: A candelabra
With almond blossom cups, a sight to see!

One tree was called the Tree of Life, it flourished
Its beauty never ceasing to amaze.
The Tabernacle's tree of life: The Torah
Its words give us our lives and length of days.

The Tree of Life was down a path, the way
Was marked off by the cherubs who stood guard.
Atop the ark were also perched two cherubs
Of molten gold, refined and beaten hard.

God placed mankind on earth "to work and guard it,"
To tend the garden so God's world might thrive
The priests worked in the Tabernacle, guarding
That we might have a place to serve and strive.

We've lost the way to Eden and we've lost
The Tabernacle. Maybe just as well—
The whole earth is our shrine, the world our garden
Let's make this earth a place where God might dwell.

**The Talmud teaches that the Torah was given in black fire on white fire (Y. Shekalim 6:1). The black fire is the letters of the Torah scroll, and the white fire is the parchment background. In this column, consisting of a poem on each parashah, I will try to illuminate the white fire of Torah – the midrashim, stories, and interpretations that carve out the negative space of the letters and give them shape.*