

This week's Torah reading: Vayakhel\Pekudei  
Rabbi Dan Liben

This week, the book of Shemot comes to a close. We have not only finished a book of the Torah, but, after many weeks of wading through the details, we have also completed the construction of the Mishkan (the Tabernacle), God's dwelling place in the midst of the Israelite camp. To celebrate both of these completions, we will stand up in synagogue on Shabbat morning as the Torah reader completes the final verse, and declare, "*Hazak! Hazak! V'Nithazek! Strength, Strength, and be Strengthened.*"

Parshat Pekudei forms a fitting bookend to the first two books of the Torah, neatly mirroring the opening chapters of Bereishit. There, God builds a world in which human beings can reside. In Exodus, we return the favor; we build a Mishkan, a dwelling place for God within that world. God builds through sweeping pronouncements; we build through thoughtful planning and often painstaking detail. The language of Vayakel and Pekudei also mirrors the language of creation. Listen during the Torah reading Shabbat morning for verbal echoes of the opening chapters of Bereishit. And, just as God concludes creation with a blessing, so Moses, upon seeing the completion of the work, blesses the people who were engaged in it.

Although we have no Mishkan, no physical container to hold God's presence in our midst, I have always been moved by the metaphor of the Mishkan. After all, the entire second half of the book of Exodus, and all of Leviticus, is devoted to this enterprise. It asks us to consider the question: how do we build a world in which God would choose to live? How do we construct a society, and a life, in which God's nearness can be felt?

In part, the medium is the message. The blueprints, the planning, the sometimes numbing attention to detail reminds even those of us who see ourselves as "big picture" people, that God often is found in the details. The caring and loving attention that we bring to our Shabbat preparations, the thoughtfulness that we strive to bring to a seemingly trivial conversation, the daily regularity with which we put the coin in the pushka, are all planks that support the structure of our Mishkan.

The book of Shemot ends with the words, "*B'chol Maseyhem- in all their journeys.*" We, like our ancestors, are in the middle of a journey. When we make space for the Mishkan to travel with us, God's presence can be our touchstone, our anchor in a world of impermanence and change. Shabbat Shalom.