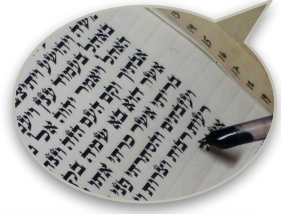




The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Shemot

Parshat Pekudei

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The House of Israel

By Howie Schub

Parshat Pekudei, which marks the end of the *Sefer Shemot*, discusses the completion of the building of the Mishkan. The last pasuk reads: *For the cloud of Hashem would be on the Mishkan by day, and fire would be on it at night, before the eyes of all the **House of Israel** in all their journeys.* (Shemot 40:38)

The use of the wording **House of Israel** is a bit unusual. Indeed, the uniqueness and importance of the wording is underscored when we compare the final pasuk in *Shemot* to the the final pasuk in *Vayikra*, *Bamidbar*, and *Devarim*. Here's a review of final pesukim:

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| Shemot | כִּי עָנָן הָיָה עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹמָם וְאֵשׁ תִּהְיֶה לַיְלָה בּוֹ לְעֵינֵי כָל־בֵּית־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל־מַסְעֵיהֶם (Shemot 40:38) | <i>For the cloud of Hashem would be on the Mishkan by day, and fire would be on it at night, before the eyes of all the House of Israel in all their journeys.</i> |
| Vayikra | אֵלֶּה הַמִּצְוֹת אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת־מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַר סִינַי (Vayikra 27:34) | <i>These are the commandments that Hashem commanded Moshe to the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai.</i> |
| Bamidbar | אֵלֶּה הַמִּצְוֹת וְהַמְשָׁפָטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶרְבַת מוֹאָב עַל יַרְדֵּן יֶרִיחוֹ (Bamidbar 36:13) | <i>These are the commandments and the ordinances that Hashem commanded through Moshe to the Children of Israel in the Plains of Moav, at the Jordan, by Jericho.</i> |
| Devarim | וְכָל־הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה וְכָל־הַמְּנֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינֵי כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (Devarim 34:12) | <i>and all the strong hand, and all the great awe, which Moses performed before the eyes of all Israel.</i> |

Why do *Vayikra*, *Bamidbar* and *Devarim* end with the expressions *Children of Israel* (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) or *all Israel* (כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל), while the book of *Shemot* ends with the less commonly used designation *House of Israel* (בֵּית־יִשְׂרָאֵל). What is the Torah hinting at?

Rabbi Yossocher Frand recounts in the name of Rav Nochum Lansky, one of the Roshei Yeshiva in Yeshivas Ner Yisroel, that *Pekudei* ends with the phrase *House of Israel* to stress the importance of family. He points to the symmetry at the beginning of *Shemot*, where the Torah mentions each person's family: *And these are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt with Yaakov, each man AND HIS HOUSEHOLD (u'beito) came* (Shemot 1:1). The book of *Shemot* is about the genesis of the Jewish people. It is about when the Jewish people became a nation — a nation of families, not of individuals. According to Rav Lansky, it is the **bayit** (household) that makes us into a nation. If we think back to the narrative of the *Sefer Shemot*, we see this emphasis on the **bayit** over and over again. *They should take a lamb for the HOUSEHOLDS of the fathers; a lamb per HOUSEHOLD* (Shemot 12:3).

The Korban Pesach was brought together with one's family. *Thus shall you say to the HOUSE (beit) of Yaakov... (Shemot 19:3).*

We hear a lot about the dissolution of American society and how we are losing the structure of our society because the nuclear family is breaking up. Just as a chain is only as strong as its links, so too a nation is only as strong as its families. That is why the book of *Shemot* places such an emphasis on the building of **bayit** — faithful households. We are a nation only by virtue of the fact that we are a nation of strong families. For this reason, the book of *Shemot* begins with the pasuk that emphasizes that the Jewish people came down to Egypt, *each man with his HOUSEHOLD*, and ends with the pasuk which emphasizes *the entire HOUSE of Israel*.

According to the Ramban, the Jewish people at the end of *Shemot* attained the high level of spirituality that was present in the homes of our patriarchs and matriarchs at the conclusion of *Bereshit*. Just as the spirit of God hovered over the tents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their families, so did it become recognizable and present amongst the Houses of Israel. Where? The spirit of God dwelled within the Mishkan.

The Torah teaches us that there are two places, so to speak, where Hashem's presence may be experienced and should be cultivated. God's glory fills the entire universe; He is omnipresent. But human beings cannot encompass the entire universe in all of its vastness and complexity. We need a personal God that we can relate to. It is for that reason that Jewish tradition teaches that God can be found in two places: One place is in our home, our family and our daily lives. The second place of Godly encounter is in the house of worship, study and Torah service. That is our substitute Mishkan where the spirit of God hovers over the building and is recognizable to us only if we are attuned and sensitive enough to experience it.

These two pillars of Jewish life have accompanied us on our long journey through the world and through our history. May we continue to feel God's presence and build, visit, pray, and share smachot in all the **Houses of Israel**.

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Howie and Debbie moved to Scarsdale from NYC in 1994. Their children -- Joshua, Daniel and Aliza -- all grew up at YIS, graduated from WDS and Ramaz Upper School and went to Torat Shraga and Midreshet Lindenbaum in Israel before attending BU, YU and Cornell. Howie is a past President of YIS, Gabbai in the Social Hall Minyan, and a member of the CYC-Os.

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